
TITLE: ARRIVAL OF THE ANCIENTS I – SILENCE AT DAWN

AUTHOR: FILIP ZIVKOV

|| PROLOGUE ||

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Over recent decades, air across Veles has been thick and heavy. Full of fiery hatred.

A land once known for the wonders of freedom, diversity, and fantasy; wickedly crumbling at the foundation. Songs of old are being forgotten, and friendships that once stood have been silenced. The Heroes which captivated children, are now overrun with the terrors of reality: what the stars say is next to come.

As for Kings and Queens - they used to *worry* about loss, for fear of failure would mean failing their people. Something in which the righteous had no desire for. *Now*, this triumphant ability has turned to ignorance, blinding followers and innocent lives to the oncoming storm. They slay life endlessly and seek not to save themselves... let alone their brethren. There is only destruction upon the horizon... but still, there are few which remain with golden hearts.

Elven kin who feel nimble and swift enough, pretend to not see this trouble. A trouble birthed during the Beginning of decisions, for it is not in the *true* heart of Men; but in malevolent forces carefully studied.

This *fire* - the heavy air - seems to be approaching its crescendo quickly. *Still*, it hides in silence.

In this world, the cost of life has become cheap, and those who risk travelling the empty paths welcome death. Ghouls, demons, and beasts of all nature have fought their way into a realm they do not belong. Guided by Her. Monsters manifest themselves in many ways during dark hours, most of which are undead, and not the least of which are werewolves (created in yet another vicious manner.)

Although not much is known about the tale of their creation, these demons and fire-spawn have not come aimlessly. Since as long as most remember, this hatred has been among the land too long. The knowledge of their creation extends deep into history and is known by few, for it is from the beginning of time where their creation was thought, unintentionally and without malice. At first.

Though there can still be solace claimed, for faith works incredulously... Unfortunately, small cities are now distraught and fight one another into the ground. They have become each other's strongest enemies, which has caused a fair many folk to travel, and then travel more after that.

Bloodshed is being committed with fury, and the demons known as orcs and undead will soon be the least of peoplekind's nightmares. The plague that spreads is as much within the courts of people, as it is outside.

When children weep at night, and towns collapse, when murder is made and enemies are written as such, scholars *might* find themselves asking, "What is this cancerous silence that plagues Eastern-Veles?"

Only the wisest dare answer with theories, yet it eludes them that this information can only be found through story. Through the world as it is *now*, and how *now* will manipulate all of time. No longer are there Ancients to rely on as protectors and guiders of Life.

SEGMENT ONE: WORLD'S COLLIDE

CHAPTER ONE: THE ONCE KINGDOM

I

Eskoath: The bottom of the barrel, but worse. Not even a black and blue drunken gnome would take his tongue to the spout of *this* keg.

The humans had done to the faeries what everyone had originally done to the dark elves; and they hadn't paid the price just yet.

Despite its consistent downfall, the once kingdom had a special type of grandeur in the century past. It held banquets and gatherings of the utmost importance, and was spoken of as, "The King of Kingdom's for the human race."

Massive in size, yet always known to have the warmest of hearths and most welcoming of seats.

The most renowned fighters, architects, and even wizards from around the world had made their way to Eskoath for its epitome of civilization. It was one of the only places who shared their plentiful knowledge in various skills with Veles' kin - Fae, Elf, Gnome, and Dwarf (interestingly enough, they still kept distance from Dark-Elves, even though the world was evolving.)

In this Once Kingdom, whichever book you sought, the Library of World's would have it. Whatever profession you hoped to attack, the strongest of mentors would be there to teach. If you had proven to be resourceful, you gained access to many secrets normally kept inwards.

Along with the long list of impressive history and education, Eskoath created the very core of how trade was performed, and business conducted. Working with their accompanying dwarves, humans had envisioned the idea of money, and how the jewels and gems dug from the earth could represent a marketplace for *all*.

The highest of currency values was the Tvurth. This gemstone was not forsaken to anybody except the dwarves in ancient times, for the humans believed they deserved the unique right to their most magnificent treasure.

Although rumoured to be carried amongst the heaviest purses, this stone was more created for art than application. Incomparable is its beauty and rarity, but its size is less than safe to keep in one's pocket; for fear of losing it.

Scriptures scarcely go into detail about their appearance, and when they chose, it is presented vaguely, and no two descriptions match. This is not to say they were false claims... perhaps this was just one of the gems' many properties.

The simple economic system the Eskellian society brought to life was this: Jagged edged, rough cut garnets of all colors had been held to the lowest of standards. For this money, you'd be lucky to receive any replenishing meal or warm stay. Virtually, garnets were used more decoratively for the poor, although they did come useful for snacks and cheap ale.

Further than garnets, came jade disks. Disks had more prevalent uses, but worked best in combination with garnets and emerald tokens. This, you would use more frequently for everyday purchases or having a stop at the market.

Disks held a higher value of ten garnets and emerald tokens held a value of a hundred garnets, or ten disks.

Following the path then comes ruby cores near the cost of twenty tokens or two thousand garnets.

Sapphire slits are valued at twenty-five cores (1000 Disks.)

With a few slits, you could pack your belongings and easily live comfortably. Buy your own tiny village, pay a personal scribe, hire a farmer, and many other luxuries such as the finest of wines and feasts.

Then there is red diamondite, which falls far, far below the value of the Tvruth. Even still... one Diamondite is more than most ever earn in a lifetime.

The names of each piece of currency derived from their physical appearance, and they also held value as status symbols. People would wear jewellery dependant on their class, representing their position economically.

Beside mathematics and eloquent literature, any form of painted or musical artistry was seen equally as valuable to the race.

Languages and words of race's still vary to this day, but Common has continued to be tried and true (refined yes, in Eskoath - although not created.)

Oh yes, Humans: Incredibly smart.

They used their minds and thought only of how it could help others. Using their position among the rocky shores of the Free Sea, this advantage made for an impressive network of travel like no other known. Lying on the Eastern-Cintilla shore (Western Veles), Eskoath had sent out massive ships to help deliver goods and services everywhere - from their neighbours in the Mountains, to powers across the expansive Ocean.

But all this greatness began to get lost.

The knowledge of friendliness and generosity seemed to leave the souls of humans. Slowly and slowly, a bitterness had broken bonds and rusted the fabric of wisdom. With encouragement, Eskoath tried to hold onto relations with other human colonies; after the battle was committed... everything changed.

This *same* city would shine with pure light and blind others with its architectural beauty. Flowers would flourish all year round and the air smell of freshly cut grass after a damp morning rise. Rain seemed to fall along the castles and structures in a mythical manner. The cobbles were tended to daily. Housing was expansive, and cheap enough for all. Most importantly, there was safety. Safety for all, and each King and Queen had taken to this duty responsibly.

Now, only a skeleton of the Kingdom remains... The name is spoke of as a completely different place these days. It no longer holds the same valour and honor that itself once had birthed and shown others.

Although Eskoath is tainted with hurt, heroes can be found in the most unexpected of places. And be the most unexpected of people.

II

Eskoath, known for human history and power, had fallen to the same disease all humans do. Sorrow.

Greed?

No. Greed was no problem for the people.

No, this was not wrought in cinder. It was *sorrow* that fed and fostered these lawless perspectives.

When self-proclaimed wise men reap their creations, it will *only* be sorrow brought to them, and only then can a decision be made with how they handle it. This has been the gift of wisdom to the wise: "Through Sorrow."

Eskoath was named rightly so for the people's pact kept for much of history. Their oath to protect the Eska Tree forest: the primal beauty and land named Dahlielle. Of course, the humans had failed in their pact, and now the forest had been mostly abandoned, receding to only thirty percent of its being.

Two Millenia ago, the gigantic Eska expanse was in deep danger. The ecosystem in this section of the world was far too remote. Too much was out of balance and none of the changes the area had went through was kind to the inhabitants.

But, many fae fled here - their realm, turned to a fragmented land: unexpectedly. An unknown source of energy had collapsed their creation... well, El'thil's. They used to have two homes, in perfect balance. No more. This destruction occurred shortly before the Twelve Ancients had returned to Op'ial.

After the faeries had found Life and purpose within the Dahlielle, humans had come and seen the fae interacting with this land. Many times had human travellers made this excursion, but never did they think to live here. Somehow though, what the faeries had done in coming, put the forest into a motion of natural being.

Since the human settlement hadn't *seen* any of the tricky faeries, they were first puzzled with the newly discovered growth and beauty. Some of the scholars and

intellects though took council with their most powerful officers, and a decision was made that very night. A King and his Queen was voted for fairly that very night, and together, the large group of men and women declared they would not take the Eska trees abundantly, for the Fae had brought creation into the forest. Into their lives and purpose of being, by proxy.

Eventually the races collided, and they were taught the raw love that fae had for these natural wonders. This wisdom opened the eyes of the first humans to interact with faeries. This *awakening* had been half the reason for the future kingdom's drive and power, along with their compassion and kindness. It was one of the many character traits others seemed to lack elsewhere in the world.

Eskoath had been an almighty symbol of their gratitude, and they wrought it with work and splendor. The city was openly dedicated to their friendship. They had fostered a love for the land and made sure only to take what they could create, for creation was Life, and Life was joy.

For nearly eight-hundred years, humans held strong. King's and Queen's had come and gone, all holding true to a fruitful way of living.

Now, this oath is broken and so are the people. This name, "Eskoath," is now a curse of remembrance.

After the Queen was lost during the Battle of Hill'im sixty years past, there was no understanding which way the city would topple. Even considering the battle was brought to the faeries.

You see, for humans, - and many other races - females not only went to battle but had proven a strong hand at that. They were statues of pride, solidifying themselves powerful with whom they had slain. Sorceress' could combat the spells of any battle mage and torch those in their path if they chose. They could mix remedies and elixirs more potent and full of life than any other... as well as death.

Yes, the world needs women as it needs men, so it was without question the Queen would follow her King... although this had been more her goal than his.

Which Queen?

No, not merely the current Queen of Eskoath. During this time, she was known as the Queen of Humankind.

During 'The Time of the Once Kingdom,' it was the crowning castle for the race. When their relationship with Fae burned strong, *balance* remained, but Hill'im was an irrevocable slaughter. It had torn through the city only with devastation, however the Queen and King thought it might benefit their markets. The woman had provoked her husband into a more proud stance, and they began slowly invading the boundaries of an ancient oath.

Koi (a southern human kingdom) had now taken rightful power to watch over the Humans, and currently, now stands as the capitol. Eskoath was considered banished, and known only as a place to outsiders/travellers of dark descent. Not to mention the many crooked souls that reside in the wealthy and political districts. "Royalty," as humans like to call it.

Most felt during these dark times that the fight against fae was justified. Originally, they had thought to protect such large portions of the land, but as time went forward, resources dwindled and this protection brought upon no economic gain. The humans had wasted away with their crops and nature, they began secretly destroying land with the beliefs that the faeries had no knowledge of it. The darkest sin, a knife in the back – a lie too gross.

The people of Eskoath should have reached out. Instead, they had begun taking what Lithuali'al had provided the Elves and Fae with, for they different lived a type of life that thirsted for these treasures. The ones humans had cut down, burned, or stole. The fae need little material possessions for happiness, and hope to be surrounded only by greenery and each other. There was a power these resources contained that the humans knew not, and only kissed the surface of their powers.

Magic was beyond the reach of them, and they started a war for less than that.

III

Twelve in total are the Gods of this land, - Veles - and they have witnessed all that Eskoath brought to life, as well as death. Now, they continue in an old realm, unable to create the same *change*. Moving neither forward, nor back.

Even with the *faith* of Halio, (Keeper of Sight, creator of Scales and Wisdom) a deeply rooted evil continues to live amongst the good. A cancerous type of disease spreads and affects all those not included in their values and truths.

Certain *beings* who transcend the title of monster.

There are rumored to be Five of these anti-Gods. "Evil," mocks the transcription of their capabilities. These creatures, believed to be among the living, command peasants to do as they wish, playing a game of tactical war. Scheming and projecting a grotesque feeling.

However wickedly thought of... life happens, and people always forget turmoil and trouble. They go forward with their head down, commenting about the "ill fortune of the Twleve Ancients."

There too are unique people who don't crumble under this rule of forget. Those who look at the scale of life's details and adjust them accordingly. These people never forget turmoil and trouble, but always seem to bring both along their journey. They learn the true nature and workings of life. These people make their own path, not through simple solutions, but life endangering quests and experiences. These individuals... they have control over their weight upon life's scale.

They draw attention to themselves.

Whatever happened to the city after the battle, was uncharacteristic and murderous. But the signs were slated further before than their murderous fight against the fae, and the implications greater.

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Frozen.

Fear.

Coal.

*

It... it feeds on life.

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Fire and shadow overwhelms your soul around the torture-spawn. It defies all the laws of... even magic... I'm in

*

Tears

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Everytime I bring myself to parchment and pen, words dissipate from my mind. But today, an overwhelming cold is burning my conscience, and something must change.

People **must** know.

I have thought myself a madman debating the topics of religion... not believing... even though I know of Hexlain by sight...

This I believe in: both Ancients - twelve powerful they reign with justice - too there are...

Shadows? Nightmares?

They roam at night and kill livestock. They kill people. They challenge all laws of good and seem hidden to others!

However their being... whatever you may think of our Keepers....

First known reference of Demons.

Entry by Arthis Val - ***found dead in his home with this note.***

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CHAPTER TWO: BLOSSOMING FLOWERS

Two weeks ago

I

“Hum-HUM-humhumhum hum hum HUUUUUM” chirped the voice of our dear forest-fae friend. The Dahlielle wooded area was teeming with emotion as a calm, warm wind blew through the towering, needle-like Eska trees. There was a profuse amount in this specific area.

Auror’I was one of very few residences who took up the northern section of the continent and called it home. Just outside the city of Eskoath, Auror’I spent most of her days harvesting from her beloved neighbouring life sources. She seemed to grasp *emotion* from the surveying area astonishingly more than that of any other passersby. Elf or otherwise.

Her bounce turned into a distraught bobble as she went ahead, "Oh, hum..." she hummed, very upsettingly, noting the end of her tune.

"It pains me beyond belief to know you're all upset, my dear friends," she sympathized with the trees around her. Auror’I carried an obscure perspective about everything she interacted with – and it wasn’t her fae being either. The concept of when a fully aged, childish faerie becomes one of the strongest shamans in the world, seems to disrupt the very nature of “normal.”

Or perhaps Auror’I was one animal of a different reality entirely, moulded for **more**.

"I know, I know. I’m so, so, sorry for your pain... but I can live past it knowing you’ll grow anew." She responded to her neighbours - the trees. She spoke this one sentence with a maternal manner, but no lines streaked her fair face.

Auror’I enjoyed dressing her hair in obscure, new designs when she could - today the faerie wore her hair in two ponytails down the front of her shoulders. She then tied them in knots at the bottom... like that of someone who “lives in a castle!” she proclaimed what she thought. This style did not exist in any castles.

Her hair bore a gold shine mingled with titanium white, and often, shared space with dirt. It hung down slightly past her shoulders - even while connected as a knot, shortening it.

With brown trousers and a lighter brown top, frequently, clothes were a loose fit around her stunt figure of roughly four feet. These were her, “fun clothes” – coincidentally named after all the fun she typically endured while wearing them. Her large eyes were a slightly desaturated tone of light blue, and her fingers - although that of a forest-fae - were slender and fine, which was comparable to her long-tipped ears.

Our fae-friend continued onward. After a few more seconds of skipping, she stumbled to a halt when she saw the blackness of something deep and sinister. One of the reason's she couldn't leave this place for The North – where a large cluster of her cousins now lived.

Slowly creeping up to the dark brush, Auror'l knelt and touched the once life source. Loudly around the forest, insects called out in the heat of Spring and the smell of lavender was prominent in her nose.

"Grown too old it seems, my lovely friend. You'll have to shift into something new and be gone with from this area," she spoke, harvesting the Hollowheat from the ground and stuffing it in her dirt covered satchel. The fae surveyed the underlying area, looking for more disturbances, but only managed to catch glimpses of Lifebloom - what most refer to as Hallowheat before it “expires.”

With the Hallowheat pulled from its roots, Auror'l lay her palm on the forest floor and a dark poison was siphoned from beneath her feet. A sensation of electricity climbed up her fingertips, seizing feeling up to her forearms. Actually, the sensation she experienced while conducting this magic, seemed to flow *from* her. *That should be the last of it*, she thought.

With tears streaming down her face, the faerie grieved for all the other times her Friends were taken advantage of. Chopping. Burning. Poison – all artifacts of human life, being thrown into the soil to rot and disturb the balance of Nature. At least elven & dwarvish people could be more understanding and well mannered.

As her tears hit the grass below, a Caladrius - quietly resting on her shoulder - let out a shrill, saddening cry.

It would have spooked anyone else. Not her mother; the faerie.

The bird took flight up, up, and up. Beyond the treetops. She would come back after the Mourning.

Auror'I had been conducting shaman work like this to protect the Dahlielle for the last... Well, her last many years of her being. The last few weeks had been the worst cancer she had seen, so Crimson would not fly back anytime soon.

Auror'I's ears struck up to a full point, excitedly and joyously chatting, "There! Ohh, beloved Mother of the ground beneath my feet" - most would say one of the Twelve Ancients and Keepers, or simply call her by name: El'thil.

"I'm glad to hear we're all back to our usual selves!" This was in response to all the cheerful chatter amongst the previously still Dahlielle Forest. The Life had become much more conversational once they were merely saved from death.

With poison picked and conversation had, she focused her dirt covered face and blue eyes towards home, leaping along. A singular streak of brown paint was drawn horizontally on the Auror'I's face, gliding over the bridge of her nose.

The shaman was also gifted a crown of bone, which she travelled everywhere with. Imbued with critical attributes, it worked as the shaman's staff, or wand. The size was miniature but it sat comfortably around the women's head; and it looked it. With this, the faerie could maintain a higher constitution, becoming mentally overwhelmed nearly never. Also, the bone was a reminder of both sides to life.

Most would describe the Dahlielle Forest as barren, haunting, and just righteously boring, but Auror'I seemed to have a different perspective. Where she walked, her feet *felt* life flourish. Scrubby insects racing and life pushing forward!

She began thinking she needed to be somewhere, but couldn't for the sake of herself remember...

"Hum, Hum Humming, Hum humhum" she hummed routinely as she rounded the clearing of trees where her house held up. The trees protecting her home gave shape to a canopy overhead, giving her safety and privacy. The shaman inhabited one of the most bountiful sections of the Dahlielle.

Before taking stride into the circle enclosure, she paused, sensing movement with her keen ears. Someone seemed to be looking through the windows of her personal palace!

II

Sylas could have sworn to any of the Ancients themselves, he was on time; if not early!

"4:38:59, Faerly Specific Time," he recalled hearing her say... He just assumed she meant early evening. Had she *purposely* been making a practical joke out of it? You couldn't really be sure with that faerie – but Sylas too had his own personal demons. Thinking too much was the downfall of most intellects, and the wood-elf thought of everything, all the time, to great extremes.

It was suffocating, but created diamonds.

Auror'I's house was a two-story structure built inside a fashionably dark, sequoia sized Eska trunk. Eska trees, normally, needle-like and sky-high. Auror'I was a curious creature and lived in a magical place.

Inside was furnished with more wood, dirt, and what seemed to be the minimal amount of stone required for structural support.

The trunk of the still lively tree was at least twenty feet wide and spared plenty of space for someone of minimal stature. From what Sylas could see through the windows, there wasn't a ladder to reach the second floor, only stacks of belongings and shelving. The doorway was a mere four to five feet tall, which seemed to avoid practical use for anyone but fae, gnome, or dwarf. *A little inconsiderate*, thought Sylas.

He was dressed in a resplendent dark-green downfall coat that hung above his ankles. Underneath, he wore a clean black dress collar tucked into matching pants.

The elf made sure to sport his pair of heavy brown boots on this trip today – he'd made the mistake of wearing fancier shoes here a long, long time ago. He never made the same mistake after all these years.

As Sylas heard a rustle behind him in the nearby brush, he turned backwards, sharpening his piercing black eyes. His medium-long length brown hair glistened lightly in the fair bit of sun bleeding through the canopy. The crows resting up above gave a call to each other and fell out into the battle of flight.

"HUUUUUUUUM!" sang Auror'I in a beautifully melodic tone directly in Sylas' ear. *Loudly.*

With the reflexes of a Feveltoad, Sylas jumped forward and turned around to see the face he'd been looking for through the window embedded in the tree-trunk home. Catching some of his fear and turning it into bright energy, he responded in a lower, more serene hum, and bowed towards the shaman standing before him.

With minimal signal, Auror'I jumped through the air towards Sylas.

Once he caught her in an embrace, she spoke excitedly, eyes open so wide *she* might've been mistaken for a Feveltoad herself! "The air seems to be enjoying the laughter of life today!"

Sylas gently put our friend-faerie down, "Does the wind have any reason to be moved otherwise?" He responded - Sylas seemed to quite enjoy these unique conversations, none of his customers were similarly obscure or kind to him.

"Yes..." Auror'I spoke sickly, "Fortunately, I've got the ingredients you've been curious about... most not enjoyable though is some of the life in the area is deeply troubled. This is what saddens the air in my lungs; although merry with my solution through abilities," she finished off very melancholy.

"Ahh, I see. It's difficult to see something like that," he put his arm around the faeries and held her close. "But I'm sure they can help mend one another," he tried to reassure Auror'I.

"Do you mind inviting a cold friend inside and brew some of that glorious draught you steep?"

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Sadly, some Life *could not* mend itself... It needed a caretaker.

Within the Dahlielle, Auror'I had been the only truly dedicated caretaker of this land since after Hill'im. She was a warrior of the woods, fighting for a cause, living a life she wanted – one she wanted for others.

Other fae had fled to The North, or elsewhere entirely unknown. People knew they were out there, but where?

Auror'I wished she knew.

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The draught Auror'I poured sure tasted full of the Life beneath the Trees; although, "glorious" might have been an overstep. Once Sylas settled into the home of one very curious friend, he sipped on the earthly tasting tea and gave his compliments.

"My eyes present to me one tense friend, perhaps in need of more than my tasteful drink?" Auror'I questioned as she, in one swift motion, jumped from the floor of her tree house onto the few naturally carved shelves rooted in its walls, up to the hole in the ceiling.

Her voice was soft but pleasant - a contrast to the elf's scattered sentences.

The second floor of her circular house-tree contained her bed, – which consisted of leaves and comforting straw – one outcropping shelf that circled the entire top-deck with jars of curious looking substances, and holes for little critters such as Moonmunks, Lilitains, and Squirrels to come and go as they please.

She's right, Sylas confessed to himself. This conversation... it is full of a sorrowful sound.

III

"Where's Crimson?" Mister Sylas spoke softly, "I would've thought he would bask in the love of your harvesting."

Ahh Crimson, beloved beauty and mistress of flight.

Auror'I's main companion of the forest was her faint red Caladrius, named simply, "Crimson," to others because her true name was highly difficult for non-fae folk to comprehend the poetry.

The bird had a glowing sheen of white light that would shine ever brighter at night, but frequently the bird chose to project a hue of pink/red. Crimson.

Auror'I, now rummaging through a barrel full of empty phials beside her bed, then jumped down from the 2nd story of her tree-house, unscathed.

"As I said with words, today was a sad day for the wind- and most of the forest. She'll come back when her talons feel life spurting from the dirt." In a hush tone, almost as though concealing her words in secret, Auror'I continued, "I'm worried there's poison jumping from the clouds! Or maybe Mossmites are exploding with pain-" the elf interjected before she could finish her speedy, anxious sentence.

"As simple as I'd like it to be Mossmites," he paused with a grimace on his face, "I've heard about the destruction our city is having on the outer areas," Sylas replied coldly. "The Dahlielle is not one bit the same, and inside Eskoath walls are no different."

"Recently, a lot of the king's men have been too harsh to show compassion. These days, Arthol is hanging mere muggers out in broad daylight because he's completely forgotten how to *act* in trying times. Sorrow is fit for him."

A chill crept up the faerie's spine.

“His voice even begins doubt to the Keepers-” Sylas’ face was stricken with shock, his blood beginning to boil, “Diving into the realms of deities is-”

Auror’l covered her ears with each index finger and, with control, let on a single flat note to tune out the conversation. It sounded pleasant; and equally the same annoying.

Sylas sighed “My apologies old friend, I’m just hurt with the culture of the city now... I used to dream of learning the arts here, and now... Even with *my* knowledge, I can’t bring the Once Kingdom,” he collected his pain. “This conversation isn’t warm, and we needn’t further that topic,” The elf spoke these words kindly, and it was appreciated.

Auror’l’s mind was a saddened swamp stoked to flames on the most humid of summer’s eves... poison of the Ancients need not make it worse. As she glanced her head toward the window, clouds had not been approaching from The North, but... well, they seemed to *start* nearby.

Sylas diverted her thoughts from the poor weather with his voice, “Do you think of travelling, friend? I am getting worried for you. Danger is much higher in Eskoath than it was in history books... even a mere five months ago. I worry the Dahlielle will fall prey first. Surely you sense signs too?”

Sylas was mentally pushed, and Auror’l say this with remorse. Hopefully her tea would help ease his troubles. Sometimes the elf merely needed to speak.

“You think I’ve been here forever?!” Auror’l spoke with a joyous smile – engrossed in this topic.

The shaman reached inside the satchel still bound to her body, pulling from it the contents. All of it would have been difficult to find for anyone else – she knew the forest like nobody. The only difficulty was foraging the Hallowheat. It was always a Sad Day when Sylas came around - Hallowheat needed to be picked the day of his visits to ensure maximum potency prior to alchemy.

With his nature of creating potions, – and poisons for some funny seeming customers – he and Auror’l helped purge the Dahlielle of anything disrupting each other. Keeping a *balance*.

“The blossoming flowers smell best when you have no home! I have sisters in the Oxin-May where the Sun wakes up, and unknown cousins in The North. Travel is as much faerie driven as it is gnomish.”

The North was well named after its location. There wasn’t *too* much further North than The Dahlielle. Unless you were fae, elf, or read books with the druids, not many people thrived further above.

The satchels contents were littered upon a stump within her home. With slow, precise, and loving movements, she took each ingredient and crushed them with a stone held in other hand. After creating a few neatly secluded patches of ingredients, – to paste consistency – she carefully picked them up using a slice of wood and deposited them into the tiny jars she brought down.

Most of all, she enjoyed tasting each of the flavours before depositing them. Her friends were beautiful, and she knew *someone* needed to appreciate their efforts. On its own, Hallowheat was a healthy, aged herb that could be used for cooking, but tasted bitter. This was still a sign of beauty to our fae.

“I’m not sure how I would fair, but The North sounds a beautiful place to stride through - from the tales I’ve heard at least.” Sylas kept the conversation nice, “All I hope, is that you know how much I care for the air you bring into our home, friend.” Sylas responded meekly, “Death, war, and incorrect judgement seem to be on the horizon. Travel might do us both some good. Everyone needs travel.”

Much Life was in that one room of the Dahlielle forest, and boundless friendship.

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We *must* evaluate the intellect of those who think “*The Five*” are fact. These are wicked thoughts. Squirming, as they seek betrayal and disloyalty.

Lithuli'al created, - Ancient protected – no land will ever be known so free as Veles. Such a fury is not painted by the hand of the Sire of Stars. Such a fury could not even present into **my** mind if chosen. Yes there is distress and pain in the shadows. But Five Fingers cannot control us. Not Him.

...

I'm beginning to experience a hurt and cold that pierces my mind. But to think *what* might control those monsters out there... Treacherous. The Keepers are the most powerful... it can only be treacherous to think of someone this wicked with Their powers.

We will combat this new spawn of flying beasts and terrorizing undead: like we have learned to live with drake and wolf. Although, there are still worse creatures... Carelessly, the name of "Five" continues to plague others. This will be cut down from my mind and imagination any further.

May our Twelve remain stronger than *any* unknown number.

Speculative denial regarding the company known as The Five found in Haunting History, Menacing Mythology.

Entry by Vela Orthi'a

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CHAPTER THREE: KNOWLEDGE OF SHADOWS

I

It was before the break of dawn when Kthelle (*thell* – a Dark Elf) woke at the Burning Lake Inn. Morning was eerie, and dense clouds clogged any vision outside her window. The sun was hidden, the sky grey.

“Piss,” she said, rolling her eyes, not looking forward to starting the summer solstice in *piss-poor* weather. She was already been expecting today to be long.

The sleep she had was mediocre and humid.

The purple-skinned figure lay motionless in her bed, before she found the tenacity to tirelessly sit her body upright. She let out an exhausting sign, swinging her feet over the bedside, where she kept her boots neatly beside one another.

Her room was relatively simple, but after all, was on the **third** floor of the Burning Lake Inn.

Her bed pressed against the back wall of the room, beside the only window in her quarters. The Burning Lake was taller than most buildings in the outer parts of Eskoath, so the sight leading into the city was tremendous and vast. Towards the centre of the city sat a few of the tallest standing structures. Eskoath looked as if someone had turned a funnel upside down, with the deepest (tallest) part inwards, and shorter structures not.

At the foot of her bed, there was a well-kempt walnut chest, bound with dark-brown leather straps. These were laced in an intricate pattern that knotted itself shut in front. Firmly.

A few more wooden dressers were neatly placed throughout the room, but they weren't as simple as they seemed. These pieces of furniture were compliments of Nalia, the innkeeper of Burning Lake Inn.

These “dressers,” were equipped with many tools needed to complete the types of tasks Kthelle lived for. Intrusion, performance, and **patience**. They included:

- An array of colorful and unique hair dyes.

- Facial markings for bruises, dirt stains, or rashes.
- And certain herbs that would make your system react very dramatically:
Depending on the plant species of choice of course.

All the rooms on the third floor of the Burning Lake had such pleasantries, except Nalia wouldn't rent them out to unfamiliar faces; not to mention the prices were steep. Neither of which applied to Kthelle - she had other ways of expressing her values to the Innkeeper besides Disks and Tokens.

Burning Lake Inn was home for Kthelle. She had grown up in Eskoath after her sister had found refuge for them.

Although socially very separated from most, Kthelle and her sister had something special because of their experiences together - their difficulties and hardships.

The drow rose very gracefully. Without putting on her boots on, she prepared for her morning reflexes training. Before commencing, Kthelle quenched her thirst with whatever lay on the bedside.

A darkened berry mead of some sort was her final choice of last night.

Interesting.

Dressed in simple looking clothing, what she wore was both functional and flattering. Her black pants were tight and her top was matching, the latter including accents of grey.

The dark-elf's pitch-black hair stood out among her light-grey eyes. Her hair - which she tied into a high ponytail before starting her stances - hung just below her breasts.

It was the fifth hour in Eskoath when she began a type of dance. Movement's fluid and mind Zen, she slowly slid her feet across the floor and swayed her hands in the air, making frozen tableau's representing poses named by those before today's time. This performance allowed her to remember her strength while maintaining well practiced as a rogue. She was so familiar with the routine, she now performed the series of motions eyes closed, covering her light-grey pupils.

These techniques were - allegedly - concept creations of an “Elven water-tribe.” Elf didn’t only marvel at nature, but they harmonized with all its sources, crafting creations from nothingness. But **one** tribe, dedicated to **one** resource... It was difficult for Kthelle to grasp such a concept when she began studying.

As she continued her training over many years, Kthelle understood the finite time everyone had to train the vastness of them all. Focused solely on *one* element, there was such a deeper knowing over generations and generations. Much was learned from the teachings she was able to gather, for a lot of the technique wasn’t applied to other martial arts.

She blocked off the external sound of steps creaking, rain trickling, and windchimes in the distance. Her focus was a solidified fortress, and she was able to calmly maintain this meditative-like state during her whole morning routine. It was more than a routine; it was a ritual. Tradition, and a part of her personal Culture.

II

Droplets of sweat slipped from the dark-elf’s forehead as she strained her muscles, testing their power. After a rich inhale, Kthelle stood back on two feet. Her system was full of relief as a calm swept throughout her nerves.

The drow was now tired and pungent, so she decided it was time-enough for a warm bucket of water along with soap and a filling meal. Her routine relieved an hour of time before she’d even thought to open her eyes. Each individual stance she conducted was picture perfect.

Before she grabbed her midnight-black cloak, she took notice of the weather outside. The sun punctured a gape in the sky and the clouds projected a brilliant, clean warmth. *Rarely does weather so beautiful grace the bottoms of Eskoath*, she thought.

The rectangular building that was Burning Lake Inn was segmented to three above ground levels and a basement layer. Kthelle’s rooming situation - on the third floor - provided many assets.

Nalia kept any information discrete, and she never struck a bad deal with whom she cared. Nalia *knew* people; and was fair. The way she saw it, everybody needed hospitality and a goddamn drink of *something* imported. At the end of the day, she made many friends and kept neutral doing this. More or less.

The second floor was housing for other gracious customers. The main deck was where it could get rowdy and full of merriment – or deathly quiet while a storyteller was weaving their web. Usually, David or Vejra.

Frequent repeat customers always got along and drank to their heart's content, paying Nalia well in Garnets and Disks. Sometimes, she received a handful of Tokens from her most senior clients.

Once Kthelle stepped out of her room, a balcony greeted her that wrapped all along the upper two decks of the inn. The walls were painted a deep-burgundy. The wooden railing following the walkway on the second floor was cracking, and disfigured from use over many conversations. The third floor's pristine. No such chips or scrapes nicked any of the wood here.

Infused crystal lights burned a dark shade of orange. They were with wooden handles and in the shape of a normal torch; mounted to the walls. It radiated a magnetic shadow that was rumbling like a wave, creating the effect True fire might project.

"Mornin', Grimnal," Kthelle silently called out to the human guard below.

He'd been in Nalia's service for quite some time, and had become a right-hand of sorts. Sometimes, he would join Kthelle for some of her personal quests, or help her steal food and resources at Nalia's request. Last month they had taken yet another successful venture out to the Cave of Gnome in the Archstone Peaks.

"Hello, Little Leaf," Grimnal smiled back at her from below. He stood gigantically tall at six feet & six inches, with short brown hair barely covering the tops of his eyes.

As our dark-elf made her way towards the bottom of the spiral staircase, she-Tripped.

Kthelle landed curiously on her head, and none of her reflexes seemed to be prime for the fall.

Loosing all sense of her direction, a sickness fell over the women. *How was she supposed to react?*

What struck the drow more than excruciating pain in her head and shoulder, was her lack of movement. All lack of awareness.

Finally securing some senses, her eyes made their way forward. The scene in-front changed from the serene morning it had once seemed, to flame and destruction. The Burning Lake Inn was quite literally on fire.

The elf couldn't make out many sounds beyond the loud whips of flame and crunching wood, but for a moment thought children were crying nearby...

Shadows and smoke obscured her friend Grimnal. How would she be able to save the Inn? Where had all this fire come from? How had it all spread so fast?

Staring down at her hands was the worst of it. Her fingers had become more boney than strong, and there had been gaps of flesh. There was no physical pain though.

Rolling on her side, Kthelle moved even before the beam fully fell. But she was too late. After a couple rolls from the floor, she saw the beam that would hit its mark, but before she was dead- Her body had rekindled itself, and she woke.

Grimnal was standing overtop her, pulling upwards before she could interject. The man was strong, regardless how swift the elf was; currently it was not at all. An even worse ache would come later in the night... it wasn't the first time she experienced this medical illness.

The firepit in the middle of the hall was vibrating with hints of orange as the heat and color splashed the walls and area around it. Only embers had been cooking, but they were hot and projected hints of mint, which was just another sweet touch the innkeeper put into her work.

“Kthelle, over my soul, Halio-”

“Halio says we dare not fuckin’ talk about it, remember? *Remember* how he told us that?” she wasn’t angry at her friend, but at the situation. She also didn’t even let her sister know about these... Moments.

Not even Grimnal knew about what she saw or felt during these times, he only believed she was unconscious.

III

“Sleep?” he asked casually.

The man wore an old scuffed up uniform. His jacket was clipped along the front and had no fancy badges or accolades. His face was neither foul nor fine - the truth was, he just never managed to know when or how to shave.

“Very poorly. The conflicting weather is no help,” she responded flatly. Her balance, like many others’, was off recently.

“Aye... I understand. Just **do** remember to keep your spirits up,” Grimnal seemed to be repeating a phrase he didn’t completely connect with himself. There was an unfamiliar silence between the talkative two, but it wasn’t the painful fall that occurred.

“How are the streets for you today, will you need my hands,” the large man leaned in and the table they settled at groaned, “Or knives?” He spoke with a smile and grit.

As the man finished his words, Kthelle had only *now* noticed he was drinking a warm beverage, “Are you sipping **hibiscus**, dear warrior?” she jeered at him.

With a playful laugh Grimnal confessed “Yes!”

Kthelle’s nose was correct

“I’ve been enjoying a different sense of routine,” he admitted, waving a hand. “The culture of Tea Brewing is beautiful! I’ve been deep in studies, and through many scrolls,” the two laughed as they thought about when times had been different. Easy.

“No friend, haha. Today’s your lucky day, nothing but a mercenary’s day for myself; though, I *will* need your help with Daav as that day comes nearer.” The drow was curious to know if Grimnal would still provide his service - not that she would judge him otherwise, considering it was a conflict of interest.

Before the man could respond, a confident female voice called off in the distance, “Sister, are you not comfortable with your stay?” the Gnome had a hint of sarcasm in her voice - she already knew the answer.

Grimnal quickly whispered his final words, “My dagger and heart stand with your choice... yet perhaps this method-”

“Grim,” Kthelle sternly cut in, “Our world is not full of every faerie tale we think. I will use that as an advantage, and learn from them,” The dark-elf turned to face the She-Gnome who had been approaching from behind the counter, which extended and covered one of the long sides of the inn. Kthelle’s posture snapped into a different attitude and her mood seemed to flip instantly.

With a smile on her face, she jokingly spoke as she put a hand on her lower back “Sister, I dare say, I believe the accommodations seem to be getting **worse**. I’m frightened for the bones in my back!” Kthelle groaned, “Oh, and if only the sleeping arrangements weren’t as bad as that foul stench, we might have a valuable prospect with this... safe haven? hostel?” she commented as she looked around awkwardly at the structure’s make-up.

It *had* changed a little since her trip away; some of it not to Kthelle’s liking, all of it better.

Nalia let out an incredulous gasp, “I should execute you for such words!” she trailed off laughing.

Kthelle’s sister was indeed a Gnome, and Nalia had taken care for her most of Kthelle’s life.

Her sister too was the innkeeper of Burning Lake Inn, and her employer.

“And yet,” Kthelle challenged the innkeeper with her eyes, raising her hands in the air, the corners of her mouth quivered upward.

“Dare I say, that foul stench seems to be gifted from your own devise, Kthelle.” Nalia wrinkled her nose.

“Truly, though.” Nalia insisted what she knew Grim had been thinking.

There was a man and woman seated at the bar Kthelle which hadn’t noticed when she first got downstairs. Perhaps they had come down after her... incident.

One seemed to be a wizard’s-apprentice - her robes were light grey and accented with navy blue along the cuffs and seams. A crest rested on her shoulder – defining the apprenticeship.

Of course, Kthelle assumed the woman was a wood-elf, because she couldn’t think of another drow in Eskoath besides her. Then, of course, no faeries would be near... besides Her. These had been the three of six races that were privy to pure magic - unless the sorcerer cast darkness, they had to be elven.

When Nalia got closer to the two by the door, the wizard grabbed her hot meal and sat at a nearby table - away from the area known as coin corner. Their hood still rested downward and the angle was too difficult to catch the figures being.

The gentleman at the bar seemed to be one of the army; King Arthol’s. Except- it was no man. As the cloak around her head dropped, Kthelle saw a brunette-haired human.

She was drinking a freshly ground cup of beans. The coffee had been imported from across the Free Ocean, and Nalia advertised this as much as she stressed the price. She was drinking it black, but Kthelle could tell she didn’t even like the flavour of coffee. *Perhaps a sense of nature*, the Drow thought, *she’s looking for normalcy in whatever her trauma is.*

“Yes, yes. I’ll clean once I’m fed,” re-joining conversation, “What does the pot provide us this morning, Mother Hen?” questioned Kthelle, her stomach rumbling.

“Well, yours truly has crafted a delicious helping of honey & raspberry oat porridge. As *you* should know,-“

“Yes, *the fruits are of the highest value*,” the sisters spoke in unison.

“*And*, the milk was harvested by these hands from nice, clean goats this very morning.” Nalia concluded. Kthelle eagerly not caring, but just wanting. Soon, last night would be on display for everyone if she hadn’t been fed.

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“How’s Arthol fucked it up now?” Kthelle conspicuously nodded her head towards the knight by the bar.

The party was now seated at a table and the drow was attacking a bowl of Nalia’s porridge, while also enjoying a new chocolate-mint beverage - suggested by Grim.

“Well... he doesn’t believe the monsters and creatures that hit us from the west are... I swear on Halio’s throne he said, ‘They are not the nightmares we preach.’ Or at least that’s what my ears have heard - That his battle with them is a trifle. This of course means he will stop protecting us.” Nalia seemed moved by this news.

Kthelle rolled her eyes, she was frustrated with the constant turn of today’s tone, “Hence why that soldier has such anxiety, I presume?”

Nalia gave Kthelle a curious look, she was thinking “*how?*” but instead responded with ease, “Naturally. Her troop has been sentenced back to in-keep work ,- truthfully shoveling the shit - and I see what troubles her mind. It’s not the work I tell you, it’s her *knowing* what’s coming. She’s been on those fronts fighting those beasts. Giant falcons, dire wolves, golems, trolls...” Nalia’s eyes were wide open, certain things she had a sore stomach for, “Undead.”

There was another pause the gnome used to collect herself once more.

“She mentioned they seem mutated,” Nalia nodded back to the bar, “The friendly creatures have now turned viciously in behavior; the unfriendly one’s, even more so.”

There was more silence that joined their table, and Kthelle utilized this time to purge the meal before her. It was quite delicious, and she had to appreciate all these gestures Nalia took from her life and shared with others. Regardless of the world's state.

The two seemed to work in tandem with their abilities - after all, Nalia wasn't going to find out *how* to steal the most precious, purely grown fruit that was sent on a barge to Eskoath two weeks back. She would merely request... providing the *where*.

The fruits of both their labour tasted bountiful.

The life they had built was simple, but as close to authentic as you would get in this line of work. The only problem was... Other people. They seem to get in the way all too frequently, and this was where Kthelle's irritation grew with Daav Gregor.

Kthelle seemed moved with all the amount of energy she had as she pushed herself up to stand at the table, "Well, I'll need warm water up to my bath before I'm off, by which considering the standards of El'thil, I'm already late to bloom." She sniffed her armpits openly.

"Sister?" Nalia seemed thrown off balance with the sudden change in temperature. She glanced over to Grim, who sat beside her.

"Firstly, is a certain 'Cutthroat' not still filling you with impatience?" She whispered softly.

"Aw, you beautiful woman," Kthelle put her hands on the table, "My impatience is to the troughs edge, but discussion has no purpose here. Although I do not understand your heed, I'll live through it," Kthelle seemed to express a strangely positive mindset today. Lying of course, and *well*.

Truthfully, she didn't know if she would follow through with her intentions. Regardless, she knew Grim was a foundation for her to rely upon, and Kthelle was aware Nalia had not an ounce of knowing this.

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Nalia took this answer without hesitation, “Glad to hear.”

When her sister meant business, she was locked in and the pin was steel. “Now secondly, there might be some information you need to gather for me regarding a... A certain relic. By information, I truly mean I **need** the relic – physically – *for* this information. If you spend some time within the market by the cellars of the musician’s shop, it should help with these words,” Nalia slid a cleanly folded, unmarked square piece of parchment across the table.

Kthelle leaned over to pick up her instructions, “The cellars wedged on the corner, near the fine-merchants stall and tailors?” she spoke, creating a sort of intersection with her hands.

“Correct,” she replied straight.

Kthelle gestured a small bow towards the two “Until later, friends.”

Business was done quick and tightly.

As usual, no question had been asked, and that was good. Fruits, new furniture, or relics of ancient past, questions seemed irrelevant by this stage. Nalia took care of Kthelle and would continue to. She would clean her wares from the table and send water to her room. She would keep the fire warm and have the bard’s play.

This was their life.

* * *

Magenta passion struck the waves of ocean blue.

Wisps had created spaces of white,

shimmers of orange cut through the pass.

Although deadly and folly were our thoughts these days, they were filled with laughter and calm.

The colors may deceive and present an ungodly beauty, and storms may clash in the clouds.

But Auranth may see beyond what may strike, though you are blind.

Drift slowly, and with lullaby into its comfort; the cushion is pleasant, and smells of fresh greenery. For the storm has struck once, twice, and thrice un-relentlessly, but nature primes what emotions strike heavily.

The folly is not in knowledge of the recurring storm, but in fear of its return. Fear too of losing the milky skyscape:

The Passion

The Wisps.

The Shimmer.

Power is knowing the storm will recede, to then show what folly might have driven away time and time again.

Hope lives not without patience.

One poet's description regarding life's true folly, Heretics and Unwise Words: The Unspokens!

Entry by Poet Acella (A-Cell-A), last name unknown. **Sentenced to hang with his many outrageously spoken words.**

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CHAPTER FOUR: UNDERGROUND HEIRLOOMS

Kthelle made her way inwards from the Northern, outer layer of Eskoath. Under King Arthol Faluh's rule, you needed to have special papers or particular stewardship to go upwards and in. The Market resided here, along with other premium, accessible services to a more economically fortunate community. Kthelle, of course, had whatever falsely scripted papers were required for her to get to the other side.

She too made friends with the patrol staff over time, and because of this never had issues. This also clued her into new information that happened on the roads, and sometimes in the castle.

Her road towards the inner-wall caused no trouble, but someone *had* been keeping an eye on her recently... Whether it had been one of Daav's people or not, he was doing a horrendous job. Kthelle lost this rat after cutting only a few corners.

Now that the drow stood in the expansive area that was The Market, she allowed herself to study today's population and their vibration. Kthelle was a master of performance and charm, and understanding your audience was the most critical aspect. After many years living off the only resources she could, Kthelle learned that knowledge of life and other people, could get you further than any abilities in fist or gems would.

The streets of Eskoath were wide and bumpy because of its pebble-like infrastructure. Soil followed along the roadside – typically, flowers would blossom this time of year, but this quality diminished. The beds were now filled with litter such as parchment, empty phials, and rotten food left out for the Aves.

This same, new-found trauma seeped right into The Market, which was once a loud, fantastical setting where musicians would challenge each other's tune. Merchants, tinkers, and alchemists would yell their stocks with smiles, "Twine, chocolate, pelts, books, ink! Give me your Garnets and Tokens for values of *new* nature!" one would cry out.

“Cures for boils, bruises, and bats! Let infestation spread no further! Alchemical bindings and medicinal properties; only from Tola’s Trillium!” another would say.

This potent life was broken since Hill’im. Although the properties people sold were of the same nature, their prices had increased and the people had no time for talk.

It was for these very reasons that Kthelle was surprised to notice a general clamour that struck the air with conviction. It was generous, and mixed in with the tunes of gems clicking to one another, laughter, and the movement of water in the channels as people passed by on boats.

It was an energy that made her uneasy.

Normally, she could skulk about and manage her business happily and without conflict, but now everyone seemed to... care. A change of pace for today.

“Love,” one elderly lady standing next to her more elderly husband called out. Quietly, the old women gasped – After all, Kthelle was the only long-term housed drow in Eskoath.

She only missed a single beat though, smiling with charm, “Are you going to let me sit on these treats all day just to throw them away? A beautiful lady like you needs to enjoy the delicacy of baked goods to enjoy life’s other pleasures,” she finalized her pitch with a wink. Although Nalia had done an outstanding job with breakfast, the dark-elf turned to entertain the human woman.

The lady was wearing a long green dress, it touched the dirty stones below. Her hair was riddled grey, but seemed once to be pitch black. She was staring uncomfortably straight at Kthelle, unblinking.

Her husband was dressed in matching attire with dark green leggings and a short sleeved white top. He had drastically less hair than his partner, but equally grey.

The material of Kthelle’s clothing was much more dignified than the thread sold to these two unlucky souls. They seemed hard working farmers no doubt, their hands

had the signs to tell... But money was still thin for them, and although they thought these fabrics might have been nice, they'd been duped - Kthelle could see the stitching breaking apart.

The *dye* was noticeably nice.

The dark-elf was fitted with dark grey bottoms and a white shirt under a simple jerkin. Her purple skin would attract the summer's heat too easily, so of course the material was uniquely sourced. Her charcoal-coloured hair was pinned in a half-bun as locks hung down the sides of her face.

Her main form of steel was carried as two blades; today she had no need for concealment, except for the *want* to conceal - carrying weapons had been permitted around Veles since they had been created, except in the Homes of Elven and Fae beings.

They were on her outer thighs, she also had storage close to her ribs if she chose.

The dark-elf didn't mind an early morning exercise, "Ohh, you're so precious, and the goods smell bountiful, but... well I just don't have much to spare," Kthelle replied.

This was a character the drow had used on many occasions for such interactions. Simple in matter as a person and with little responsibilities. Someone who might have grown on a farm or outside these walls, but married into a man with money. When she lived as this soul, she could learn about people and their fine mannerisms and quirks, for they shared a different sympathy.

Kthelle's clothes, although a little more unique, still worked its way into her character because of its styling.

"How about you give me four Tokens, and I'll give you **any** treat?" the lady desperately called out.

FOUR tokens? Kthelle thought, distraught at the idea to give four tokens to anyone for any amount of trinket style pastries – *however* fresh.

Kthelle looked meekly towards the ground, “Now, you see... Well, my husband-” the woman cut her off as she hit her husband’s torso with the back of her hand.

“You see that?!” she spoke to him with frustration, “You men say one thing, and look how sheepish we get! Doesn’t the damn girl deserve a pastry, Torph? Enjoying the nice Summer weather only to- ” the farmer woman continued to rain terror upon her husband with words while Kthelle displaced her attention elsewhere.

She had heard the sluggish man’s footsteps as he made his way through the market, circling Kthelle’s location. His proximity was distant and his heavy feet wouldn’t be able to keep up with Kthelle without barriers.

“I mean heavens,” the woman loudly crept back into Kthelle’s consciousness “If I didn’t bake-” *here comes the husband.*

“Ohh, Ves,” he spoke, with a deep, growling voice, as he brought his hand up and let it fall on the counter “Don’t corner me so I-”

The conversation was awkward.

After casually turning her head about her, the dark-elf caught sight of the man who had been dissecting her movements. She had recalled his face from a few weeks ago when Daav was yet again sending agents after her.

His face had a scar across his left ear and jaw, but his dark-brown hair hung just long enough to cover. His build was tall and large; heavy and wooden. Slow.

Kthelle had forever denied her allegiance to a group known as the Gang of Whispers. Their hideout sanctuary was dedicated to those less fortunate in the realms of family and wealth. Those that had abilities in *other* areas that could provide enough sustenance, plus the world. Those not typically placed in high power.

The drow wanted no part of their corruption. The morals they abided by were paper thin, and deep greed was another common factor.

Unfortunately, their leader didn't make her decision easy, and his followers had become more hostile and less skilled; both combining to create chaos.

"Hun, let me tell you what," the lady said, her husband was now sitting again and seemed as flustered as a four-year-old when cake was not given to them. "Two pastries, one Token," she spoke without hesitation.

The Market isn't healthy today, thought Kthelle, *it's desperate*.

All these merchants, bargemen, and innkeepers don't know if they should spike their prices, or sell everything they have for whatever they can get. They don't know if they should live like times of old, or claw at each other's throats for survival.

For a moment, emotion was sparked within Kthelle as she mourned Eskoath. Then, paid four tokens for her pastries and ran off, not catching the response of the women as she called out to her.

II

Cutting through the crowd like salmon flowing through a river, Kthelle deftly pursued her task of getting to the cellars Nalia requested she visit. The dark-elf wondered, as she tried to elude her tracker.

That didn't stop her from stealing a few extra pastries in a concealed pocket under her skirt. These were of course treat's for her friends, she reminded herself – avoiding heavy contact with passerby's. Halio forbid she crushed the delicacies in her pocket.

As Kthelle approached one of the water canals that ran through the market, she spared one final glance for the man with brown hair who carried a blade on his waist.

Skulking down the stairs, pushing onwards down the paths of the canals and out of view, Kthelle made her way to the bottom of some wooden steps. The water was slushing about the walls below; above reverberated its tune loudly. The water smelled dirty as though rats had died in their depths, although the marble which lined the trenches wasn't speckled with such horrors.

The platform she stood on was a long, straight stretch. This system was mainly patrolled and used by fisherman or even captains of galleys who would trade their goods. There too were those which moulded the canals into their traditions. Pirates too used these waterways.

Around The Market, these long platforms provided space enough for lower-level shops and tunnels. Curiously enough, the note her sister had given her, told Kthelle of one such path that could lead her to the particular basement which she needed to attend her meeting.

"Tuna! I bet ye never seen bigger catch!" a loud man, who reeked of whiskey, *constantly* repeated to the crowd - which seemed to diminish rapidly.

He truthfully had no other exclamation except this.

Small stalls were set up by men of these captains - or fathers - where they sold their goods. Some would also be selling trips around the city if you fancied some company and conversation. And work.

Long ropes and other gear littered the walkway, and the area lacked any sort of organization. No one had strictly guarded these parts, so the pirates had truly made it their own. Kthelle, now more than before, tried to avoid bumping into others or losing her balance.

Tunnels, some gated and some open, greeted the dark-elf along her right hand side and she heard more slushing from the water to her left. There was a similar, rambunctious platform with other stalls on the other side too.

As the drow approached one particular gated door, she immediately knew it was locked. Swiftly, masking her movement of reaching for the handle, she leaned up her body against the damp, stone wall beside its entrance. She was one with the common civilians around her, but a distraction would be necessary for her to, “get on with it then,” as Nalia would have said.

Blankly using her vision to scan the surroundings, Kthelle noticed she had plenty of rope at the bottom of her feet. Enough to use to her advantage.

Cautiously, she stalled for time, trying not to wait too long for the perfect group to pull into her scheme. It didn’t take long at all.

A few loudmouth men made their way down some stairs, walking the opposite direction Kthelle came. They made their drunken presence known with both scent and attitude. It was early in the day yes, but common for the docks to see such characters.

As most situations with a troupe of drunken men go, Kthelle’s plan went as expected. When she hoisted the rope into the air, the men toppled over the wares of one of the stalls.

Kthelle now had enough shadow to clear her way as she picked the lock behind her back with one hand. Once the whole platform incorporated themselves into a scrum, there was no wasting time for guards to come; although none ever did subdue the antics down here.

Infact, the drow hadn’t seen a guard her whole, pleasantly warm day.

As she shut the door firmly behind her and walked through the tunnel, she thought about what she would hear many times, “Sometimes, to be as quiet as possible, you must create the most noise.”

III

With the pleasantries of meeting attendants, making her way through a maze, and piecing together what she might be dealing with, Kthelle found herself in a dank, low lit room with dust littered across many bookshelves.

The only other body in the room was a young boy, by the looks of twenty one... two?

The room with the two occupants was no bigger than Kthelle's chambers, and was barely below ground. The hideout must have been right beneath the heart of civilization and yet extremely well hidden, for the dark-elf could see figures passing by in the glass by the top of the room as people congregated in the street. Horse hooves clip-clopped and wagons rattled.

With the change of air temperature and taste, Kthelle figured that she had been taken somewhere further towards the docks of the Free Sea. Eastward.

"You brought the letter?" the young boy inquired with speed, disregarding niceties. His hair was short, and orange as the setting sun over water. He was also a man not skilled in the sword - this was knowledge from the blatantly poor treatment of his amateur steel, left plainly brandished along the only table that sat in the room... instead of on his person.

The only other attractions the space had were two stools, two tankards, and a small cask Kthelle was *sure* the hosts swapped frequently.

The drow glided towards the stools, "Yes, I have."

Pulling out the clean, elegantly folded parchment given to her by Nalia, she slid it across the table and took a seat. Although tempted for a drink, she thought best-

Fuck it.

She reached for the tankard before this thought was completed, taking a large gulp as the man frighteningly spoke up. Almost out of nowhere and too loud, "Excellent! Yes, very well. Good!"

No actual heed was given to the letter on the table... He had heard Kthelle's words and she couldn't of been lying... *right?*

A smile lined his face as he cautiously, with care, reached in his cloak. He didn't even know who our drow was...

His general movements told Kthelle he was a man of exploration and knowledge, not intricate games of challenge. A man set in facts, perhaps someone who would have held a position at the Library of Worlds... now lazily resting a third-generation sword on a plank of wood that hasn't kissed the slightest taste of blood in centuries.

"You must know, lady, that I am forever grateful for your arrival," the boy spoke up this time. His demeanor seemed to balance out and he had now grown calmer. "Artifacts like this, well... they're not meant to be held by scholars. To study its intricacies and know the properties is of importance to me, except-" he let his words hang in the air, forgetting to fill the space.

His hand extended from his cloak with a dark purple pouch, about hand sized. It was knotted at it's top with silver twine that carried a flat light along its fibers (similar to the bag). The man's eyes had heavily shifted to the pouch he held in his right hand.

"Except...?" Kthelle asked, fighting for the scholar's attention, which she now had.

"Ahh... sorry. Y-y-yes." he stammered, then peacefully and with reverence, let the purple fabric drop from his palm to the table. From his perspective it almost felt as if time slowed dramatically. It hurt, and for too long, before a metal thud came from the table.

"Except, after studying what I know, an item like this should not remain with me. It *cannot*. It needs to be disposed of using these instructions." This time, the man

searched his pockets aggressively and frantically until he found his treasure. He seemed to know where the pouch was without hesitation.

Kthelle treated herself to more of the dark-maple wine left out by whoever the hosts had been.

Still frantic, - as scholar's are - he laid down the papers beside the artifact Kthelle was meant to deliver home. Different from the note Nalia sent, there were many, many papers stacked on top of each other and held tightly with simple twine.

She fixed her grey eyes on the man. He leaned over the table; his hands had been trembling as they held the stack of notes down. This must have been all the research her sister was hoping to gain, plus more.

"I'm Jayce," the scholar pronounced, very level and normally, preparing to sit in the chair beside him, across from Kthelle. "Are you familiar with the Children of Magic?"

Curious thought Kthelle. She set her tankard down on the table. Leaning back heavily in her chair, dust kicked up from the ground and the floorboards croaked.

Clip-Clap, Clip-Clap.

"I received formal education, believe it or not. Then beyond." the dark-elf spoke as hostility pierced the air, "So yes, I know the history," she finished with gritted teeth.

"Haha, settle friend," the man laughed, lifting his hands mildly, "let me indulge us with a tale. The tale of this heirloom perhaps," continued Jayce, raising his eyebrows as he gestured towards the pouch.

He began projecting an attitude both condescending and wise. The man before her seemed a weight had been lifted from him without having the artifact. He spoke like he was old and knew many things, but all he knew previously when the drow had first entered, had been fear... That was clear.

Placing her wine on the table, Kthelle spoke soberingly, "What of this Heirloom? Pouch? This," she gestured towards the object, and as she did this felt an electric vibration surge through her forearm, but she made no significant reaction. There was a moment's longer pause than she wanted, but Jayce didn't seem to catch this beat.

"Is merely a present for my dear sister to do as she chooses. Then, I am to enjoy the warmth of her fire, women in her tavern, and feathers in her linens. I don't care for stories."

With a screech, the drow pushed her chair backwards and stood tall, "I should be going. Who knows, I might need to fetch some decadent dinner for the lot of us tonight," she firmly stated with a genuine smile, happy at the prospect of a nice night.

Before she could reach both the parchment stack and pouch, Jayce snatched the purple item from the table, out of Kthelle's boundary, but not without repercussion. Although the man had claimed to know a fair amount, his coordination lacked immensely.

As he sprang from his chair and had the pouch in his hand, he bumped into the table heavily and knocked the whole lot to the floor. As the cask crashed onto the wooden floor, nobody outside had taken notice of the loud eruption as wine was wasted. The old, battered sword also had the same fate of falling.

Jayce himself had been taken to the floor, but swiftly recovered his stance, leaning back, cautious to speak.

He had mad eyes, locking onto every inch of the tiny room.

Softly, these were his words, "Fae, Elf, and Drow."

The sword that the Dark-Elf still had ringing in her ears, was soon enough in her hands. Reflexes primal today, she unsheathed the blade and whipped its point into the direction of the human, "I, quite truthfully *friend*, have other shit to do."

He disregarded the blade, and continued, “Known as the Children of Magic because these three races had been the only three given Pure Power. Naturally, from birth, gifted into a world of splendor and creation,” the ink master pushed forward.

Kthelle decided she actually wasn’t going to kill the man, but would let him tell his tale, keeping the two entertained for the moment. She lowered the steel because she actually did enjoy stories...

“Except some,” he bowed his head towards Kthelle.

Ahh, he *did* know who she was... Being the only Drow in Eskoath, and only drow born without magic, was gold for this scholar.

Ugh, I’ve already decided against it, she thought with frustration.

“Yes, others could learn sub properties of spells, bindings, and curses, but they would be overwhelmingly challenged with the natural... *trait*. Over time though, multiple new avenues presented themselves to the world of non magic born. The other races, we began to wield “*Magic*” differently... and in unique ways. After all, you, a well learned woman-” he bowed, stifling a laugh, “should know, it was no Child of Magic who first created the works of enchanted items of power. No, this right was *well earned* by the Dwarvish folk.”

Kthelle used her eyes to attack Jayce. The way the dark-elf held herself put a pressure on the man that left his heart beating rapidly and his mind restless. Was she going to attack him? Kill him? She heard this from his heart-rate.

Would she?

“You speak like a slug, Jayce, and the stench of your words make my headache,” she responded genuinely.

He set his jaw.

“Learned woman,” he held the purple pouch before himself, almost if mourning for someone, then gently tossed it. Kthelle was sure enough to catch the bag as it came her way. There were no other vibrations she experienced from its presence.

Immediately on impact she felt a heavy, medium sized medallion hit her hand, followed by a light, thin chain that connected with the other side of the confined space.

“I give you a tale within a tale. The Five... Uuuuuuuu,” he sarcastically said these words, feigning fear. He noticed no reaction from Kthelle, “You have no fear for demons of the night? Trolls, werewolves, goblins?”

“*These* are things I fear,” Kthelle confessed, “But I fear what I know. I fear what is real.”

“Kthelle... I know things,” he replied dubiously, sensing her skepticism, “A great deal of many things. Not through enjoyment, or want, or passion, but my duty has become my duty as a chronicler,” Jayce laughed on, walking towards the spilling keg with one of the tankard’s that sat on the floor.

She made her way to the door, “I assure you; the pleasure was all yours, Sir Jayce.” The drow let the sword slip from her hand and it clanked off ground once more.

“A pact,” the man spoke, stroking his short trimmed, brown beard, eyes growing wider, “Made by whomever you cast, only... depict *more* sinister.” Kthelle made way for the door, towards her next meeting. Jayce continued calling out after a sip of wine “No! Even more! The worst, most powerful, boundless creatures, made wicked!” he shouted.

Clip-Clop, Clip-Clop.

Kthelle began to think the man had lost his mind, “Puppet Masters of Demons and Parents of Nightmares! Who do you think *created* the fears you face?” he spoke more silently, “Abusers. Foul foes degrading magics, both pure and inspired. Seekers of... Heirlooms,” cold air exited his lungs.

“They say she comes in silence... that she *is* Silence.”

The elf turned around. This caught her attention.

“And a *Dirty-Elf*, like you. Purple skinned and tainted; she is. Here I stand, having just given you something beyond your thoughts.”

Anger rapidly expanded throughout Kthelle’s physical being, but she held control. She normally always had when she came across these kinds of people.

“If you were to even read the words I *haven’t* transcribed for you... Words hidden from that stack of papers,” he gestured to her hand, “Not even you would trust yourself,” after finishing his liquor, he lazily tossed the tankard.

“Yes. Whatever magical properties are within this bracelet, stone, jewel, pendent... whatever!” she waved the bag around, “You shouldn’t trust me with it. Especially after such generous words,” a smile flashed on her face, “But nonetheless, you *fear* it, and for that, I will smother your nightmares my dear child. You’re so very welcome, ugly insect.”

After slouching down and considering the act a bow, Kthelle relieved the two blades from her right hand with astonishing force. They both caught into the left leg of the scholar, one had pinned his foot to the floor and the other was in his shin.

Clip-Clop, Clip-Clop.

The man screamed out in agony, blood pooling around his foot as he tried to wiggle around for the first few moments, but nobody would be coming. Not since the keg topple, not now.

Knowing quickly better than to continue yelling, he reached for the blade to remove it, “NO!” shouted the figure standing over him.

Her complexion seemed to glow heavily with... peace. Terrifying was her power, for Jayce knew any more movements might make his life less valuable than a Garnet. Still, calm was her further actions after, well, originally throwing the blades.

“I won’t kill you.”

She didn’t intend to, luckily he believed her.

“What explanation do you have to make such a pleasant treaty – a planned meeting of friends – so miserable and disheartening?” He knew this question was used to provide dramatic emphasis when she paused. He knew better than to respond.

Kneeling beside the man, she sighed and put her head towards the boards, “Learned man, do you know what the word ‘Hill’im’ *actually* means?”

This too was rhetorical. The man with two blades in his body wasn’t going to interrupt.

“I know because of your age and attitude; you most definitely haven’t met a faerie. This is extremely common mind you, since nobody has since The Battle. Almost as though they’ve disappeared... Only they haven’t.” Kthelle was enjoying teaching her pupil a lesson. She reached for the blade in his leg and started to pull it towards herself. He let out moans of pain and most likely hatred.

“But even knowing a Fae wouldn’t help you. Scholars, much similar to you, and even true wise men have talked about the word, and why this battle - the battle of Hill’im - was named such. But then you tout around the topic of nightmares and folklore regarding hideous, reproachful monsters, – which in truth are real – but then you bind this same lore to the name of *Dark-Elves*?” she wore a disgusted look on her face, “You may have known my name, but I have hidden myself from you with smoke and mist. Your vision is blurry to know who I am!” the calm had left the elf.

“For centuries, since the beginning of whichever time, us, the purple-elf, have been made into demons, only to now be rumoured to be the ringleader! The strongest of some tale of these ‘Five’ beings?! Haha, learned man, we need only a simple life. Everyone, really only needs a simple life. However the style; it’s a seat at the fire, some spice in the ale, and tobacco on the double. Dwarves want to craft, Humans want to

expand, and yet Drows want only to slaughter? These are the new tales you tell your kids at night, to keep them distant and frightened of us?”

The man was now weeping uncontrollably. He thought the woman was going to skin him alive. She gripped him by the nape of his neck and brought the two eye to eye.

“A shadow filled with ichor. Blackness beyond blackness. A silence that pierces elven ears. Hill’im. A fae poem so dense, I can’t even think of conjuring its sadness. So, while you prance off with whatever inequality you spew, weaving stories, you become the greatest nightmare. Whoever you think spawn’s monsters and fire, **they** have labelled **you** this. You have become the silence you say this fictional drow claims to be!”

Stuttering and shaking violently in Kthelle’s hands, Jayce spoke, “Kthelle, no, please! My master’s-”

The elf spoke over the man, but she didn’t have to speak powerfully - his voice was meek, “Yes, you follower. Know this, Inkpuppet, your children and women have nothing to fear. The dark-elves anyone once knew are sparsely scattered around cities, constantly watched and “tamed.” The rest, as surely you know, stop never, forever on the West march. With children. Deathly afraid to encounter such a pleasant interaction as ours. Living a life so secluded even we, elven kin of the night, cry for help.”

Gently dropping her hands from his face, the drow stood up and set her eyes towards the barred, dark-willow door.

“Not *everyone*, though,” she nodded towards Jayce, relating to his previous insult. “Men! evolving and expanding quicker than any of the races. Creating and changing their rituals. Along with the lives of others. My most sincere apology is that you haven’t met a Fae creature.”

Clip-Clap, Clip-Clap.

The face she had conjured was menacing. Although the elf moved with freedom and youth, her mind had been tested. Jayce had seen this expression worn on many of

the Elder Chroniclers. To ever think the man had ever been in the presence of this woman and not known her capabilities was foolish.

What was he, as a *scholar*, involved with at this point...

He once again worried she might slice his throat with metal, but the only injuries he suffered were dagger wounds, but he needed to fix these fast.

“Let us hope they don’t disappear from this plane as they have disappeared from our sight. For they have more fear than us Dirty-Elves, and see how we live now. They moulded this city, Jayce.”

She mourned for the people. In her lifetime, she had only met one particular fae a handful of times. She was kind and brave enough to show Kthelle her Caladrius.

It was extraordinary.

Before she shut the door behind her, she heard one final cry for help from the man:

“Have her **destroy** it, drow.”

* * *

Monster and Creature have been the terms we press onto these magnificent wonders of life. From the beginning, our lack of knowledge has shown us the importance it is to understand other beings’ *intentions* and *desires*.

This book, dedicated to the extinct and unique, provides a complete index and categorical assignment of all the known beasts that pleasantly and unpleasantly cross the paths of other beings Lithuli’al has brought.

From the Amarok, to the Undead, this scribbled passage will be known as a resourceful wonder that will be updated day by day. As my party of four and I venture out into the wilds, we seek to protect ourselves and harm as little Life as possible. Our

beliefs and curiosities can be found between these bindings and the journey our lives take will be known to you, as it is now-

First entry in: Understand the Beauty of Animals, Creatures, and the Unknown! Ver 2.

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