

[21:31] Elicia of the Alabaster Flame ★ | Reports, each more worrying than the last, had reached the ears of the Holy See; reports at first of worrying activity, of missing peoples, and then of bodies found in the snow. A village in the farthest reaches of Coerthas, near where icy snow gave way to the first dead grass of Dravania. Far enough that the horizon looked only of winter's chill but if one squinted their eyes they could see the auburn hue of Dravanian trees through the fog. At first, reports and rumors were that the bodies were found with frozen over bite marks- villagers likely taken by beasts as they ventured too far from the village walls. But then one was found with wounds that could only have been made by a spear, and then another by blade. Peace with dragons was a tenuous thing, it seemed, and if rumours were to be believed then it would be over all too soon. But village life was a boring thing, and the rumours of some country yokels from a town most people had even forgot exist wasn't much to go off of, especially when nothing more substantial than tavern rumour was presented. But that did little to quiet the worry of the commonfolk, and it was likely better to put the rumours to rest before they could take hold as fear. And so it was that a small retinue was dispatched- an Inquisitor and pair of Temple Knights. A few days journey on little notice across the frigid wasteland of Coerthas was never anyone's idea of a good time, and the first night in the tavern when they arrived at the village was almost a relief enough to forget the goal of their journey entirely- even the inquisitor finding solace in stew kept warm by a dwindling fire that tasted more of poverty than spice and certainly not of any meat or vegetable that could be discerned. The first night in a warm bed with four walls and a roof against the cold was like bedding in Halone's Halls themselves; a final peace before the work began. The first day of questioning villagers turned up little. Panic had already settled, and information gleaned was sparse and often contradictory. Rumours that had little more merit than those half-contrived ones that reached the heart of the Holy See. One person who heard it from another who heard it from a third who saw a body. Only to learn that well they'd not actually seen it, but they heard about it from someone else. 'Well it was too far to be brought back!' they might insist, 'well my neighbor said it was over there...' The work was slow, and either of the Temple Knights might have found it grating themselves as well as felt the weight of the inquisitor's own growing ire and desire to return home. The second day saw their search expanding into the countryside, chasing rumours that may as well have been fairy tales. A days search found nothing but snow and growing misery- at least until night fell. It was under the watchful eyes of Thaliak's moon that Ser Elias found- or rather stumbled over, half buried in the snow- a body of a villager abandoned to the wilds. But frost and beast had long destroyed any hope of evidence, and the party eventually had to turn back to the village lest they meet the same dour fate. As second day faded into third night, they didn't sleep near so soundly. The third day saw them venturing farther- towards the edge of the snow and to the land where dragons called home. Those blood trails in the snow, half-frozen and half-buried by the snowdrift, might have been from anything, surely... They found little in the forests to the north, and as far as they'd traveled it was time to return earlier than any of them would like. "Inquisitor," the other Temple Knight had mentioned on the way back to the village, "Isn't it... rather quiet?" and the rest of the ride back was spent in the weighing realization that they'd not heard beast or bird besides their own. Even the chocobo seemed disturbed by... something. But as they returned to a village settling for the evening, they were welcomed again with warm meals and dirty beds that might as well have been palaces. The night was louder than the last, as each of them wondered which of their party was turning restlessly in their bed.

[21:47] Elicia of the Alabaster Flame ★ Dawn broke well before any of them felt rested, and the day started as any other. The knights escorted the Inquisitor as he made his rounds; a day of questioning villagers and searching homes, tension settling on everyone the retinue spoke to as if the men of the church could not bear to shoulder it all themselves. A heavy fog had settled over the frozen village, this day, reducing the sun that only taunted with its warmth to a golden glow dispersed throughout the wintry shroud. Eerie, perhaps. Elias might notice that the chocobo were more spooked today than the last, as restless as the knights had felt the previous evening. But save the fog the sky was clear. It was around supper time when progress was made- but progress is

rarely good in search of heresy. A house that had been abandoned by the war had been offered a short while back to a traveler claiming to be from the city, and it was in a more thorough search of the rotted wood and crumbling stone that the other knight had found a Dravanian idol, alight with magics. Proof undeniable that something here was amiss, even if none of the villagers were- yet- to blame. But thoughts have a way of being interrupted by the frantic ringing of a village bell, and shouting in the streets. Even before the trio could open the door the sound of something heavy hitting snow and cobblestone was heard outside, and as they threw the door open they were met with the sight of fleeing villagers from a large, frenzied aevis whose squared teeth gnashed at a woman who had been unfortunate enough to be caught in its jaws. "To arms, knights!" the inquisitor had ordered. "They're at the gates!" A villager had cried. And so it was that they had found themselves unwitting participants in a skirmish for a war that should have ended. The first to fall was the inquisitor- run through by a heretics spear who had climbed the walls where a member of the militia- which is to say a young lad with a sword who hadn't learned its weight- had failed to stop him. He had died choking on his own blood and cursing the dravaniens even as one of the few aevises had torn his head from his shoulders. It was almost a sick joke, either knight might think- for as chaotic as it was in the cover of fog and falling evening, the heretics were a small and unruly band. To have survived the war and find themselves on the back foot from such a paltry ambush was nothing short of insulting. But even an insult needed to be repaid in kind when made in steel. The first of the aevises fell to knights as villagers ran and hid and were chased by others of their turned kin. A second in the chaos found its skull impaled by the other knight's spear, only for him to fall to a bolt of flame from evening dark, a mage hidden somewhere beyond where either knight's helmet let them see. And so it was that Ser Elias found himself alone, facing down the fourth aevis. Perhaps the last, for he had seen one felled by a farmboy with a pitchfork and panicked strength as the boy protected his sister. A few bodies of villagers and heretic ambushers both lay motionless and going cold too fast in the frost. But there were other heretics, and either he would put this elezen-turned-dragon down and the heretics after it, or he would join the corpses of the retinue for what should have been a simple job. Though throughout it all- in the moments of quiet between skirmishes in the streets, Elias might have noticed an odd fact. He hadn't seen any... actual dragons. At least, not for a while. Now, though, as the Aevis reared back and flared its wings and attempted to chomp down on him, Elias might finally spot the shapes of a small group of dragonets harassing villagers. Snarling and biting and whipping their wings as if frenzied mad- but also baby dragons barely bigger than an elezen toddler and only half as temperamental.

[22:28] Ser Elias de Spencer nocked another arrow, letting it take a short flight to meet the Aevis in an abrupt end to its journey, embedded into the roof of its gaping mouth and digging a merciless point into the softer flesh there. There was scarce a moment to breathe before he groped for another arrow, the quiver at his hip rattling with the indelicate action. This, too, took a short flight like its sibling; though hurried hands made for poor aim, and this one digs as an annoyance into the thick muscle of the beast and merely serves to enrage it further. Levin crackles as it gathers, as deadly and infuriated as its caster as the Aevis prepares its aetheric retaliation; in the heartbeats that happened between loosing the annoyance into flesh and the dragonkin choosing violence from a safer range, a blue blur streaks past Elias to deliver a vicious kick in the form of an upset Gestalt. Here, there was a chance to relieve some of that anxiety and pent up energy and worry, and the warbird seems almost eager for the chance to release the tension that had plagued it so for the last several days. The kick staggers the Aevis and interrupts its cast, the furious squall from the tombstone-toothed dragonkin also getting cut short by another swift meeting of taloned foot and scaly hide. This new threat is rounded upon, and that choice becomes the last made as an arrow makes a perpendicular angle to the one still seated in the dragonkin's mouth — the meddlesome obstacle of skull and scale preventing an unhindered trajectory through the space behind its eyes. Breathing hard with the rush of adrenaline, Elias forces himself to try and slow the ragged gasps that demanded too much air and not enough clarity as he regains his bearings. A series of small shapes catches his eye, and the next arrow flies at the nearest dragonet that snarled at the villager

it harangued — though the Chevalier's shot merely pierces through the thin membrane of wing as the infantile creature's erratic flight accidentally manages to keep it safe. Lips purse behind metal mask to whistle something that sounds like a rising warble, and the dark blue Palfrey echoes it back before charging at the small flock in a menacing gleam of steel and trained violence.

[22:54] Elicia of the Alabaster Flame | As the Aevis is felled by arrow and bird, Elias is given the moment to breathe he needs to think. The battle is hectic, certainly- fog and snow and evening light doing little to stop it from feeling claustrophobic. The aevis spasmed and thrashed as it was killed, but a trained warbird made short work of the misbegotten creature's last vestiges of life. The Dragonet, wing pierced by arrow, recoiled and screeched a painful cry as it flitted away from a maiden who stumbled and nearly fell in over the cobbles in her haste. The look she gave Elias was one of gratitude in the moment before another villager helped her back to her feet and the two continued to run, and the dragonets scattered as the chocobo charged at them. They were small, and even frenzied were little match for a bird so much larger than they. Arrows streaked through the air at Ges from the gloom as the mortal attackers tried to finally put down the last of the defenders of the small village. Though they clattered off the steel of the bird's armored barding, it boded poorly- the pair was outnumbered, and their companions already felled, and the village none too full of fighters. And worse, still, in the moment of relative quiet following the stilled thrashing of the Aevis... Elias heard something familiar. Too familiar. The heavy wing beats of leathery wings, approaching far too low and far too fast. A dragon- a true dragon- descending somewhere beyond the fog. A roar echoed through the night, a cry that Elias had heard in some way countless times before. A call to other dragons, though for what... who could say. Villagers and heretics alike trembled and staggered under the aether-laced call, and the scattered dragonets recoiled and shook their heads as they darted away from Gestalt. And then, from cover of night and fog, Elias saw it; a White Wyvern crashed from the sky to dive onto one of the attacking harriers that was pursuing some of the villagers who hadn't yet had time to bar themselves inside. "Fohl na!" a voice cried- though... it wasn't from the dragon. A woman, astride the dragon in a saddle seemed perfectly fitted to the wyvern's back, clad in silver armor and flowing white cloth like fresh fallen snow, spear in hand. "Doh a na dran yah!" She called, and the dragonets looked to her and the wyvern that had called them, and as if wakened from a dream shook their heads again and darted as quick away from the bird as their little wings would allow. The wyvern himself buffeted his wings and knocked the harrier and villagers away, giving the platinum-clad rider a chance to drive her spear through the chest of the staggered heretic, "With me, Temple Knight!" she called, already turning her helmeted gaze to the dark that hid more of the ambushers.

[23:29] Ser Elias de Spencer reacts before he has time to think, bow already nocked with arrow and trained on the pale hide of the dragon that materialized from the mist. The sight of a *rider* upon the foul beast, however, sends a jolt of shock through him so violently that the arrow flies harmlessly wide through the air. Cursing under his breath at the loss of such limited ammunition, there is little surprise when the heretic that joins the fray also speaks the traitorous tongue of the scaled menaces, but the rider seems to have little control of the beast and the first attack seems to simply be unfortunate collateral damage for the harriers. That is, until gleaming spear finds the breast of yet another assailant; the shock of discovering a person acting as a rider upon the wyvern had nary a chance to be overcome before this blow is dealt with equal precision. The call from the rider is very nearly missed, but once the words register, they are treated with the same lack of trust as given to any of the heretical aggressors. Instead, a long and sailing note is whistled to the chocobo and echoed obediently, and the Palfrey ruffles his tail feathers before stretching high with wings outstretched wide, a flash of green aether swirling around him briefly before zipping into the nearest injured villager. The man looks surprised for a beat before he continues running, the limp in his gait lessened notably as he escapes the skirmish. As the wyvern and rider seem preoccupied with.. not attacking the village's inhabitants? A blink is spared as this information processes, and his next arrow is aimed at a man with a sword and equally battered shield, the former raised to strike at the

crook-armed shepherd that had been knocked down by the buffet of wind. A hiss of air, and the heretic's throat blooms red along its newest wooden adornment.

[23:44] Elicia of the Alabaster Flame's attention was barely on Elias- as if unafraid of the Temple Knight or simply not in a position to let herself worry- which may well be the case. Elias would know well how quickly even a dragon could be felled outnumbered, and if she were truly against the heretics... then outnumbered they certainly were. Perhaps it was simply that she had no choice *but* to trust- or at least hope- that the archer's arrow would not find her back. As another harrier fell to an arrow through his throat, the white wyvern launched forward as the heavy wings beat once in a sound like a boom, a cloud of snow rising where it rocketed away from the corpse of the heretic that fell to rider's lance. It stopped short of the walls, a pair of heretics carrying worn spears braced against the dragon's approach. But as it pulled up, the buffet of air knocked them back slightly as the rider brandished the spear high like... a staff. She swept it low as the dragon whirled around in tandem with the slash, and an arc of white flame like starlight erupted through the air to cleave through them. Their tattered clothes ignited and with panicked screams the pair stumbled back off the walls and were silenced by the crunch into frozen ground. The dragon rounded, and the rider's attention fixed on Elias as the pair swooped low nearby, "Are the villagers alright?" She called, loud enough to be heard over the beating of the wyvern's wings- clearly familiar with how she'd have to make her voice carry to be heard. Clearly, she was not unfamiliar with her... mount? companion? "Are there any more of the heretics?"

[00:01] Ser Elias de Spencer spares a look around for any more attackers, the last of them within the village's walls either as dead as those they'd felled or in the hasty process of joining the fallen. Gestalt again ruffles feathers and stretches high, glittering green aether engulfing the Temple Knight and soothing aches he hadn't known he'd acquired. An arrow stays nocked, ready for hands to draw it and send it into deadly flight. "Just the one." Projected loud enough to be heard on even a battlefield, the insinuation is more than obvious as he stays facing both dragon and rider, tension still obvious in his posture.

[00:11] Elicia of the Alabaster Flame stared at him from behind the visor of her armet, the helm obscuring all but the elezen's stoic frown. She held up her off hand from the reins she held- which seemed more for her own stability and suggesting a course of action than any real 'control' of the dragon, given that they bound around scaled neck where they couldn't adjust his path if they tried- as a show of... peace? surrender? The blue eyes of the dragon fixed on Elias but offered no input, but with a keenness of gaze that made it quite obvious that he was just as intelligent as his kin. The rider stowed her spear across her back, and then patted the wyvern's neck. "Peace, Ser." She said, her voice still projected enough to be heard as the wyvern slowed his wings and descended back to the earth. His wings furled and came to rest, and the rider continued- quieter now that she didn't have to project so loudly. "We are not your enemies." She swung one leg over the dragon's back and dropped down to the snow gracefully, the white cloth billowing as she fell until the elezen righted herself. Her armor looked... almost like a dragoon's- though sleeker and without any of the vicious adornment that made them so frightful foes for dragon. Archaic, almost, in design.

[18:34] Ser Elias de Spencer does not lower his bow – the arrow remains nocked and ready to be drawn for fire – but neither does he aim it specifically at the dismounted rider. The raised and empty hand is noted, but with how quickly he'd seen dragoons move and even this armored heretic fight, an empty hand meant little at the present moment. "I find that hard to believe; if not by circumstance, then by nature." Beneath his visor, eyes shift their gaze to the dragon behind her, wary of the white-scaled creature and even more so for the intelligence that seemed to lay in those eyes. Beside him, Gestalt casts one more time, the wispy green aether surrounding the Palfrey before wings flutter and settle, fluffed again against the cold. Brown eyes look back and forth between Temple Knight and Dragon Rider for a moment, appearing to assess the situation in what capacity a chocobo is able, and large taloned feet start to amble casually toward the woman in

dragoon-like armor. Tensing at this choice, Elias starts to draw the string of his bow, unsure yet of what the Palfrey seemed to have noticed.

[18:44] Elicia of the Alabaster Flame stood once she'd gained her footing, watching the Temple Knight in their tense standoff. The dragon did not take up a defensive posture, but did raise to a more comfortable standing position from where he'd angled his neck downwards to afford the rider an easier dismount. The rider shook her head, "Believe what you will, but I've no desire to see anyone throw away the peace forged between man and dragon." She replied. The palfrey's movement caught her attention only slightly- enough to turn her head and watch for a moment but with little in the way of any reactivity. As the bird began to approach her, the woman tensed in turn- but seemed to do her best to keep her reaction hidden and maybe Elias might not notice. But she took a step away, shaking her head again as she turned back to Elias, "But we waste time arguing. Our time would be better used seeing to the injured and scared."

[19:04] Ser Elias de Spencer bristles at the implication of misplaced priorities, but his visor does much to help hide the reaction. Gestalt, however, continues his unhurried approach to the other rider, head starting to lower to her helm's level. Before armored beak can get close enough to begin investigating, a flat-noted whistle shrieks suddenly from the Temple Knight and the chocobo immediately flinches to a halt, looking back to eye the man with a tilt of his head before repeating the whistle and turning to step quickly to his rider's side. "The scared have quit this place, with good reason, and the injured need a Healer beyond my limited capacity to simply make one comfortable while they die." While there is an open defiance in his tone, exhaustion and resignation lay beneath the performed arrogance. The charred remains of the other knight and the impaled-and-headless inquisitor were far too gone for any sort of sanctioned magicks to aid in recovery. Deep gashes from swords and spears needed his brother's or Finia's skill — abilities far beyond him.

[19:15] Elicia of the Alabaster Flame tensed further as the chocobo continued its approach, only for a hidden sigh to shrug her shoulders as the chocobo was called away- even if the sharp whistle made her jump. She folded her arms as he retorted, jaw visibly tightening as she looked around at the dead inquisitor and temple knight, and then the villagers who hadn't managed to get away. The pristine white of her armor was stark against the red of battle's carnage. She frowned, shoulders slumping in a very clear distress that even the greatest actors would struggle to feign. She considered the battlefield, then turned back to Elias and shook her head with returned resolve. "There are others in hiding." she retorted, unfolding her arms and turning to Elias with an insistence that could only be achieved by idealism that was becoming severely too-common in his life, "And your companion and my own magic is more than enough to tend to them."

[20:07] Ser Elias de Spencer can only manage a withering look for a moment before a tri-tone whistle sounds from beneath his helm; the high, middle and low toned command echoed before Gestalt ruffles dark blue feathers again and once more starts to approach the other rider. Frowning beneath his helm, the bowstring is abandoned for reins as the chocobo is physically halted this time, and his head led around to point toward the village and not the woman in white armor. Armor and tack clink against each other as there is a brief expression of protest from the bird, and a calm stare at the Temple Knight is leveled before he finally reroutes toward the skirmish-damaged buildings. Elias huffs once in mild exasperation at the palfrey's stubbornness before turning back to the dragon rider. "He is not formally trained for healing, and will only cast upon those that seem to be an ally. I can only guide him so much before he either starts circling between the same few people or exhausts himself." An outcome he'd rather not push the bird toward, if he could help it. Pragmatically, the last two formidable allies he had were killed in the heretics' attack. But his reasons for keeping his chocobo out of harm's way extended far beyond that.

[20:11] Elicia of the Alabaster Flame turned her helmeted gaze towards the Chocobo as it started to approach her again, frowning ever so slightly but then nodded towards Elias. She turned again and

then started off at a brisk walk that turned to a jog towards one of the larger buildings. "That will suffice." She assured, "Fury willing, nothing too serious needs mending. I think I saw people running here." She hadn't drawn her spear again, or staff? Whatever it was. And as she eventually got towards the door the jog slowed to a brisk walk once more, and then slowly she stopped and waited by the door for him. "You might be better served entering first." She said, "I know not if the townsfolk will mistake me for a dragoon."

[20:24] Ser Elias de Spencer follows at a much more wary pace, trust still not yet formed so easily.

Gestalt, however, trots happily ahead behind the woman, catching up easily and following the plume on her helm with clearly interested eyes. Before that black beak can open and nip at the waving white tuft, reins are again grabbed and firmly tugged to keep the bird from trying to pull at the decoration. Her suggestion is met with a silent stare as he debates the risk of having this unknown behind him as he enters a building, but the soft noises of people slowly coming out of hiding broke the silence that now permeated the village. Options are weighted, the high voice of a tiny noblewoman briefly remembered, and his jaw clenches as he finally slides his arrow back into its quiver and shoulders his bow for the moment. "Isn't that why you're wearing that?" The question is almost sharp in its delivery, the clear similarities between dragoon armor and the woman's finally addressed.

[20:45] Elicia of the Alabaster Flame startled slightly as the chocobo closed in, the suddenness of both its presence and subsequently being yanked away clearly enough to override whatever self control had stilled her reactions before. It seemed she wasn't entirely comfortable with the Temple Knight or his companion either, but apparently deciding that it was more important to focus on the villagers. As they moved, she turned to the dragon that had moved slightly, stretching its wings and preparing to follow. "Kohl hess na sjahs esh y nesh dran kin eil Fimbulvetr." She said. The Wyvern, at this, reared back and unfurled his wings, beating them once, and then replied "Skohl. Sfahsk. Nhaff na ang," in a deep, guttural voice that rumbled in its broad chest. And with another beat of its wings that displaced a cloud of snow and trembled the ground it launched into the sky and disappeared into the mist. The woman sighed and then turned back to Elias, shaking her head. "No." she replied, "This is armor that was once favoured by the Dragon Riders of eld; in the days ere the first verse of the Dragonsong was sung." She spoke with a clear hint of pride, but not quite enough to puff out of her chest or square her shoulders. But the door opened, and the scene inside was... certainly distressing, though not disheartening. Many of the villagers whom Elias had at least seen through the last few days had made it inside, some injured and bleeding, others unconscious from fear or wound, and those who were well enough trying to tend to the others. It was a warehouse of some sort, mostly emptied now and likely once used for storing the harvest before the lands froze. A few younger villagers jumped to the ready; boys that were likely barely more than apprentices and only half of them having hit their growth spurt into adulthood. Each brandishing whatever tools they could as weapons- axes, hammers, a pitchfork, one really old plank with a nail through it. They trembled, and Elias was fixed with the gaze of countless frightened villagers as everything paused. "... S-Ser Elias-" one of the boys asked, "I-Is... Is it safe? Did you win?"

[21:14] Ser Elias de Spencer can feel his jaw set in rejection of this answer, but keeps his doubts to himself for now. If this woman who spoke to dragons fancied herself a 'dragon rider of eld'... Gold eyes flick briefly toward the wyvern as he takes flight, the lower timbre of the voice suggesting that the creature is likely male, and he shoves the uncomfortable comparison to the heretic Iceheart to the back of his mind for now. Instead, the sudden attention of nearly every able-bodied person in the warehouse makes him pause, a different mask slotting into place as he straightens in authority and addresses the room. "The heretics are gone, and have little reason to return after losing so many of their own. But we cannot let relief turn hands idle, for there is still much to be done to restore peace." Congregation-blue gauntleted hand finds the shoulder of the nearest village boy whose shaking hands still held his pitchfork at the ready. "You've helped protect your home, and for that you should be proud, but now your family and neighbors need your strong backs and not your

readiness to fight. Can four of you help your elders determine the severity of those injured, and gently separate them from those who can get by with bandages or a splint?" He glances over his shoulder at the armored woman, saying nothing of Gestalt who had ever so slowly started to subtly creep closer to the dangling plume on the back of her helm.

[21:27] Elicia of the Alabaster Flame | The village boys looked around- mostly at each other and then at the elders. Before being shaken to action when one of the older men barked a short, "Well you heard 'im, lads!" They turned and nodded shakingly as they hastily discarded weapons by the walls and moved to go help the people who were tending to the wounded. Some arrow wounds, some bruises and broken bones. Some bite wounds. A few injuries were more grievous; limbs or extremities severed by turned-heretics's fangs, or deeper slash wounds from blades that didn't want to stop bleeding. But as the knight took control, there did seem to be a palpable shift in the air as newfound resolve- and assertions of the lack of heretics- redoubled their efforts. One of the true village elders, and aged Elezen woman that was near the height of a hyur with how hunched over her cane she was, beckoned Elias inside. "Come in, come in! The air is too cold for these old bones." An almost jovial irreverence born of age and experience, but Elias could see in the haggard look in her eye that she was just doing her best to assuage the others by not succumbing to stress herself. If he entered, she'd move to close the door after him and Gestalt- if Gestalt followed first- but would pause as she saw the white-clad dragoon? Who, for her part, was still side-eyeing Gestalt beneath the helmet and sidling away from the bird. The older woman looked at her, and then harumphed and beckoned her in as well when it seemed like the dragon rider might hesitate. "I said come in; both of you!" and apparently the kindly grumpy voice of a grandmother was enough to draw the Rider's attention away and she dipped her head in gratitude before stepping inside. At this point, if the retinue followed in full, the woman *did* finally close the door. But once again eyes turned towards the door. This time, to Elicia. One of the injured villagers, being tended to by her husband, blanched, "W-wait, isn't that the heretic that was on a dragon?" she started, panic creeping into her voice. One of the village children stared at her, somewhere between scared and awestruck, "I saw it scare away the other dragons!" she whispered to one of the older boys- maybe a brother? The dragon rider, for her part, froze awkwardly in the closed doorway and opened her mouth to speak, but failed to find words immediately.

[21:55] Ser Elias de Spencer tenses as the Rider is recognized swiftly- her whirlwind entrance on the back of the wyvern having apparently still drawn plenty of attention in the chaos of the skirmish. For survivors who had only just been attacked and lost so many of their loved ones, tired hearts served as kindling to a flame and panic spread just as quickly. The mutterings and disquiet almost immediately started to fill the air, and Elias can feel his expression pinch behind the obscurity of his visor as a decision is forced to be made quickly. "That is certainly an unusual way to greet one whose blade is stained with the blood of those who sought to harm you." Almost as water over embers, the authoritative projection cuts across the whispers and murmurs, diminishing most into distrustful murmurs. When the sounds of discord still continue, so, too, does the Temple Knight. "'The enemy of my enemy is my friend', or so the adage goes. It would be remiss to slap away the hand that is offering you aid, especially now." Gestalt's reins are loosed again and the palfrey sidles forward, nearly blocking the view of the Dragon Rider from most of the room. "For those that can be moved, bring them here for treatment. For those that cannot, make those people known and we will come to you to provide aid." Directions are given again with the same tone of command, as though there hadn't just been open questioning of the Rider in white.

[22:02] Elicia of the Alabaster Flame | The villagers, certainly disquieted but equally haggard and tired- if frightened- were easily either cowed or convinced by the assertiveness of the knight. Nods and murmurs filled the air still, but more pressing matters needed to be attended to. Back to checking over the wounded, and talking quietly amongst themselves. The little girl that had pointed out Elicia scaring away the dragonets simply stared at the pair for a while- a dragon rider and a temple knight- and Elias might recognize the look of an awestruck child who had just seen heroes step out of a

story. But she was quickly dragged away by her brother to help bring water. Elicia folded her arms and then turned back to Elias, staring at him from beneath the visor for a short time. "... Thank you." She said quietly, before turning back to the others. Her momentary hesitation seemed dispelled, and she unfolded her arms as she stepped forwards, "I'm going to see to the ones that need aid more urgently." and Elias watched as she moved to one pair of villagers and crouched beside them, talking in hushed tones and then looking at the injured ones wounds. A blade wound that had nearly bled through the bandage, but likely- hopefully- wouldn't prove fatal.

[22:27] Ser Elias de Spencer can't bring himself to look at her or the starstruck child as gratitude is uttered, the sour taste of pragmatism making the choice less honorable than one might have been led to believe. Once thought to be depersonalizing and needlessly obscuring, he finds himself immensely grateful for the featureless faceplate that kept the vast majority of his expression hidden behind cold steel. The moral dilemma is set aside for the moment as two of the boys he'd designated for assistance help a man hobble over, dark trousers stained darker down one leg and a gash of red along that same thigh making what ailed him obvious. The tri-tone whistle is repeated once more as gauntleted hand briefly pats armored beak before pointing to the man, and Gestalt 'kwehs' in a cheery tone before stretching high and fluttering dark blue wings. It is only seconds later before Choco-Cure is cast upon the man, and the mask of pain upon his face recedes as the wound stops bleeding. "Is there a healer in the village? He would still fare better with catgut stitches." The suggestion is made quietly to one of the boys and the young Elezen nods. "Aye, her." The grandmotherly woman who'd ordered the pair inside is pointed out again, and he gestures the man to be taken to her.

[22:37] Elicia of the Alabaster Flame had set about quietly unwrapping the hasty bandage, careful to not pull on the wound too much, until she had exposed it to the air that hadn't quite warmed again from having the door open. She held a hand out, and the familiar blue-white glow of meager curative magics glimmered at her hand, flickering like stardust. She smiled at the villager while she worked, and Elias might hear the quiet reassurance she offered as the wound slowly knit shut. The man that Gestalt had choco-cured was lead over to the grandmotherly woman, and she beckoned for them to follow to a place where she might sit, and called over the young girl to go fetch her healing supplies. In another part of the room, a pair of men- elezen and hyur- had set up a ring of loose brick and thrown some scrap wood and ruined furniture into it, and another had clambered up on an old shelf to toss open some small lattice vents along the top of the building's walls- enough that the men could start a fire and start filling the warehouse with *some* warmth, without smoking everyone out. As the Dragon Rider finished her healing, she stood and with a nod turned to find another person in need of more dire healing. The flowing garments atop her armor- the scarf and skirt seeming to have replaced the armored tassets and vicious spikes of contemporary dragoon armor- whirled around her as she turned. It was an almost inspiring sight- a village beset by villains coming together in a time of trouble to support one another, everyone working with resolved determination... if one could ignore the proverbial dragon in the room of- at least by not-too-long-ago standards- a heretic in their midst.

[23:15] Ser Elias de Spencer guides Gestalt again and again to heal those brought forward, either dismissing them to rest again or having them wait patiently for further treatment from the Village Healer. As some regain enough energy to assist in aiding others, the work ever so slightly gets easier, but not all who are brought forth are able to walk away on their own again, and time seems to fly by quickly as the injured are tended to. Before he knows it, the fire in the corner has drawn enough close that someone has fetched a pot and another child sent to grab ingredients, and something that smells vaguely like soup bubbles away over the flames. The gnawing sensation of hunger rears its head as the scent starts to fill the room, but gets ignored as Elias slips a woman's arm over his shoulders to help one of the boys lift her to be brought to the tiring palfrey. A low whistle meets both villagers and the knight as they approach Gestalt, and armored beak bunts gently against visor as the three reach him. Gauntleted fingers gently rub beneath ebony keratin

before patting the blue column of neck. "I know boy. You're doing so well. Just one more? This will be the last one, Ges, I promise." Low, soothing murmurs are offered to the chocobo before feathers ruffle with far less energy than in the beginning, and wispy green aether collides with the supported woman. Her head bobs slightly as the wound on her scalp closes, but there is little change otherwise. Looking between the woman and his chocobo, Elias jerks his chin toward the Village Healer to motion to the boy to set the slightly-less-injured woman in the small queue to be treated with more natural remedies.

[23:30] Elicia of the Alabaster Flame herself had been moving between those who couldn't even make their way to the knight and palfrey, and even she was taking a moment to breathe by the fire to keep warm. A scowl settled on her face as her stomach rumbled at the scent of cooking food, and she turned away. Things had been peaceful; quiet. She had been moving back towards Elias and the (dreaded) Chocobo, mouth opening as if to speak only to be interrupted by the sound of heavy wingbeats outside, and something hitting the ground outside. A dragon landing, and without a roar to herald its arrival. The Rider dodged by Elias to move to the door, not yet opening it- even if she was seemingly unbothered, the palpable tension that immediately settled in the building was obvious- and now with everyone far more worn and weary than they'd been before. She turned her head up to call out the window, "Ohsk in ehm." ["Speak your name"] and a moment later the rumble of a deep voiced dragon responding- a voice that Elias was likely slowly at least recognizing from the day, "An ehm Fimbulvetr, Kin y Hraesvelgr." and the rider paused, sighed, and... chuckled and shook her head. Exasperated, relieved, and amused in equal measure. She held a hand to the group that watched her, and then said "Be at peace; It is only my companion returning. He was hunting for any heretic stragglers."

[00:03] Ser Elias de Spencer tenses as the wing beats are heard outside, a long-ingrained response to danger not so easily removed from a single incident of a less-hostile encounter or even the "protection" of the accords. The only being in the room that does not seem to tense at the wyvern's return watches her pass by with tired eyes, the wave of her helm's plume not even drawing the same interest now that the palfrey has less energy. It is only when words are exchanged that Elias stops reaching for his bow, the weapon having been propped against a wall as activity demanded he surrender it for the time being. 'Kin y Hraesvelgr' makes his ears practically twitch with recognition, and there is a flicker of understanding and unfortunate parallels again drawn between the Rider and the former Ysayle. Looking to the others in the room that once again watched the woman with wary eyes, he voices the question that the room silently begged. "And the results of his hunt?"

[00:09] Elicia of the Alabaster Flame was quiet for a time at the question, before shrugging and shaking her head. "I'll go talk to him." She said, but sighed- mostly tiredness, from bells of expending energy with magic she wasn't nearly as comfortable with as she wished she was in this moment. "But if he's back and not calling to me, then either he found nothing or has dealt with them." she turned to the room and offered a tired smile and a hand gesture to bid for calm. "Regardless, there is nothing to worry about. You are safe, and Fimbulvetr will watch the village while you rest and eat and recover." And with that she moved to step outside if not otherwise stopped or followed. In the time that the door was open, the white Wyvern could be seen standing outside, leaned forward onto his wings like forelegs and watching the Rider as she left, and briefly turning glowing blue eyes inwards as he studied the people inside- and then lowered his head respectfully. And then the door was closed behind her, and Elias might be able to hear the footsteps down the wooden stairs and then the crunch of footfalls in snow.

[00:58] Ser Elias de Spencer can practically feel the tension in the room both drop and change as the armored woman leaves, a scant few people outright sighing in open relief when she is out of earshot. Not that the Temple Knight can blame the reaction, but the blend of exhaustion, curiosity, and tension make for a volatile blend that has him itching to do more than continue to move tired

and injured bodies back and forth. Idly patting the chocobo on the neck to soothe the bird — or (more likely) himself — it is only when one of the boys makes a move to follow through the door that he raises a hand to silently stop the other Elezen, gesturing for him to return to helping distribute soup to those that still waited. There is a pause before he continues toward the door, and a slight detour is made to retrieve his bow and shoulder it once more for personal peace of mind. The slice of cold that greets him is mitigated only by the warmth still pocketed by his armor, but the fresh air is a surprising relief after being nose-blind to the smell of unwashed and injured bodies in an enclosed space. Careful steps follow out the door as he also closes it behind him, treading slowly down the stairs and halting at their base. There was little need to approach the wyvern any closer, and less reason to have the woman continue to speak the Dragon's tongue in front of still-skittish villagers to report anything back. Silently, he waits for any communication on those that attacked the village, using the brisk winds of the Highlands to try and help shock a bit of energy back into himself if the report brought ill news.

[01:09] Elicia of the Alabaster Flame | When he stepped outside, he was met with the sight of the woman standing before the Wyvern, his head lowered and held between her two hands. Her own helmeted head rested against his, shoulders slumped, in the way one might stand against a friend for support. She was breathing heavy, and it was obvious in those moments that she was far, far more tired than she'd let on. She was speaking to him- not a whisper, just quiet from fatigue and barely audible above the cold. But as Elias emerged, she stood back upright as if doing her best to hide that selfsame fatigue. She turned her head to him, and then turned to face him fully. "Ser Knight." She said, Fimbulvetr as well shaking out his neck and then rising to look at Elias from over top of the Rider's head. "The heretics are no more." she said, "Their leader was felled in the assault, and Fimbulvetr has dealt with the stragglers. The villagers can rest easy, and focus on recovery." she sighed, though, and shook her head. She was quiet for a time, and then continued. "There... was an artefact. Did you reclaim it? Fimbulvetr found no trace of it."

[01:36] Ser Elias de Spencer | The brief moment of vulnerability is ignored, the gesture one he too-often found himself in when he thought himself alone with Ges, and the pang of empathy is shoved down for chilly formality. Her question earns a frown that's hidden by his helm, the inquiry specific and strange. "Only bodies and cyclical stories." He shakes his head, glancing over his shoulder at the door — too close to raise his voice and not be heard by those inside just past the thin wood and open slats in the windows. Even now as he glances, a couple of smaller heads can be seen ducking back into hiding behind the stone wall. The long stare given to the nosy village boys would have sent them scurrying away — if they could see the expression on his face. As-is, however, it is another moment of silent daggers being glared ineffectively before he takes another handful of steps farther from the storage house. "What artefact." Had he been able to speak louder, the question would sound less like a demand for information, but thin patience and spent gentility lead to a much coarser delivery.

[01:43] Elicia of the Alabaster Flame folded her arms, consternation on the visible part of her face as she frowned. "I'm not certain what it does... exactly." She admitted, "But it was a small statuette, stolen from Zenith a short while passed." she shifted her weight, shaking out hands threatening to numb in the cold. Fimbulvetr shifted, mostly to turn and face the pair fully as he leaned forward on his wings. Elias might be able to tell that he was clearly paying attention and listening, but the large dragon had made no attempt to communicate save in his own tongue with the Rider that accompanied him. "Once it was suffused with Nidhogg's aether; his rage. But much of it has faded." she continued, gesturing idly with a hand as she spoke almost as if just trying to stay moving. She spoke as soft as he, aware of either their potential youthful eavesdroppers or just the potential of such a thing. "Once able to drive dragons to a frenzy, now... it was only strong enough to evoke the fervor in the youngest of the dragonets. Fimbulvetr's roar freed them from its thrall; the ones from earlier. I've been tracking this group to try to recover it."

[20:15] Ser Elias de Spencer shakes his head again, glancing toward the middle of the village where the other Temple Knight and the Inquisitor had both fallen. "I remember no such idol, nor of something imbued with such taint. If that is what called the heretics here, then perhaps one of the fallen have it on their person." He cranes his neck to find any of the remains of one of the heretics, but turns back to her with an obscured frown that can at least be heard in his voice. "If you've been tracking them, then surely you realized that they might attack one of the nearby villages — if not for supplies, then for sport." There is a subtle note of accusation in his insinuation; if she was aware of the harriers' movements, why not send word of warning ahead?

[20:31] Elicia of the Alabaster Flame frowned at the mention of the idol still being unaccounted for, crossing her arms again and turning towards the carnage. It was obvious from the slight shifts of her helmet that she was looking at the fallen Knight and Inquisitor. Though the insinuation was met with another shift of her gaze; downcast with a sorrowful- perhaps guilty?- frown. She shook her head. "... By the time Fimbulvetr and I had returned to Zenith, the artefact had been gone. It wasn't until the dragonets went missing that anything was even thought to be awry." she sighed and her shoulders slumped, shaking her head, "By the time we discovered their meeting place, they'd already consumed the dragon's blood and set forth to the village."

[20:49] Ser Elias de Spencer crosses his arms, studying the woman through the thin field of view provided by his helm. Her argument is reasonable, but still sounds inexcusably thin to his ears. Eyes briefly flick to the presently-silent wyvern that seems to be listening, and he can't discern whether its silence is a bane or boon. "And a group that size — on foot, no less — not only escaped your notice but outran you as well..?" There is more doubt in his words, and he can feel the exhaustion lend to annoyance. "They've been nearby for days, and still managed to outpace you? Is your dragon slower than a cockerel learning to fly? Or perhaps you empathize with murderers and traitors."

[21:10] Elicia of the Alabaster Flame | the Wyvern watched, and lowered his head to turn to Elicia. He snorted softly, and rumbled a deep "Nehskdyhr nell gahr." ["The elezen's hatred does not change."] It didn't sound... accusatory? Or angry. It was saddened, perhaps. Resigned. The rider lifted a hand and shook her head, responding with the tongue of dragons again, "N ais in; Loshk ehs sohr in." ["He is right; he hears only an empty apology."] She then drew a quiet breath and continued, though her scowl deepened despite her attempt to control her expression at the accusation of sympathizing, distaste clear even on what little was visible of her features. "The dragonets only went missing some few evenings past, from Anyx Trine." She started, expression settling again, "We only learned of it upon our arrival, and from there were directed to Zenith." She folded her arms again, "I hold no sympathy for those who would tarnish our newfound peace, pray think not otherwise." She turned to look towards the carnage again, frowning deeply as sadness crept across her visible visage. "You... have my sincerest regret that we were not faster, nor learned of this sooner."

[21:57] Ser Elias de Spencer tenses at the rumble of the foreign tongue that makes his very bones feel strange to simply hear it, and ever so slightly his hand creeps toward his bow. When neither Rider nor Wyvern seem to be plotting something — and sound.. put off? — his posture relaxes only fractionally, but the tension of readiness remains. The Rider's lamentations, however, are nearly met with a scoff. "Offer your regrets to those who need or want them." He gestures at the bodies that still lay in the snow, the cold of Coerthan winds having taken any last vestiges of warmth far from them already. "To those that died needlessly to violence they've had no hand in. These are farmers and shepherds and simple village folk; not future knights nor deacons nor lordlings declaring laws!" His voice has slowly gotten louder as his words continued, and he stops himself short of yelling, his hand balling into a fist and returning to his side as he visibly reins in his anger. The Temple Knight shakes his head, as though disappointed, and then the shake gets bigger as he looks away from her — an overwhelming distaste for the entire situation expressed silently. The need to move and

do something to get his mind off of the day's tragedy becomes too much to remain still, and he stalks back toward the fallen, not willing to expose more of his feelings to the stranger and her oddly tamed dragon. The fellow Temple Knight is found first, ankles carefully grabbed and the man dragged onto his back, arms rotated and shoved above his head as limbs already start to stiffen. What's left of the Inquisitor gets similar treatment, though with perhaps a little less gentleness.

[22:13] Elicia of the Alabaster Flame quieted in stark juxtaposition to Elias' only rising emotions. The frowned deepened as she looked across the village- and the bodies chilled in the snow. She took a step away and stumbled, hand reaching out to brace against Fimbulvetr's shoulders. She took a moment to catch her breath, having not realized how much simply standing in the cold had sapped the little of her remaining strength. A deep inhale saw her rising again and she set about moving towards the nearest of the villager's bodies. A tear streaked down her cheek, visible only barely where light glinted wrong off exposed skin; 'the war was supposed to be over'. But the temple knight was right, at least in so far as the little her regrets mattered to those laying cold in the snow, or families torn apart by death and tragedy. She wasn't nearly as strong as he, and moving the bodies was... difficult. But they deserved better than being strewn throughout the streets and buried in snow. She struggled, but eventually got them to a spot hidden from snow beneath stone balcony. An odd choice, maybe, but as she lay them down respectfully and adjusted the freezing body carefully into a less gruesome pose, she spoke aloud- to Elias or the air or perhaps her own companion, who had taken to dispelling snow from where it had fallen over bodies with his wings, "The families will likely want to see to their burials; with a priest who can actually offer them final rites."

[23:04] Ser Elias de Spencer found it far easier to detach and settle his mind into the physical task, righting a body and then dragging it carefully to the half-shelter of the balcony. The Temple Knight and Inquisitor get left in their odd poses as he methodically drags form after form to the stone shelter, more modest postures given to the fallen villagers that he could still recognize. Of the heretics he could find, those still in an Elezen form are left to lay face-down, no care given for the attackers who tried to pillage a farm village on the far edges of Coerthas. "Bury? You have the tools to pierce this ground so deeply? No. They will be burned." Words are breathlessly huffed out as he continues to work, ignoring the fatigue and hunger and screams of exhaustion from his body. "A priest will need to be informed. Tithe must needs be gathered before word is sent. If you find anything that shines, put it in a pile — they will need it." There is only a touch of annoyance left in his voice as his words come out more like a checklist and less like conversational offerings. The chill of sweat that's being cooled far too quickly starts to creep along his neck and face, the wind finding the crevices in his armor and digging icy fingers into the spaces. "A pyre will need to be built. They'll need wood. Anything flammable and dry." He eyes the damaged parts of the walls and fences around the village, several areas repairable but some of them splintered beyond saving. A mental note is made to repurpose some of the wooden debris, but perhaps that might get delegated to some of the younger members of the village. He staggers upright from where he'd dragged the body of one man who'd lost his life fighting desperately for his home, and breathes hard behind his helm. "Pithy words from a deacon-in-training who knows little of their world and less of their loss.. Would that they could save their coin and put it toward the things they *need* here and not—..." Elias stops himself again, too-honest feelings sneaking out unbidden. He shakes his head again and trudges back to the body of the Temple Knight, briefly searching pockets and pouches for something before pulling a small sack free and tossing it slightly aside where it falls with an obvious clink of metal pieces inside. The inquisitor's body is searched next — not one, but two sacks pulled from the remains, and something weighty covered in cloth removed from a larger pouch. Straightening with a small amount of difficulty, the cloth is removed and the statuette revealed. Flinching at the sight of it, the memory finally comes forth— the man had said he'd found something damning only a handful of moments before things all went to shit.

[23:25] Elicia of the Alabaster Flame remained quiet at the retort, working just as diligently as he; though not near so quick. Despite her armor, she was no knight and no dragoon. The task was a greater effort for the slender woman, but she worked with little complaint as puffs of mist were huffed from bare lips beneath the ancient armet's visor. Fimbulvetr worked just as diligently in his own ways- keeping snow from the bodies and hefting the aevis corpses to deposit beyond the walls in an irreverent pile; they'd need to be dealt with later, but for now keeping them out of sight was ideal. And out of the way. In one such pass as he landed back within the village and the rider was jogging out to meet him from laying another body in the shade, she paused and panted quietly as she gestured for the Wyvern to join her. He redirected course and settled down on the ground before the elezen, lurching forward to lower his head to her and rest on his wings like forelimbs again. She beckoned for him again, breathing a strained, "My saddlebag" before she'd fully caught her breath. The dragon obliged and turned to offer it to her, and she rummaged through it to find... something? Father would forgive her for this, probably. Truthfully, he probably wouldn't ask when she needed more. Out of the saddlebag was pulled a drab coinpurse, but being as full as it was might have been a surprise. Then again, it wasn't as though she weren't clad in pristine white armor. Honestly, the rider was nothing but one mystery after another, as vexing as she might be infuriating sometimes. Next she pulled out a small dagger, ornate in the way one might make a practical side-arm for one above their station; not necessarily ornamental and impractical, but certainly a demonstration of skill. And then jogged back to the bodies and pierced the coinpurse to the wall with the knife, blade wedged into a spot between two bricks where the grout was carved away by weather and time. "It should pay the tithe- let them keep their coin for fix-" she trailed off and slowed to a standstill as she saw what Elias had recovered. "That, Ser Knight," she said, her voice softened in a clear attempt to not enflame him more, "Is the idol that was taken from Zenith."

[23:59] Ser Elias de Spencer can find no words — of shock, of explanation, of outrage, of dismay — none at all. The relic is small but distinctly Dravanian, the idol very clearly draconic in shape and inexplicable aura. His fingers tighten around it, the cold ever so subtly becoming less of a hinderance as fire aether starts to warm the air nearest to him. The ice and snow that had slowly been gathering on the cold curves of his armor turn clear as heat warms them just enough to melt where it had stuck and loosen from his person to either drip or fall free. The fact of this is missed by the man himself as he continues to stare at the idol, thoughts kept silent behind clenched teeth and flattened lips. With an almost exaggerated slowness, he turns toward her, steps stiff with suppressed emotions as he approaches. That same exaggerated slowness is used to extend his hand and hold the little idol flat in his palm, as though keeping it well secured might only spark a more drastic reaction from him. Silence continues to meet her as he wordlessly offers the damning object, more than willing to get the accursed thing out of his hands and no longer tied to either the Inquisitor or the village.

[00:08] Elicia of the Alabaster Flame watched him with silent tension, perhaps noticing the way the snow melted and the air heated, perhaps not. She said nothing as she turned her masked gaze from idol to knight and back, until it was extended to her. She breathed a soft sigh of a breath she hadn't realized she'd been holding, and then reached out to take the relic. She closed her fist around the small object, a draconic idol barely bigger than her hand. Distaste was clear in the frown she wore as she looked down at it, though for what wasn't clear. So much death at the hands of zealots, and this the lure of their unwitting allies. She shook her head ruefully and then stepped over to Fimbulvetr to tuck the statuette away in one of the saddlebags, where she could return it to Zenith and- hopefully- beseech one of the other dragons to purge what lingered of Nidhogg's Rage. Well... one dragon in particular, but that would likely require Fimbulvetr's own intercession. "... Thank you." She said over her shoulder as she closed the saddlebag. She turned back to Elias and then looked back to the bodies, and the village. Heretics still lay in the street, snow threatening to bury bodies beneath the mist. The Aevises had been collected and deposited beyond the walls for easy disposal. The wood and scrap for a pyre had been piled by the white wyvern. The bodies of

the dead had been laid for temporary rest, with the rider's coinpurse waiting to be taken in tithe. "I... should likely depart now. I imagine the villagers will be glad to be rid of me, and the idol must needs be returned to Zenith." she took a deep breath and then shook her head, "I would offer to return to dispose of the Aevises, but I imagine they would be glad to see the last of any dragon for a while."

[00:34] Ser Elias de Spencer only nods once in response to her thanks, not looking at her but still at the damnable idol that had apparently helped lead the heretics right to the village. As it is tucked away, his gaze averts, glare aimed elsewhere and not at the woman who had — even if a tad belatedly — done more than one might expect a complete stranger to do for a village with which they certainly had no apparent ties, nor any obligation to assist. Her words of departure are simply met with another nod, as though he doesn't trust his own voice not to betray exactly how he feels in that moment. Her comment about the villagers not wanting to see a dragon for a while earns her a quiet scoff, but nothing else verbalized. It is a moment before he can get his feet to move, but hands are busied again to keep from staying still too long, and the pair he'd entered the village with still needed to be readied for the trek home the next day. Much to do, too little time, and stopping for too long might let the paralyzing thoughts creep back in.

[00:48] Elicia of the Alabaster Flame watched him a moment longer, and then turned without another word to brace against the saddle on Fimbulvetr's back. The Dragon lowered his head to make it easier on her, and with one foot in the stirrup she heaved herself over the dragon's shoulders. A practiced motion made more difficult by too much fatigue. She slumped in the saddle and took the reins in one hand, patting his neck affectionately with the other. The dragon turned to look at her, concern obvious in the glowing eyes that fixed on her. But she shook her head, and silently- at least, as silently as a large wyvern's wing beats were- lurched forward and launched into the sky like a missile. The snow was kicked up into a cloud that trailed for a short distance and then dispersed, white wyvern and white rider disappearing into the mist and night as quickly as they'd arrived. And then Elias was alone, save the damnable snowfall that had started again. At least until the door to the storehouse opened and a younger man stepped out- barely more than a boy, awkward in his youthful features and gangly limbs he hadn't yet grown fully into. He was holding two bowls of stew, one in each hand. Though he paused when he saw the temple knight by himself, "... Is she gone, Ser Elias?" he asked, his voice quiet as if uncertain if the rider was listening. But his tone- and expression seemed conflicted; as if he didn't know if he was sad for the departure of their eleventh hour defender or happy to be rid of the rider and dragon both. He looked down at the ground before his feet, brow furrowing, and carefully not looking at the bodies. "We... prepared you both some food. But I suppose you'll be the only one taking it? The fire is warm, if you want to come rest."

[01:03] Ser Elias de Spencer turns to the boy after wordlessly watching both wyvern and Rider depart, fingers reaching up to unbuckle his helm from his head. A tired but forced smile meets the boy as the helmet is removed and tucked under his arm, but it dims as he answers. "I will, and I do. Eat with me? Don't let that go to waste, and don't let me think you lot are avoiding me after all this." The jest is light as he affably pats the boy's shoulder and takes a bowl. As they pass it by, the dagger and coinpurse are subtly yanked from the wall, and the blade is tucked out of sight. At the jingle of coins, a curious head turns, and is met with a wink and a finger pressed to lips in performative secrecy. "Let's surprise them, shall we?" He nods toward the door to encourage the boy to lead them back inside, and whispers of speculation turn into soft exclamations of astonishment as the door closes behind the Temple Knight.