

“What exactly did you do to my armor?”

Lio wasn't exactly enthused by the strange etchings made at various points on the armor of his station. As a knight he was expected to look the part even if he didn't exactly fit as the most devout of holy warriors. The Father was certainly a being that existed somewhere, on some plane of reality, but that reality wasn't the one Lio lived on. It wasn't the reality the people of Dalmasca—*his* people—died on daily under the oppressive hand of the Garlean Empire. So he left the prayers to the holymen who practiced in secret, the very same ones who had ordained him one of their vaunted Knights Templar.

His appearance in that sense was all he had. Lio couldn't stand out too much without drawing Imperial ire, so his armor was simple. Bronze plate with fur trimmings along the shoulders. It made him look more like a mercenary or a wanderer to outsiders, but to his fellow Dalmascans here in Rabanastre? They would know. Outside of the Garlean patrols there were few who wore proper armor and the Church, as hidden as it had to stay for now with the assistance of groups like Lente's Tears, was very good at spreading the word among the smallfolk who they could look up to.

The knights couldn't always wear their armor though. Clandestine work called for them to don more simple attire to avoid being identified clearly. Such was the nature of resisting from the shadows. The day would come where Rabanastre would rise up openly, but it was not yet that time.

And so this was one of those days. Returning from his work Lio found the Church's armorer and smith, a Bangaa named Chita, with his gear laid out before him and looking rather proud of his work. “I got word I was to provide you with an advantage, so I have done that.”

Lio looked unconvinced, “By vandalizing my armor?”

“And your sword if you would allow me to borrow it for the night.”

That made the knight blink. “I don't believe I follow.”

Chita gave a raspy laugh, “I suspected they didn't tell you then. You do know the Templar are meant to be conduits of magicks most holy, yes?”

“Fairy tales.” Lio responded derisively. “They're meant to inspire hope in the people with such tales of magickal swordsman who wielded the Light of Kiltia as their own sword and shield. The Zodiac Braves of old.”

The old bangaa had a mischievous glint in his eye. There was something he wasn't saying, though the look he received from Lio made it clear he wasn't going to be keeping those secrets long. “All true except for the part about them being just stories. The clergy has holy books that detail the lives of these swordsmen and women and the abilities they could attain. While we

have been unable to discern the means by which they could call on Kiltia's Light, we found...incantations."

"Incantations?"

Chita nodded, "On their own they do nothing, but they were said to be key to the swordspells the holy knights of old could use. We made no progress for years on figuring those out."

"Which I suppose is why you are now privy to the secrets of the clergy. They found a way." Lio surmised.

"Correct." With a deep breath Chita finally got to the point, "Another tome was discovered in recent years, it took some time to decipher and it was kept very quiet but we learned there was another way of drawing on those swordspells. Ancient runes that can draw aether on command. It doesn't make you a spellcaster in truth, but you'll be pretty damned close." He gestured to Lio's armor, "We've been applying these runes to the armor and weapons of our chosen knights slowly and carefully. Father help us if even one was discovered and this knowledge was taken by the Imperial Army." A sigh and then, "Here...here let me help you get it on and we'll give it a test."

Several dubious minutes later, Lio was geared up and ready to see what this achieved. "Nothing feels any different, Chita. Are you certain you did this right?"

Chita whacked him gently with the handle of his smithing hammer on the arm causing no damage or pain but making an obvious metallic clang as it banged against his armor. "It's dormant until you call on it, lackwit. We don't need a bunch of swordslingers out here lighting up Imperial sensors with active magicks." He pulled out a slip of parchment and showed it to Lio, "Here. Memorize this, then draw your sword and say it aloud."

The parchment held a single sentence that seemed to be naught but gibberish to Lio, but it was written in Dalmascan so it had to be important. They didn't typically write in Dalmascan these days unless it was meant to be kept hidden from their enemy. Drawing his sword Lio favored Chita with one last doubting gaze before proceeding...

"Power thrumming in skies above..." Even as he said the first half of the words he felt something change in the air close to him, a sort of charged energy from above as if he could feel a levinstike coming despite being inside a cave. He continued without so much as a beat skipped, "...as refulgent blade now strike!"

A sudden urge made him lift his blade and a strike of lightning sure enough came from as if some unseen cloud to make contact with the broadsword he carried. Despite the conductivity of the metals he wore, he wasn't zapped by the spellcraft, instead something in his armor held it in place and he looked helplessly at Chita who cackled madly, "Release it you idiot!"

Bringing his sword down as if striking an enemy the levin stored in the blade suddenly lashed forward and dissipated a short distance away. Lio simply stood, shocked with every pun intended to himself in that conscious thought when he realized it. Chita was simply grinning now, that pride in his work now twofold. "You don't have to go shouting the incantation, you can say it at any volume and it'll do. I have a number more here for you to spend the night memorizing. And while you do that...I'll work on your sword. That way you don't always need to be wearing the armor to call on it."

Still stunned, Lio simply accepted a larger bit of parchment and handed off his sword to his smithy friend. Now he was a Templar in truth...and where now would this path lead him he wondered as he wandered back to his bedroll to study.