

THE EMERALD KEY



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Mahamaya Girls' College
Kandy.

ISBN - 978 - 624 - 208 - 290 - 5

Foreword

Literary development is a yardstick to measure the development of a country. The Kotte and Dambadeniya eras stand out in the history of the world because they were literary enlightening periods. If so, this is the golden period in the history of the *Mahamaya* as well. This is the reason why our daughters have been enchanting through book writing for many years now. It is a special event that our writers have succeeded in building a culture of writing books in the school and spreading it to the entire school system and this time involving the global student community in it.

Beyond this, this time the school community itself has also decided to rebuild the past *Yatiwara* writing tradition in the country in order to pay tribute to the founder of our school, Karadana Atthadassi Thero.

The *Pirivena* student monks have also taken up book writing "***The Herana Gatkarani***" project was introduced.

It is a matter of pride for me as the principal to lead the way in bringing about a qualitative change in the education of schools and *Pirivena* education through this academic and religious service, and it is also an achievement for the school.

This book, which is the result of recognizing one's innate talent at an early stage in life and turning to writing, will undoubtedly be a help for future education and future life.

Shashikala Senadheera,
Principal,
Mahamaya Girls' Collage, Kandy.

The Legend Unfold

The port city of Eldermere was alive with its usual bustle - ships creaked against the docks, hawkers shouted their wares and the aroma of salted fish and baked bread filled the air. Amid the crowd, Dhalia wove her way toward an unassuming antique shop tucked between a fishmonger's stall and a tavern. The shop's cracked sign read *Fate's Curiosities*, and the dusty windows revealed little of its contents.

The bell over the door jingled as Dhalia entered. Inside, the air was thick with the scent of old wood and parchment. Shelves sagged under the weight of books, jars of strange herbs, and gleaming trinkets.

"What can I do for you, miss"? asked the shopkeeper, a wiry old man with sharp eyes and ink-stained fingers.

" I'm looking for something.... unique" Dhalia said her gaze drifting to a small chest tucked behind the counter.

The shopkeeper followed her eyes and gave a wiry smile. "Ah, an adventurer are you? This journal might interest you"

He placed the chest on the counter and unlocked it with a tiny brass key. Inside was a weathered leather bound journal. The pages were brittle, scrawled with faded ink and strange symbols.

Dhalia turned the pages gingerly, her heart racing. Amid the scribbled notes and sketches, one line caught her eye: *The Emerald Keylies beyond the Maze of Tides, hidden from those unworthy.*

She knew the name - the Emerald Key was a legendary artifact, whispered about in old sailor tales. It was said to grant its wielder infinite knowledge, though some claimed it brought only destruction.

"How much for this?'".....

The shopkeeper chuckled "That depends. Do you believe in the stories it holds?"

Dhalia handed over a pouch of coins without hesitation. "I guess I'll find out"

Back at her modest apartment overlooking the docks, Dhalia spread the journal out on her desk. The cryptic symbols puzzled her, and she knew she couldn't decipher them alone. Her mind went to Yuliana, an archaeologist and expert in ancient languages.

The next morning, Dhalia found Yuliana in her cluttered study at the university. Yuliana's face lit up when she saw the journal. " This is incredible ! These are Solari glyphs - very rare. They describe not just the Emerald Key but the trials guarding it. If this is accurate, we're looking at the find of the century"

"Think you can crack it? " Dhalia asked.

"With time, yes .But we'll need more than translations.

This map indicates treacherous waters, hidden temples, and who knows what else. We'll need a crew"

By the evening , Dhalia had gathered Maverick and Scarlet at a dimly lit tavern. Maverick was leaning against the bar, his board frame and easy smile making him a familiar sight among the sailors. Scarlet sat at a corner table, sharpening a dagger, her piercing eyes scanning the room.

"You've got my attention" Scarlet said when Dhalia laid the journal before them." "Infinite knowledge, huh? Sounds more like infinite danger".

Dhalia smirked." That's why I'm asking you"

Maverick chuckled. If it is half as exciting as your last escapade , count me in. But I hope you've got a solid plan treasure hunting and staying alive don't always go hand in hand"

" The plan starts with this journal, " Yuliana said, joining the table . " And it leads to an island marked as the Maze of Tides. If the legends are true, the Emerald Key lies at the end of a long and dangerous journey"

Scarlet leaned back, twirling her dagger. "Danger doesn't scare me. But if we're doing this, we do it my way when things go south" .

"Deal" Dhalia said " We leave at dawn"

As they clinked glasses, the group had no idea what awaited them beyond the horizon.

Setting Sail

The morning sun painted the harbour in shades of gold and orange as the team boarded *The Stormchaser*, Maverick's trusted ship. The vessel was a sleek schooner with sturdy sails and a deck polished to a shine.

"Welcome aboard". Maverick said, patting the ship's wheel affectionately. "She's not just a ship - she's my partner. Treat her right, and she'll see us through anything"

Scarlet rolled her eyes". It's a boat, Maverick. Not a person".

"You'll change your tune when she saves your life" Maverick replied with a grin.

As the ship left the harbour, the team settled into their roles. Yuliana ported over the journal, her brow furrowed as she attempted to decode more glyphs. Scarlet inspected their weapons, occasionally glancing toward the horizon with a mix of impatience and anticipation. Dhalia stood at the bow, letting the salt air fill her lungs.

The sea was calm at first, but by mid-afternoon, dark clouds gathered on the horizon. Maverick frowned, adjusting the sails. "Storm's coming. We'll need to go through it if we want to reach the Maze of Tides by tomorrow".

Scarlet raised an eyebrow. " Through it? or around it?"

"Throuhg" Maverick said firmly. " Around will cost us two days, and I doubt we have that luxury"

The storm hit harder than expected. Waves crashed against the hull, and the ship groanded under the strain. Maverick barked orders, his hands steady on the wheel.

"Scarlet, secure the supplies".

"On it!" she shouted, bracing herself against the rail as she lashed crates to the deck.

" Dhalia , get the sails down before the wind tears them apart!"

Dhalia climbed the rigging with practiced ease, her muscles straining as she fought to lower the sails. Rain lased her face, but she refused to falter.



Below deck, Yuliana clung to a post, the journal clutched to her chest. She muttered under breath, "This better be worth it"

After what felt like hours, the storm finally subsided. The crew emerged, drenched but relieved. The Maze of Tides loomed ahead, its labyrinth of jagged rock and crashing waves illuminated by the moonlight.

"We made it," Maverick said, exhaustion evident in his voice.

"For now," Dhalia replied, her eyes fixed on the treacherous waters ahead ." This is only the beginning.

The Island of Whispers.

The Maze of Tides stretched before them, a nightmarish expanse of jagged rocks and churning whirlpools. The ocean roared as if trying warn them away. Maverick gripped the wheel tightly, his jaw set in determination.

"Everyone, holds on!" he barked.

Dhalia and Scarlet stood at the bow, peering through the mist. Scarlet had her dagger drawn, as prepared to fight the sea itself. Yuliana stayed below deck, poring over the journal for any clue about navigating the treacherous waters.

"There!" Dhalia shouted, pointing toward a narrow passage .
" That's the route!"

Maverick nodded, steering *The Stormchaser* in to the narrow channel. The ship tilted dangerously as waves slammed against its sides.

"Keep her steady!" Scarlet yelled.

"Easier said than done". Maverick shot back, his voice strained.

The ship scrapped past a jagged outcrop, splintering part of the rail. Dhalia grabbed Scarlet's arm, steadying her as the deck tilted again.

"Look out!" Yuliana shouted from the hatch.

A massive wave loomed ahead, threatening to swallow the ship. Maverick made a sharp turn, narrowly avoiding disaster. As they cleared the final whirlpool, the waters suddenly calmed.

The island emerged from the mist like a phantom. Towering cliffs framed a dense jungle, and an eerie silence hung over the place. No birds, no waves, only the rustling leaves in an unseen breeze.

"We're here," Maverick said, exhaling deeply.

As they stepped on to the shore the sand felt cool and damp beneath their boots. The jungle ahead was a wall of green, dense and impenetrable. Scarlet glanced around, her hand on the hilt of her dagger.

"Doesn't look welcoming", she muttered.

"It's not supposed to be," Yuliana replied holding the journal tightly. "The Solari built their trials to keep intruders out"

They entered the jungle cautiously, the thick canopy above blocking out much of the sunlight. The air was heavy with humidity, and every step seemed to echo unnaturally.

"What's that?" Dhalia asked, pointing to a series of carvings on a nearby tree.

Yuliana approached, her eyes lighting up. "Solari glyphs.

They're warnings . This one says, ' Beware the guardian".

"Great", Scarlet said, rolling her eyes". More cryptic threats".

As they ventured deeper, the jungle seemed to come alive. Shadows moved at the edge of their vision, and the faint sound of whispering carried on the wind.

"Do you hear that?" Maverick asked, his voice low.

"Voices", Yuliana said, shivering. "The Solari believed this island was alive, that it tasted those who tasted the key".

Scarlet smirked, though her grip on her dagger tightened " Let it try. I'll test it right back"

They reached a clearing dominated by a massive stone statue. It depicted a humanoid figure with elongated limbs and hollow eyes, standing sentinel over a hidden staircase.

" This must be the first trial," Dhalia said, stepping closer.

Before anyone could react, the statue's eyes began to glow with an eerie green light. The ground trembled, and a deep resonant voice echoed through the jungle.

"Speak the answer, or face the guardian's wrath"

Yuliana quickly deciphered the glyphs on the pedestal. " It's a riddle: 'what balances the heart and mind, yet weighs nothing?"

"Love" Dhalia ventured
The statue's eyes flashed red, and it took a step forward.

"Wrong answer!" Scarlet shouted, pulling her dagger

"Wait!" Yuliana yelled. "It's not love-it's wisdom!"

Dhalia stepped forward, her voice steady. "The answer is wisdom"

The statue froze, it's eyes dimming. Slowly, it stepped aside, revealing the staircase underground.

"That was too close," Maverick said, wiping his brow.

"And it's only the first trial", Yuliana added her voice grim.

The temple of shadows.

The staircase descended into darkness, the air growing colder with each step. Scarlet lit a torch, the flickering light casting long shadows on the ancient stone walls.

"This place gives me the creeps," Maverick muttered.

Yuliana studied the carvings on the walls as they walked. "The Solari were masters of traps and illusions. Stay alert."

The tunnel opened into a vast chamber. Black stone pillars rose to the ceiling, and a shimmering pool of water dominated the center of the room.

"What now?" Scarlet asked, glancing around.

Yuliana pointed to a mural on the far wall. "It says the key lies beyond the 'Shadow's embrace'. I think we need to cross the water"

As they approached the pool, the air grew icy. Shadows began to rise from the water, taking humanoid forms with glowing red eyes.

"of course", Scarlet said, drawing her weapons. "Nothings ever simple"

The shadows attacked their movements swift and erratic

Dhalia swung her machete, but it passed through one of the figures without effect .

"We can't fight the like this!" Yuliana shouted.

"Then what do we do?" Maverick asked, ducking under a shadow's swipe.

Yuliana scanned the room, her eyes landing on a pedestal near mural." There ! We need to light the Solari flame!"

Scarlet nodded and sprinted toward the pedestal, dodging the shadows . Dhalia and Maverick covered her using the torches to fend off the creatures.

Scarlet reached the pedestal and struck flint against the torch, igniting the ancient brazier. A brilliant golden light filled the chamber, and the shadows dissolved into mist.

The pool shimmered, revealing a hidden passage beneath the water.

"Looks like we're going for a swim". Dhalia said, grinning despite her exhaustion .

The Under Water Labyrinth

The passage beneath the shimmering pool was unnervingly narrow, forcing the team to swim single file. The water was ice-cold, and their torches, wrapped in waterproof cloth, cast faint flickers of light that barely pierced the inky darkness.

"Keep moving " Maverick urged, his voice muffled by the water. " This tunnel's not gonna hold forever."

The stone walls of the submerged corridor were slick with algae, and ancient carvings glinted faintly under the torchlight. Yuliana swam close to Dhalia, her eyes scanning the carvings with fascination.

" These glyphs are warnings" , she said between strokes. " the Solari must have used this labyrinth to trap intruders".

"Then let's not linger", Scarlet called back, her tone sharp.

The corridor opened into an underwater cavern, illuminated by bioluminescent plants that clung to the walls. The light revealed a maze of pillars and arches, some crumbled and half-buried in the sand.

"There's no way out", Maverick said, treading water as he scanned the chamber. "Just a big glowing dead end".

"Not quiet," Yuliana said, pointing toward a massive stone disk embedded in the far wall. The disk was engraved with

intricate patterns, surrounded by smaller carvings that resembled dials.

"It's a puzzle," she said.

"A puzzle," Scarlet echoed, groaning.

"Underwater, perfect".

Dhalia swam closer, studying the disk. "Looks like we need to align these dials to match the central pattern. Let's move fast - we don't know how long our air will hold."

The team worked together, turning the dials while fighting against the resistance of the water. Scarlet gritted her teeth, her arms straining as she spun one of the heavier wheels.

"Faster!" Maverick urged. "I don't want to drown in this crused maze".

Yuliana directed them, her sharp eyes analyzing the patterns. "That's it! The outer dial needs to align with the symbol of the sun!"

As Dialia turned the final dial into place, the stone disk shuddered and began to move. A passage opened in the wall, releasing a rush of bubbles and a faint golden light.

"Go!" Maverick shouted, swimming toward the opening.

The team emerged into a dry chamber, gasping for air and collapsing on to the stone floor.

"Well, that was horrible," Scarlet muttered. Wringing water from her hair.

Agreed," Dhalia said , standing and glancing around. The chamber was small, with a single door carved from solid obsidian.

Yuliana knelt beside the door, running her fingers over the glyphs etched into its surface. " This leads to the next trial. The inscription says, "Only those who face their deepest fears may pass"

"Fears, huh? Maverick said, his voice wary. "This just keeps getting better"

The Hall of Fears

The obsidian door slid open, revealing a long dimly lit corridor. The walls were lined with mirrors, their surfaces warped and cracked. The air inside was cold and oppressive, weighing heavily on their shoulders.

"Stay close," Dhalia said, her voice steady.

As they stepped inside, the mirrors began to shimmer. The reflections twisted and morphed, showing distorted versions of the team. Maverick paused, his eyes narrowing at the image of himself clutching a blooded sword, his face twisted with guilt.

"What is this?" he muttered.

"Your fears" Yuliana said, her voice trembling. "The Solari used these mirrors to force intruder to confront their darkest truths".

Scarlet snorted, "Great. A therapy session with ancient magic. Let's just get through it."

But as they moved deeper into the corridor, the reflections grew more wide. Scarlet stopped abruptly, her dagger slipping from her hand. The mirror before her showed a younger version of herself, abandoned and alone, her face streaked with tears.

"No," she whispered, backing away.

"Scarlet!" Dhalia called, grabbing her arm. "It's not real. Focus!"

"It feels real," Scarlet said, her voice breaking.

"Don't let it control you," Dhalia said firmly.

Yuliana, meanwhile, stood frozen before a mirror that showed her surrounded by collapsing ruins, books and artifacts burning around her. She clutched the journal tightly, tears streaming down her face.

"I..... I can't fail" she whispered.

"You won't," Maverick said, pulling her away from the mirror. "We're in this together, remember?"

The team pushed forward, supporting each other through the harrowing corridor. At the end of the hall, a massive iron door stood, its surface engraved with the Solari symbol for "courage".

"Only one way to open it", Dhalia said, placing her hand on the symbol.

The mirrors shattered, the sound echoing through the corridor. The iron door creaked open, revealing a spiral staircase descending into darkness.

"We passed," Yuliana said, her voice shaky but resolute.

"Barely", Scarlet muttered, retrieving her dagger. "Let's move before this place finds a new way to mess with us"

The Chamber of Trials

The staircase led to a massive underground chamber lit by an eerie green glow. The walls were adorned with Solari murals depicting the journey of a hero who sought the Emerald Key. At the center of the chamber was a stone altar, atop which rested a glowing emerald in the shape of a key.

"There it is," Yuliana whispered, her eyes wide.

"It's never that easy," Scarlet said, scanning the room for traps.

As they stepped closer the floor began to shift. Stone tiles moved, forming intricate patterns that glowed with golden light. The altar began to descend, disappearing in the floor.

"Stop it!" Yuliana cried, rushing toward the altar.

"No!" Dhalia shouted, grabbing her arm, "It's a trap. Look at the patterns-they're a code".

The tiles continued to shift, forming sequences of symbols.

"We have to solve it before the altar disappears completely," Yuliana said, her voice urgent.

The final Puzzle

The team stood frozen as the glowing tiles shifted beneath their feet. The emerald key, now halfway submerged into the descending altar, glinted tauntingly. The patterns on the tiles formed a circular maze of Solari glyphs, their meaning obscured by the complexity of the symbols.

"We're running out of time," Scarlet growled, her eyes darting between the shifting floor and the altar.

Yuliana dropped to her knees beside the patterns, her fingers tracing the glowing lines. "There are constellations. The Solari aligned their puzzles with the stars—they believed the heavens guided their trails."

"Stars underground?" Maverick said, glancing up at the rocky ceiling.

"They used celestial symbolism," Yuliana said, frantically flipping through the journal. "Look for the symbol of the 'Eternal Light'. It will lead us to the right path."

The team scanned the floor, searching for the glyph Yuliana described. Dhalia spotted it first - a radiant sun-like symbol at the center of the maze. "There!"

"Good," Yuliana said, her brow furrowed. "Now we have to step only on the symbols that connect to it—anything else will trigger a trap."

"Great," Scarlet muttered. "No pressure".

Carefully, Dhalia led the way, stepping only on tiles that bore corresponding symbols to the radiant sun. Each step caused the room to tremble slightly, as if the temple itself was testing their resolve.

"Don't rush!" Yuliana warned as Moverick nearly stepped on the wrong tile. "One mistake could-

Her warning was cut off by a deep rumbling. One of the side walls slid open, revealing a swarm of mechanical constructs- humanoid figures of stone and metal, their eyes glowing red.



" More guardians", Scarlet shouted, drawing her blades.

"Yuliana, keep working on the puzzle!"

Dhalia commanded, unsheathing her machete. "Scarlet, Maverick, with me!"

The guardians charged, their movements jerky but powerful. Scarlet moved like a whirlwind, her daggers flashing as she dodged and stuck. Maverick used his strength to block their attacks, smashing one construct with heavy swing of his cutlass.

Dhalia held her ground, protecting Yuliana as she continued to decipher the puzzle.

" I need more time !" Yuliana yelled, her hands trembling as she traced the glowing lines.

"Then we'll buy you some!" Dhalia shouted back, slashing at a guardian that had gotten too close.

As the battle raged, Yuliana finally shouted, I've got it!".

She leaped to the final tile, pressing her hand against the radiant sun symbol. The entire chamber shook and the descending altar halted. The emerald key began to rise again, bathed in a brilliant green light .

The guardians froze mid-attack before crumbling into piles of rubble.

"We did it" Yuliana said, exhaling shakily.

"Not yet," Dhalia said , pointing toward the altar. "Let's get that key."

The team approached cautiously, the green light casting eerie shadows on their faces. Dhalia reached out, her fingers closing around the sooth, cool surface of the Emerald Key.

The Betrayal

The moment Dhalia lifted the key, the chamber grew eerily silent. The glowing tiles dimmed, and the air became thick with tension.

"Something's not right," Maverick said, his voice low.

"You're telling me," Scarlet said, her gaze fixed on Yuliana. The archaeologist had taken a step back, her expression unreadable.

"What's going on?" Dhalia asked, narrowing her eyes.

Yuliana hesitated before speaking. "The Solar legends..... They warned of a great cost for wielding the Emerald key. I didn't tell you everything."

Scarlet scoffed. "Of course you didn't."

"The key isn't just a tool for knowledge," Yuliana continued. "It's a test. Only one person can claim its power, and the rest..."

She trailed off, but her meaning was clear.

"So what?" Maverick.....

Escape and Resolution

The team raced up the spiral staircase as the temple crumbled around them. The ground shook violently, and the air was filled with the deafening roar of destruction.

"Faster !" Maverick yelled, pulling Scarlet to her feet after she tripped.

They burst out of the temple and into the jungle path, the ground splitting behind them . The once silent island was now alive with chaos - trees topple and the cliffs began to crumble into the sea.

"The boat!" Dhalia shouted

They sprinted toward *The Stormchaser*, which rocked violently in the rough waters. Maverick leapt aboard first, helping the others as the waves threatened to drag the ship away.

"Set the sails, " Maverick barked, taking the wheel.

Scarlet and Dhalia scrambled to secure the rigging while Yuliana clung to the mast, the journal still clutched to her chest.

As they sailed away, the island collapsed entirely, disappearing beneath the waves.

The group stood in silence as the island vanished, the Emerald Key glowing faintly in Dhalia's hand.

"So what now?" Maverick asked, breaking the silence.

"We don't use it," Dhalia said firmly.

Scarlet raised an eyebrow. "After all that, you're just going to hide it away?"

"Yes" Dhalia said . " Someones' knowledge isn't meant to be found."

Yuliana nodded reluctantly. " The Solari would agree. The key was never about the power - it was above proving who was worthy to protect it."

"Let's hope we are," Maverick said, steering the ship toward the horizon.



As the sun rose, casting it's golden light over the sea, the team knew their journey was far from over. But for now they sailed on, carrying the Emerald Key and the secrets it held-into the unknown.

The End...

Afterward



According to my concept, under the project that has been running since 2014 to direct school children to writing, we have been fortunate to have planted more than sixty thousand writer seedlings in the local literary field. The objectives of this project are to improve the quality of education, to promote literature that will contribute to the future development of the country, to hone the abilities of the future generation, and to build a platform to showcase the creations of children.

It is our social responsibility to create the fertile soil for those seeds to sprout and grow. This is the only project in recent history that has been implemented continuously for several years at the school level, provincial, national and international levels for the sake of the productivity of education. This time, it is special that the *Pirivena* student monks have also been involved in this. The nation should be grateful for the dedication shown by the Principal, daughters, teachers, parents and alumni of *Mahamaya Balika Vidyalaya*.

The printed book is still the main tool of our education. The enjoyment that a child gets from a book cannot be provided by anything else. It is experimentally proven that the use of various electronic devices to store human knowledge and the distancing of children from books has been detrimental to the quality of education and has created various problems in society. This project, which is being implemented as a solution to this, has been adapting the smart younger generation of the digital age to modern technology by writing electronic works for the past two years, together with school children in the country.

To take their creations to international readers, Mahamaya girls have built a digital fiction for their own, literary creative abilities.

My congratulations to the young writers who have entered it through their creative abilities.

Project Founder and Coordinator,
Senevirathne Maha Lekam