

Act 1: As Without, So Within

b) Signs and Sigils (Saturday, July 7th, 2018, 7pm EST)

A leveplate reads:

Several Wood Wailers have reported suspicious cloaked individuals roaming in the Shroud. With the spreading disease, we can't afford to not look into something like this. I'd like a team of adventurers to help track down this group.

-Jacques Delacroix

1. Khenā Ridah
 2. Anstarra Silverrain
 3. Renaea Algiernis
 4. Kasado Misado
-

(Artoria Aldsan) The party, given their leve set out to the suggested location through the forest. As they head deeper into the woods however, the trees seem to grow twisted, the underbrush diseased. There are few animals-- not even many bugs, and even those vanish as the party presses deeper into the woods.

Kasado Misado scrunches up his nose as they move onwards and inwards.

Anstarra Silverrain looks around, tail slowly swishing this way and that as she takes in the unpleasant sight of the corrupted undergrowth. She finds herself wishing she'd put on a bit more clothes in some places.. though she grins as she sees Rena's familiar form, and even Kasado's diminutive one.

Renaea Algiernis walks carefully, with a measured step as she slips further into the woods. The redhead looks concerned, the wonders and risks of the Shroud clearly made clear to her. However, as she spies Kasadao, she gives the lalafell a small nod... Before her eyes fall on Anstarra. A surprised sound slips from the Ishgardian's face, and her eyes go wide. "Kitten? I mean... An?"

Anstarra Silverrain: "Mmm.. heya~" She grins at Rena. Her jacket hangs mostly open, clinging to her body in a form-fitting manner, and mostly exposing it. "Fancy meeting you in this neck of the woods."

Renaea Algiernis tries very hard not to stare, mostly failing, though her eyes go over to the undergrowth a moment later. "I... W-well... Artoria is watching the children for now. And I still have my duties as a Free Paladin after all."

Anstarra Silverain 's grin brightens. "Oh, she's home? I oughta visit you guys after this.." She looks around, her smile flagging. "Assuming nothing too awful happens. It's an ugly patch of forest, isn't it..?"

Kasado Misado tilts his head, giving each of them a small nod. He was glad to see them, truly, for they were accomplished fighters and people he could hide behind. "I wonder if we'll encounter more sick beasts... feels different here though... deader..." He shrugs.

Anstarra Silverain 's smile returns as she looks at Kasado again. "It's good to see YOU again.. and if there's anything nasty, well. Hide behind Rena."

Renaea Algiernis frowns and nods at Kasado's assessment. "Indeed... It worries me. We should keep on our guard. Let me take the front line if combat breaks out." She looks to An a moment later, and momentarily smiles. "If she's not asleep, that might be possible. She's been extremely busy with her own work... We've hardly had time to sit down and talk with each other."

Renaea Algiernis nods. "As she says. This armor isn't just for show."

Renaea Algiernis: "I'm not much for putting holes in the enemy, but I'll make sure they don't hurt you."

Anstarra Silverain swishes her tail, nodding. "Mmh. I'm good at the whole, hole, thing. In the meantime.. let's see if we can find these mysterious figures.."

Renaea Algiernis mumbles something under her breath. It sounds suspiciously like 'you certainly are good with holes'. But there's no way such a pure and virtuous paladin would actually say anything like that. She trudges forward, moving to force her way through the underbrush, thankful for her armor.

Kasado Misado nods and follows along.

Anstarra Silverain giggles, and makes her way after Rena. A slight flush in her cheeks, now that no one's looking. Her tail surreptitiously whisks toward Kasado as she moves, teasing his cheeks if he comes in reach. Whether she's actually capable of getting excited in these sorts of environs, or just does so to lighten her own mood, is a question with no simple answer...

(Artoria Aldsan) As the party wends their way through the woods, they come across a clearing. Before stepping out however, they manage to notice a pair of voices. They're too far away to make out what's being said, but they can spot a pair of cloaked figures down in curve in the land, crouched over something.

Renaea Algiernis crouches a moment later, and looks to Kasado, giving the lalafell a small nod as she gestures forwards. "Can you get a look?" She asks quietly.

Anstarra Silverain: "Heeere we go..." She lowers herself down, trying to be discreet.. while knowing from experience that Kasado will do a much better job of it.

Renaea Algiernis lets the others be discreet. She chooses to be just plain away, due to her armor.

Kasado Misado nods.

Kasado Misado disappears into the underbrush, sneaking around an forward, steps practiced thousands of times, moving in on the figures ahead.

Anstarra Silverain remains patiently back, waiting.. grinning a bit over her shoulder at Rena, tail flicking out to wrap about her arm. Finger to her lips, though, as she tries to hear what's happening ahead...

(Artoria Aldsan) As Kasado approaches, he can hear the two men arguing more clearly. There looks to be the corpse of an animal on the ground and one of the men is gesturing towards it as he says, "--Clearly not a pure chimera. Whatever is causing this transformation is being induced from the outside and causing a transformation."

Renaea Algiernis nods and stays quiet.

Anstarra Silverain shakes her head, breathing the words, "Can't hear anything.." Clearly fighting the urge to try to sneak closer...

(Artoria Aldsan) The other man responds, "But what could do something like that? This is clear putrefaction at work, but it isn't as though someone could transmute an entire forest and all its wildlife."

Kasado Misado stays put, waiting, watching, listening. This was good stuff.

Anstarra Silverain fidgets, hoping that Kasado was at least hearing something good...

(Artoria Aldsan) "Some sort of induced disease... no, even that wouldn't make them acidic like this. We need more samples--" The two men begin wandering further away, still talking.

Anstarra Silverain: "They're moving away.. we gotta follow..."

Anstarra Silverain starts creeping forward, trying to keep her distance...

Renaea Algiernis creeps as well, crunching through the underbrush...

Renaea Algiernis || Crunch. Crunch. Crunch.

Anstarra Silverain || Step step rustle.

(Artoria Aldsan) The two men spin around as they hear the not-so-quiet adventurers behind them. A shiny paladin particularly stands out. "Ah... damn, take the samples we have and go!" The two men begin running in the opposite direction.

Anstarra Silverain: "Moooo... ah, crap! Wait!"

Anstarra Silverain starts chasing after one of them!

Renaea Algiernis squeaks and starts to chase too. "Wait! We're not your enemies! Please, wait!" She calls out, going into a full sprint.

(Kasado Misado) Kasado makes his move from the shadows. He wasn't much of a fighter, but he was good at taking things people were trying to run off with. He closed in on the figure carrying the samples and, in a feat of luck, manages to swipe them and sink back into the underbrush without being noticed.

(Anstarra Silverain) An takes off like a champion sprinter, abetted by her already three-point-stance from sneaking forward. The trees blur by as she tears toward the suspicious fellows. She's not drawn her spear yet. "Stop! We won't hurt you!"

(Artoria Aldsan) The man looks shocked as the vials he was holding seems to almost disappear from his hand. "What the--" He looks panicked for a moment, and both men turn to fire spells off at the party before turning to run.

(Renaea Algiernis) Renaea struggles for a moment as a wave of fatigue goes through her, but she forces herself to keep going, her eyes drooping. "Ugh... Kn-knock that off..."

(Anstarra Silverain) An sweeps her leg at the fellow as he tries to flee.. but she misses a tangled root, and gasps as her leg is tangled and sends her sprawling. She growls. "Are you -kidding-me..."

Kasado Misado stows away the samples in various pockets and makes to dive at the feet of one of the figures, only to be kicked out of the way, landing sprawling on the ground. He's a small lala, not much of a roadblock.

(Anstarra Silverain) Anstarra dusts herself off, rushing after them. It's just a short dash, swift as she is.. and her body is now marked with grass, more of it exposed. She throws her hands up,

spread and unarmed. "Please. Stop and listen. We want to find out about this stuff too. We're not hunting you, we're trying to stop its spread." Whether it's her words, or her mostly-exposed body, that has his attention, it seems to be working...

Renaea Algiernis huffs as she keeps chugging along, pushing past the exhaustion of the spell as she finally catches up to the others. She was a little winded, and began to slow, more focused on getting in their way, now.

(Artoria Aldsan) The first mage stops to listen to An for a moment, but is quickly jostled as the second punches him the shoulder. "Quit staring and get a move on!" They cast another two spells-- though the first mage aims his at Renaea this time while the other aims his at An instead.

Renaea Algiernis grimaces, focusing on her internal aether. Her body forces itself to resist the magic that attacks her, but she's still /Woozy/ from it.

Renaea Algiernis pushes herself in front of the mage, her arms spread. "Wait, listen to us, please!"

(Kasado Misado) Kasado pulls himself from the ground and runs after the other figure. He doesn't attempt to stop him yet, but does get somewhat of a better look at the man. "Alchemists? Keep turning up everywhere."

(Anstarra Silverain) Anstarra takes a breath, and lets it out.. and then smiles at the fellow Renaea just blocked. She smiles, and casually pops a small blue sphere into her mouth, like a candy. "Thanks, love..." She puts her hand on Rena's shoulder, then steps past her, placing her other hand on the man's chest. Smiling in a distinctly.. predatory manner. Though this is the sort of predator maybe you want to be caught by. Light roils up softly, highlighting her intensely sexual physique, which she puts on full display as she walks him back up against a tree. "Look..." She smiles, and arches her back in, pressing against him. Her lips part for a moment, and then she grins. "Let's... talk a little. 'Kay? Or a lot..."

(Renaea Algiernis) Renaea chases after the man who's getting away, shaking off the leftover wooziness. "Please... Listen to me. We're not your enemies. We're really trying to find out what's going on out here, just like you."

(Khena Ridah) Khena Ridah rushes through the undergrowth. She's been far behind the party for some time and is only just now catching up while hidden in the long grasses and behind various trees along her way... All she can see from her spot is that one enemy has split off from the group of adventurers, and she takes a quick shot at him from her cover.

(Anstarra Silverain) An growls as the sleep spell hits her.. clawing at her, making her gasp a moment, as her aetherically-hyperactive body absorbs the spell all-too willingly. She casts a

glare, teeth bared and eyes glowing a bit, the direction of the escaping man.. but many were on him, including someone she'd not seen until now, another adventurer she thought she recognized. And so she turns back to her own prey, grinning at him.. "Where were we..."

(Kasado Misado) Kasado looks up at the man he was pursuing, and seeing him stop and face his allies and fail to pay attention to the Lalafell entirely, decides to take the opportunity to hamper him. It was a decisive strike, a hard kick to the the man's ankle, leaving it broken.

(Renaeta Algiernis) Renaeta curses under her breath at seeing that brutal blow, looking away. She'd been hoping to settle this nonviolently. But such was life.

(Artoria Aldsan) As the man falls with a cry, there's a sudden snarl from the ridge above. A beast-- a wolf at first glance, though it's skin seems to be sloughing off-- leaps down, it's teeth tearing into the man's shoulder and neck. He's still moving however, even as the wolf turns to snap at Kasado.

(Anstarra Silverain) Anstarra leans up, kissing his neck. Taking the occasion to see.. hyur? Or perhaps Garlean..? Either way, her hands slide over his body, as she grinds against him. "Are you gonna be a good boy, now..? I have a lot I'd like to.. get out of you..."

Renaeta Algiernis rushes forward as the beast appears, drawing her blade and shield, and quickly beats her blade against her shield. "Oi! You stupid, mangy beast! I'm the one you want, not them!"

(Kheena Ridah) Kheena's figure holding a shortbow is briefly visible to Anstarra, but she slips behind a bit of grass and is suddenly gone.

(Kasado Misado) Kasado, recoiling from the wolf's bite, his shoulder ragged, bleeding and gross, bolts in the direction they came from.

(Kasado Misado) "Gross wolf... gross bites..."

(Anstarra Silverain) An continues to tease the guy... and inquires. "So tell me.. what's your name..?"

(Artoria Aldsan) "Ah... It's Bartholomew." The man turns a bit red, seeming a bit bashful, and perhaps, not all that experienced.

Bartholomew..." The miqo'te is very close to the other man, and his robe is open in the front. A glimpse catches Kasado's form, possibly, tactically evading.. her tail gives a nervous little twitch, though she trusts in Rena. The tension of playing this game while battle takes place a hundred furlongs away is rather titillating.

(Renaee Algiernis) Renaee braces herself as the wolf comes flying at her, deflecting his blow off her shield, before slamming the pommel of her blade against his skull for a momentarily stunning blow. "Try again!"

(Khena Ridah) Khena pops out of the shrubbery to fire a potshot at the new target. "Another one of these things... They keep popping up, but even this far into Sylphic territory?"

(Anstarra Silverain) Teasing her captive, hands on his shoulders, up close and personal, Anstarra is almost too occupied to really hear anything going on. Between teasing questions, nibbles, and little kisses, she inquires, or more like states.. "You're.. investigating.. the corruption here.. aren't you..."

(Artoria Aldsan) "Ah... Well, something like that, I suppose..."

(Renaee Algiernis) Renaee dances about with the creature, weaving in cuts as it tries to bite her, but both are too skilled in their defense to land any real blows on each other. A long, drawn out fight ahead!

(Renaee Algiernis) Renaee cries out in sudden pain as a bite manages to get past her guard, her eyes watering. Righteous fury builds up in her as she hisses in pain. "Damn it... I have to explain that to my wife you realize!"

(Renaee Algiernis) Renaee's anger builds, the paladin taking a few quick swings towards the beast to get it to back off. Then she takes a moment, her sword flaring with aether, as the paladin readies her Sword Oath.

(Khena Ridah) Khena pops out of a bush and fires again. What she didn't know was that the wolf had seen her when she went in, and it reacts with amazing speed, hopping up from its sprawled-out state and back onto its feet to dodge her shot.

(Kasado Misado) Kasado dwelled on an internal confliction. He would run and probably guarantee his survival, or he could help the people that had helped him. After a moment he made his decision, dashing in from the shadows and striking what amounted to a glancing blow on the beast's flank. "Tch..."

(Khena Ridah) Khena curses to herself and tries to slip back into the foliage!

(Kasado Misado) Kasado, not wanting to be targeted and wanting to regain the element of surprise, disappears once more.

(Renaeta Algiernis) Renaeta takes the blow on her shield again, perfectly, as she turns the blow to the side, slashing forth. Before the creature knows it, he has a /Clipped Tail/, part of the tail gone. Nothing absolutely vital, but likely extremely painful.

(Khenia Ridah) Having moved enough from her last spot to be hidden once more, Khenia waits to find a good opening before firing again. She finds it when the wolf's tail is painfully clipped, firing an arrow while distracted by the pain.

(Artoria Aldsan) As the wolf enters its death throes, the man on the ground behind it groans. He's still alive, though he doesn't seem like he has much longer left, a pool of blood puddling beneath him.

(Renaeta Algiernis) Renaeta approaches the man, carefully shoving the body of the wolf to the side, and sheathing her blade. She looks a little woozy, but all her attention is on him. "Are you alright, sir?" She asks, and gestures for the others. "Hey, we need some help over here!"

(Kasado Misado) Kasado just... sits in the bush he's hiding in, panting as he wraps cloth around his shoulder.

(Artoria Aldsan) This man is older than the other, a bearded Elezen. However, his gaze is already growing distant. He clutches at Renaeta's arm, but soon loses the strength for even that as he passes away.

(Renaeta Algiernis) Renaeta's eyes mist over as she'd been about to tear her tabard up for bandages...

(Renaeta Algiernis) "Halone... Take this man into your halls. Bless him, and may he find peace." She intones, quietly, before shutting the man's eyes.

(Anstarra Silverain) Anstarra strokes Bartholomew's face, and gives it a little pat, and a smile.. before leaning on the tree, and touching her linkpearl. "Rena? Is everything okay?"

(Renaeta Algiernis) Renaeta's hand raises, and there's a bitter tinge to her voice. "He's dead. I couldn't get to him in time."

(Renaeta Algiernis) "Twice in as many days..." That last part seems to have been not meant for the pearl.

(Anstarra Silverain) An's relaxed and self-satisfied smile drops, and she turns away from Bartholomew. "What happened?"

(Renaeta Algiernis) "Wolf attacked us. I had to fight it off... There's an archer nearby that helped me, but by the time I got to the man, he was bleeding out. I... I don't know enough about first aid to... I wasn't fast enough."

(Renaeta Algiernis) "Had I gotten to him sooner, I probably could have saved him."

(Anstara Silverain) "Don't blame yourself, Rena.." An's voice is gentle, soft in the pearl. "Are you okay? Stay there."

(Kasado Misado) Kasado's diminutive voice crackles over the pearl. "And here I thought we wouldn't encounter more of these damned things... ugh."

(Renaeta Algiernis) "I'm fine... Just a bite. The flesh is rotting near it, though. These things are definitely what's killing the place."

(Anstara Silverain) She turns back to Bartholomew, solemn. "One of those plague wolves.. came out of nowhere. I'm afraid that.. it got the man you were with. There was nothing they could do." She offers her hand, with a grimace. "Come."

(Artoria Aldsan) The man frowns for a moment, his eyes closing before following An as he was bid.

(Anstara Silverain) She pauses to give him a hug as they go. She doesn't know how close they were, but, well. It's easier to assuage her guilt. And when they get there.. she stares at the wolf, for a moment, before going to Rena and giving her a hug as well, seeing how hurt she looks.

(Khena Ridah) Khena stays hidden for now as she starts to slip back and away.

(Renaeta Algiernis) She leans back against Anstara, and her bite wound looks... Nasty. The skin around it is black, and looks almost like it's rotting.

(Anstara Silverain) "Hells, Rena.. that looks infected. Let's see.."

(Renaeta Algiernis) She nods and pulls away the plating there, taking off the gauntlet and showing her arm.

(Anstara Silverain) An looks around, pausing a moment. "Where's Kasado? The wolf didn't.. get him, did it?"

(Renaeta Algiernis) She nods. "He got bit bad. I don't know where he went, he ran off."

Kasado Misado: "I'm here."

Kasado Misado 's shoulder is crudely bandaged with the cloth from his hands, now darkened with blood. The skin around the area blackening. "In pain, but alive."

(Anstarra Silverain) "Ah!" The miqo'te sighs in relief. "You both need treatment.. we should go see a healer." She looks back to the male she brought along, then. "This, ah, is Bartholomew." She squeezes Rena, then moves back to the man's side. "I'm sorry about your friend."

(Renaeta Algiernis) She nods and winces. "Agreed..."

Kasado Misado: "Huh, alchemists right? Why run?"

(Artoria Aldsan) He simply shakes his head, quietly kneeling to close the other man's eyes. "Well... We were sent out here to check things out, but we weren't supposed to let anyone know we were here."

(Renaeta Algiernis) Renaeta pauses as she watches, though she nods. "I understand... But why?" She asks a moment later

(Kasado Misado) "Didn't realise researching diseased animals was forbidden."

Kasado Misado looks stumped.

Anstarra Silverain grimaces. "This place is dangerous. On a normal day. With this.. plague.. running..." She looks around, then at Rena and Kasado, tail lashing in worry.

(Artoria Aldsan) The man shuts his mouth, clamming up.

(Anstarra Silverain) An moves in close to him, and strokes his fingers into his hair. "You don't have to worry about getting in trouble. We just need to know. This needs to be fixed, no matter who caused it."

(Artoria Aldsan) He stubbornly shakes his head. "No, I'm not going to talk about us but-- Look, these wolves are just symptoms, not the source of the problem. It isn't going to be so easily cleaned up by just killing the poor animals."

(Renaeta Algiernis) "Hmm... Sir... Is there any way you can tell us a little bit more about the source?" She asks quietly.

(Artoria Aldsan) "That's what we were here to figure out." He grimaces and reaches into the other man's pocket, palming something before standing up. "I suppose I'll be reporting back alone."

(Anstarra Silverain) An sighs, and gives a half-smile. "The only thing I really care about is fixing this... you could be an envoy from a secret Garlean research Castrum on the far side of Gyr Abania, for all I care, and it won't matter. What matters is fixing this mess."

(Renaeta Algiernis) She hesitates quietly, and looks to the others, looking to them for guidance. Her instinct was to trust him, but she'd been wrong before.

(Kasado Misado) Kasado shrugs. Worst case he had the samples he'd swiped anyway and they could consult their own sources.

Anstarra Silverain watches him a moment after she makes her quip.. and then her tail gives a little flick, as she's satisfied, well, PRETTY sure, he's nothing to do with those guys.. or he has a great poker face. Either way, she visibly relaxes, and moves to stroke his hair again. "I understand if you can't talk about your people.. but, well, whoever you are.. if you're looking to fix this, and you need.. people with skills.. reach out to us. This is a confluence of interests.."

Anstarra Silverain suddenly grins. "Or if you just want a drink sometime." She pauses, then looks at Rena, and frowns, then looks back to Bart. "I don't suppose you know any first aid.."

(Artoria Aldsan) He frowns for a moment, studying Renaeta's wound. "I can give it a try, but the wounds these things leave are strange."

Renaeta Algiernis frowns and nods, extending her arm towards the man. "Go ahead. Give it a look."

Anstarra Silverain: "If you know that much, you know more than most of us.." An settles in, to help..

(Anstarra Silverain) Will assist his lore check to treat the consequence!

Kasado Misado: "My shoulder too if you get a moment."

(Artoria Aldsan) "Sit down here." He begins pulling out a few potion bottles as he studies Renaeta's wound.

(Renaeta Algiernis) She sits, patiently, trusting him.

(Artoria Aldsan) He pours a potion on the wound, the flesh sizzling and smoking for a moment as it burns away the rot. From there, he quickly bandages both Renaeta and Kasado to keep infection from re-entering the wound.

(Kasado Misado) Kasado nods, mumbling a thanks.

(Renaee Algiernis) Renaee gasps in loud pain, before she closes her eyes, taking a long, deep breath. "F-fuck... Ohhh... That... Artoria won't be happy about this."

(Artoria Aldsan) Behind the group, the corpse of the second man is starting to turn black, the flesh bubbling and sloughing off his frame, the smell of rot permeating the air.

(Anstarra Silverain) An looks at the rapidly rotting corpse and pales a bit. "Merciful Twelve..."

(Artoria Aldsan) Bartholomew glances back at the smell, something sad-- but not particularly surprised about his expression. "You'll want to make sure you take care of those injuries and let them heal. I've removed the rot, but it's still a nasty bite that could be prone to infection." He shakes his head and stands up.

(Renaee Algiernis) Renaee nods at Bartholomew, flexing her hand. "Thank you. You likely saved me a lot of trouble."

Anstarra Silverain nods, standing as well. "Do you need an escort back to an aetheryte or something? We should all leave this place."

Kasado Misado: "Indeed."

Renaee Algiernis: "Agreed... Let's get out of here."

(Artoria Aldsan) He nods slightly, ready to follow the group back.