

<== Brasla

It was a sad day when the best way to get peace and quiet was to go monster-hunting.

Rebecca mused idly on the idiocy of her life, the tip of her chain tripping an unfortunate orc before a jolt of lightning passed from the weapon to the fallen warrior.

It was a good thing dwarves were predictable. They would always - *a/ways* - take the economically sound option. All she had to do to maintain her secrecy was pay them more than her fans would offer for her location.

It was a lot of money.

For only a small extra fee, she was welcome anywhere in the dwarven society. She had agreed (for a small fee) to help deal with the dangerous vermin that were attacking from below. She hadn't been informed that they were orcs.

Orcs were extinct. Every child knew that.

Rebecca raised a shield, deflecting the axe of another angered attacker, before flicking the point of her chain into his throat, before turning it to wrap around the waist of a second, a burst of flame traveling down the links and searing his torso from his legs.

She wondered if the dwarves would pay her to not take this information to Last Hope. She really ought to inform the king that orcs were in fact still alive, still angry, and trying their very best to invade.

She did wonder though, as the whip's tip flicked a blast of serrated stones into the chest of an orc shaman, where they were coming from. The hallways were piled three deep with corpses in places, but the green tide never ceased.

She enjoyed it, although her bored expression didn't show it.

It was an ugly truth, but it was her truth, and it was why she'd dominated the derth arena for a decade before retiring. Then another six months. Then a year after that.

She'd quit the arena five times in total. With the fifth, she'd crossed the continent, and invested her significant pile of winnings in entering the domain of the dwarves.

It had been a month before she'd grown restless, but the dwarves had kindly pointed her in the direction of one of their problems, and she'd willingly gone to do so.

To their astonishment, she was even doing it for free.

But, as lightning speared through the torso of one foe and into another, several feet behind him, she had to concede that it was growing dull.

She cast a glance to the right. As far as the eye could see, every path that led back to the dwarven halls as guarded. Nearest to her was a young dwarf wielding only gauntlets. With a detached curiosity, Rebecca wondered how badly the dwarf's viciously efficient strikes would fail against her whip's range. She watched briefly, before calling.

"Fulla? I'm going deeper. See where they're coming from."

"We can't send you any support," the dwarf replied. "But... if you want to try, you'll get further than we did."

"Probably," said the champion, bluntly. She cracked the whip, and lightning chained forwards, all but clearing the corridor in front of her, and then before the watching dwarf even saw her foot flex, she had gone.

There comes a point in an adventurer's career where they don't really need to pay attention to massed hordes. They can move fast enough that they can cut down an army, or cast a single spell to slay a hundred men. Rebecca wasn't an adventurer, but she'd reached the same point quite some time ago.

Moving through corridors packed with angry orcs was trivial. There was the occasional threat from someone competent, but Rebecca's skills had been honed in single combat, and her whip moved like a third limb.

There was something unnatural about their dedication, she felt. Orcs weren't known for their smarts, but surely they realised someone who'd gotten past two entire levels of the mine alone and unharmed wasn't going to buckle at a third. But not only did they keep attacking, they seemed agitated. Worried, even.

She came to a door, a massive slab of metal. Behind it was another.

Whatever lay at the end of this corridor, considered Rebecca after the sixth door, *must be distinctly important*. Thus, she wasn't surprised to be attacked once more. The first attacker managed to dodge the first swing of her chain, while the second was still alive after a blast of flames struck his chest. The third blew a cloud of flames for her, not stopping until lightning speared him in the chest.

The fourth she made sure to kill quickly, noting that she at least had a higher class of worthless opponent.

The fifth wasn't worthless.

A massive orc emerged snarling from the room, clad in heavy plate and wielding an immense sword and shield. She whipped for his ankle, only for him to jump over it, sword swinging for her

head. She caught it on her shield, entire body shuddering with the force of the blow, and released a shockwave of flame, driving him back far enough to lash her chain across his chest, the bladed tip cutting through the armour.

He gave a cry of pain, and she whipped it around, lashing at his hand and forcing him to drop the sword. She followed up with a flurry of stone, only for his shield to catch them. Her chain sang out for his throat - and he grabbed it, pulling it roughly. Rebecca, caught by surprise, was pulled painfully into the shield.

He swung a mailed fist around, only for her to catch the strike on her own shield, before channeling lightning into the chain. With a great roar he let go, and she thrust her shield into his to push them apart, before throwing a ball of flame from the tip of her weapon into his face. The orc raised his shield high, blocking the attack, but leaving his feet open. The chain wrapped around his ankle and jerked, sending him over.

A flurry of stones flew for his helmet, jagged pebbles spearing through the metal like paper, and then he was still.

Rebecca drew back, staring cautiously for a good thirty seconds, waiting for anything unexpected. Then, she gave the corpse a stiff salute.

She followed this by rooting through its pockets.

There was a letter, although she'd never been interested in learning the language of a supposedly dead race. There was also an orb, glowing gently with a thousand colours, the glimmer of stars inside it.

And on the other side of the room was another door.

She opened it, and every nightmare of Eyal was realised. She saw an immense orb of light and possibility. A farportal.

The farportals could take you anywhere, if you could use them safely. No-one knew how to use them safely.

What people did know is that shaloren researchers had used the farportals as an energy source. The resulting desolation scarred the world, and turned Eyal's opinion against magic. It went down in history as the spellblaze.

Rebecca stared for several moments. By the time the next wave of orcs arrived from the portal, she was gone.

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Ten minutes later, Rebecca was in the hall of the dwarven council, wearing a satchel. She looked as bored as ever.

"There is a farportal in the depths of Reknor. That's the source of the orcs." she explained. "I need to tell the king."

"The farportal is functioning?" asked one elder.

"He cannot know of our losses." snapped a second. "What do you want for silence?"

"Want?"

Rebecca raised an eyebrow. She'd hoped even they'd see reason at this point.

"Yes, want. How much?"

"...you don't have enough gold to silence this. He needs to know." she said. The elders paused, staring at her dubiously for several moments.

"...do you *know* how much gold we have?"

"Goodbye, and thank you for your hospitality." Rebecca said, resisting the urge to roll her eyes. She turned, and saw the unarmed warrior-woman. Fulla, if she remembered her name right.

"Fulla. Protect our reputation." one of the elders called it out.

Rebecca's hand went to the handle of her chain. Fulla's eyebrow went up.

"With all due respect, you must be joking." the dwarf said. "Even if I could stop her, we can't hold the orcs in the mines. They can get out into Maj'Eyal whenever they like, and probably already have."

"...then you will accompany her. Take with you our latest messages for the king. We have a new ore vein he may be interested by."

"Excuse me?" she blinked.

"The news must be broken with the aid of a dwarf." the elder insisted, glaring slightly at Rebecca. She just shrugged.

"...if that is your wish." Fulla said.

"Then we'd best leave now." Rebecca insisted, calmly, turning to leave. "It's been fun."

==> Fulla