

# Act 2 – Betrayal

## Chapter 1

Nightfall had fallen when Rylan arrived. He was tired beyond belief. Like most fire mages, he still had not mastered Teleport, and so using it took a lot out of him. He collapsed onto the ground, crushing the grass underneath. The trip had utterly drained him, but he was finally back at Albertan Keep. Panting for a while, he struggled to his feet, remembering that he was too close to the gate – He did not want to alert them of his arrival. He glanced at the gate...or what was the gate. Someone...or something...had torn it down.

Torn...down...the gate...

Adrenaline surged through him. He ran past the missing gate, the crumbling walls, and looked around him. Moonlight shone down upon the carnage. What was once homes, barracks, recreational centres... were all replaced with rubble. Not a single building was left standing.

“Once there was a city here...but it is no more...” Rylan turned around, and saw a person, draped in white.

“Took you long enough to get here.” sneered the figure.

“Why are you here? Never mind...what happened to this place?”

“...I did...” A staff materialised in his right hand, which he promptly stabbed it into the ground. The darkness coalesced around him then clung onto his robes, staining it pitch black.

“...Isaac...Are you OK?” Rylan eyed him, wary at what was happening. Isaac merely smiled as he put the hood of his robe over his head.

“You do not know how long I have waited for this day...it finally begins...the beginning of the end of this forsaken world...”

“What’s gotten into you Isaac...”

“Shadowbolt...” Darkness streamed into Isaac’s right hand, forming a perfect sphere. The mage flung the orb at Rylan, who managed to Teleport away in time.

“Where is Isaac?” gritted Rylan, a fire arrow nocked and aimed.

“Are you blind? He’s standing right in front of you.” laughed the mage.

“No...you are nothing but an imposter...Isaac never would do such a thing...”

“Then you didn’t know him as well as you thought...now save the theatrics for later. You’ll have more than ample time when you’re dead...”

Rylan sighed, then released the fire arrow. Before the fire arrow could impact the priest, he raised up both palms and repealed the spell, reflecting it back at Rylan. The fire mage teleported away, then staggered onto his right knee.

“Constant teleporting here must have drained your mana supplies...and since you changed directly to a fire mage you must not have gotten MP recovery or Magic Guard...your Str and Dex aren’t even 4...you should really restart that character...”

“...”

“Let me give you a hand...” The tip of his staff glowed red hot then a flash of red lightning sprung forward towards Rylan. He teleported away as the lightning struck the ground then stumbled to the ground as he reappeared.

“Why delay the inevitable Rylan? Your mana is low, and there is no way a targeted spell like Fire Arrow can get pass Reflect. Now...if you mastered Poison, then you would have an Area of Effect spell...but no one in their right mind would master that...”

“Fire Arrow...Area of Effect...huh...” Rylan got up to his feet, pointed his right hand at the priest, then muttered out the words.

“Fire Arrow...” Flames sprouted forth to form the bow yet again. The temperature around the mage rose substantially, until the air around him burst into flames, leaving behind 5 fire orbs orbiting the mage at incredible speeds. He pinched the flames in the palm of his right hand, pulled back as far as he can, then...

{This world may not know peace...but in my presence you will know silence...}

The flames fizzed, dying out as the magic feeding them was cut off. The fire orbs stopped revolving altogether, hovering about the mage. Rylan looked puzzled, unsure what was going on.

“Phew...who would know that you would be lucky enough to get a Mana Surge...” A card materialised in the priest’s right hand, who promptly discarded it.

“Sigh...land...”

Unfazed, Rylan yet again tried to cast the fire spell, the fire orbs starting to spin around him at ever increasing speeds yet again.

“This is getting sad...Root.” Rylan froze, and soon found that he could not move a single muscle...he was utterly rooted to the ground.

“Spirit Sphere Absorption” The priest raised his right hand as the fire orbs circling Rylan disappeared, only to reappear around the priest.

“Asura Strike...” The five fire orbs were snuffed out as darkness blanketed the world. The priest moved at incredible speeds towards the helpless mage, his right fist slamming into Rylan’s chest. The impact sent Rylan flying, crashing through the crumbling remains of a wall.

The rubble stirred as Rylan shifted the rocks off him. He tried to get to his feet, but overexerted himself, coughing up blood as he fell back to the ground.

“As I said...you can not hope to defeat me in your current state...Rylan...Now return to the darkness...whence you came...” He raised his staff up, which flickered and looked for a moment like a white blade with a black edge, then flickered back to look like a gnarled staff.

“Its over Rylan...Fiend's Grip!”

The darkness surged around the fallen mage, forming fingers around him before closing upon him, dragging him down into the dark depths, swallowing him up entirely, leaving no trace whatsoever.

“It is done...” muttered the priest.

{Wt ettx mcmnl.}

{Nq xfnq xft rlt?}

{Vtq, jlarkxjlmxtbv ft nq qxnbb kmw...qr kmw nx'q teimkmqqnlc.}

{Mq vrj wtkt.}

{Qjktbv vrj stqx!}

{Jlbnzt qret ytrybt, N'e lrx srznlc mbb xft xnet.}

{Brb...Nx'q m ynkv wt grjbh lrx ettx rl rxftk xtkeq. Vrij zlrw wfmv xr hr.}

{Qjkt, xnbb ltox xnet...xnbb ltox wt ettx.}

A burst of golden light erupted where the fallen mage stood, dispersing the darkness. Rylan looked up, then got to his feet. He wore a simple leather tunic, a red bandana tied around his mouth, his weapons hanging from the leather belt around his waist...everything he wore seemed to be made out of leather. Clipped on his left side was the mace Major, whose metal handle upon which a large, rectangular head laid upon from which spikes protruded from. Sheathed to his right was Minor, the curved dagger which greatly resembled a claw. The priest turned around, clearly annoying.

"That claw...and that paw...it can not be...how is this possible?" The rogue merely smirked, unclipping Major with his right hand as he unsheath Minor with his left hand, liquid dripping off the dagger. He raised the mace above his head, which promptly glowed golden yellow.

"Storm Bolt!" He hurled the mace towards the priest, who dodged left out of the way of the spinning mace. The rogue vanished into darkness, only to reappear behind the priest. He grabbed the spinning mace, slamming it down on the priest, who just managed to block the attack with his staff, staggering from the blow. The rogue backflipped, spinning Minor towards the priest, who batted away the thrown dagger as soon as he had recovered.

"Energy Burst!" His staff glowed red hot once again, red lightning surging forward towards the rogue. The rogue merely grinned as he disappeared, the red lightning charring the ground yet again.

"...Shadow Strike, might have known...since when did those infernal fiends meddle in human affairs?" Darkness pooled at the priest's legs, coiling up to his arms. He flicked his right arm up, his left arm down, then both arms to his sides, forming waves of bats.

The rogue dodged left and right through the waves of bats, untouched by the swarm. For the last wave Minor reappeared in his left hand, which he stabbed into the ground then slashed up, forming a golden pillar of light around him, the bats disintegrating as they touched the light.

"Midnight Pulse!" The priest slammed both palms onto the ground, darkness seeping into the ground. Rylan leaped clear off the ground and watched as the grass withered away around him. He leapt towards an intact wall and pushed upon it with his legs, propelling him forwards towards the priest, then slammed down with Major. The priest dodged the blow by jumping back, but the blow

was so great it cracked the pavement, the force knocking him to the ground. The rogue threw his dagger at the priest, who couldn't get away in time, the dagger managing to nick his right forearm. The priest hissed, melting away in darkness before reappearing a few metres away. Darkness pooled in both his palms as he stared at the rogue.

"Shadowbolt!" The priest cried, unleashing a constant barrage of Shadowbolts upon the rogue.

"Looks like someone's getting desperate...seriously, no rogue worth his or her salt would not have evasion." Clipping Major to his belt, Rylan dashed towards the priest, manoeuvring through the Shadowbolt barrage with ease, arriving at the priest untouched. Golden light shined from his right palm as Minor appeared in it, which he grasped firmly.

"Let's see you dodge this, biatch." snarled the priest, lowering his right arm towards the rogue, as darkness formed yet another Shadowbolt. Before he could fire it, pain seared through his right arm, the spell fizzling as the priest yelped in pain.

"It's over!" yelled Rylan, slashing up with Minor. A look of shock crossed the priest's face, before he fell backwards onto the ground. The rogue sighed, looking at the priest in front of him.

"It's finally...over..."

"Not quite, no. Sorry to scare you like that." laughed the priest, getting up to his feet.

"You...how..."

"Should have known better...the sheath in which Minor resides in is soaked in a crippling toxin, so toxic that it causes sudden bursts of pain in the area pierced by it. However, your timing was impeccable...timing your attack with that burst of pain...I guess it is time to reveal my true power..." A huge gash appeared in the priest's black robes, revealing plated armor beneath it.

"What the..." Using his right hand, the priest ripped off the torn black robe, throwing it behind him, the cloak floating away in the breeze. Underneath the robe was silver platemail, a gash streaked across it where Minor had impact upon it, a yellow scarf wound around his neck.

"I commend you for getting this far, but this is where the story ends for you." Greaves materialised upon his hands, a broadsword appearing in his right one.

"You managed to beat me while I was a Shadow Priest, now let's see how you fare against an Earth Adept."

Level 1 Rogue Vs Level 58 Earth Adept

Rylan gains initiative.

Rylan attacks. Rylan does 1 dmg to Isaac

Rylan attacks. Rylan does 2 dmg to Isaac (CRITICAL HIT)

Rylan: This is no use! His defence is too high!

Isaac attacks. Rylan dodges.

Isaac uses skill 'Overpower'. Isaac does 999 dmg to Rylan (CRITICAL HIT)

Rylan is critically injured.

Rylan: What the...

Isaac: 999 dmg only? Sigh, why did damage have to be capped in this world...

"Anyways...face it Rylan, there is no way that a rogue can beat a warrior in battle." taunted Isaac, blood dripping off his broadsword, Rylan's right hand hanging limply by his side, Minor knocked away during the assault.

"What was that?" muttered Rylan, Minor reappearing in a burst of light in his left hand.

"Overpower allows me to land a critical hit every time you dodge an attack. And the hit itself can't be blocked, dodged or parried. And since the only thing keeping you alive is your dodging ability..." Isaac charged in, swinging his broadsword at the rogue, who managed to parry the blow using Minor.

"As long as I parry your moves instead of dodging them, you will not be able to Overpower me..." commented Rylan, knocking Isaac's broadsword away.

"Do you really think that you can take a warrior head-on? As a rogue? Sooner or later your strength will fail..and then you will die."

The warrior began to rain blows upon the rogue, who managed to parry each hit. With each clash Rylan's strength was further drained, until he collapsed to the ground after a final hit.

"It's all over!" remarked Isaac, swinging his broadsword yet again. Rylan dodged the attack, bracing himself for the next hit.

"That's it! Overpower!" Isaac's broadsword glowed red as he slammed it into Rylan.

For a minute, the world stopped. Inspiration hit Rylan. He knew what to do.

Rylan immediately sheathed Minnor, unclipped Major, then slammed the mace on Isaac's broadsword. It did nothing to the direction of the cut, nor the force, but the blow allowed the rogue to jump over Isaac's head.

Isaac uses skill 'Overpower'. 'Overpower' misses.

"What the hell?" Isaac turned around to see Rylan throw Major at him, the mace glowing golden yellow as it slammed into Isaac's chest, knocking him into the ground.

"Thought you said 'Overpower' can't be dodged?"

"It can't be! Judge? JUDGE!" yelled Isaac, as he got up, a dent in his platemail indicating where Major had struck.

"Judge?"

"Bah, the judgemaster is never around when you need him..." cursed Isaac. His left hand glowed golden yellow as the ground before him cracked as a huge rock appeared from the ground. Making his left hand into a fist, cracks began to run through the rock before it shattered into innumerable pieces.

"Stone Rain!" He raised his left hand to the sky, causing the small rocks to fly to the sky, then swung his hand down, causing the rocks to pelt down upon Rylan.

"No rogue could survive that..."

"Then I guess I am no rogue." commented Rylan, driving Minor into Isaac's back.

Or, at least he tried.

His hand stopped at the very last moment, much to the rogue's frustration, as if he was held by something.

"One of the perks of being an Adept is access to Psynergy, specifically Mind Read and Halt. Being able to read your mind, it was easy to anticipate when you would use Shadow Strike, allowing me to Halt you in time. And to stop you from retreating..." Vines appeared around the the rogue's boots, growing up as they coiled all around him, binding him to the spot.

"Now it is time for you to die...no one as heartless as you deserves to live." Rylan tried to protest, but the vines winding around his mouth stopped him from saying a word. The warrior held his broadsword by its hilt, grasped onto the blade with his left hand, then raised the sword to the sky.

"Howl, Gaia Blade!"

Isaac's Gaia Blade lets out a howl! Titan Blade!

Rylan looked up, only to see a gigantic golden blade crash down upon him. He was soon consumed by the golden pillar of light...

{Why are you holding back, Rylan?}

"I am not holding back...there is nothing left in me..."

{Nonsense, power sleeps within you... all you need to do is wake it up.}

"Will I be consumed by it yet again?"

{Power corrupts, but as long as your heart remains strong, your will will remain untainted.}

"I hope so Ursa, I hope so..."

As the golden pillar of light faded away, Isaac could see that Rylan was untouched, glowing a golden yellow.



Isaac: The blast...it restored all your energy...but how...a Fire adept should not be able to absorb Earth elemental attacks...

Rylan: Have you forgotten? Fire and earth share a symbiotic relationship.

Rylan has obtained the Earth element.

An explosion of golden light engulfed Rylan, blowing dust up into the air. Isaac shielded his eyes as he strained to see what was happening.

Wicked claws protruded from the creature's paws, sharp fangs from his mouth, yellowish-brown fur covering his entire body. He now looked like a bear, standing upright.

"...It can't be...Bear..."

Name: Ursa

Nickname: Bear

Race: Furbolg

Class: Ursa Warrior

Title: Pillar of Strength

Element: Earth

Final Attack: Ursa Rage

"It's time for a rematch, don't ya say Isaac?" grinned Ursa, his eyes taking on the brownish colour of the earth itself.

Level 25 Ursa Warrior Vs Level 58 Earth Adept

Ursa gains initiative.

Ursa uses skill "Enrage". Ursa is now enraged!

Ursa uses skill "Overpower".

Ursa attacks. Ursa does 601 dmg to Isaac. Isaac is now marked.

Ursa attacks. Ursa does 625 dmg to Isaac

Ursa attacks. Ursa does 649 dmg to Isaac

Ursa attacks. Ursa does 999 dmg to Isaac (CRITICAL)

Isaac: What the? Overpower?

Isaac attacks. Ursa dodges.

Isaac uses skill 'Overpower'. Isaac does 999 dmg to Rylan (CRITICAL HIT)

Isaac: ...and you're still not dead...

Ursa attacks. Ursa does 636 dmg to Isaac.

Ursa uses skill "Overpower".

Ursa attacks. Ursa does 660 dmg to Isaac

Ursa attacks. Ursa does 684 dmg to Isaac

Ursa attacks. Ursa does 999 dmg to Isaac (CRITICAL)

Ursa attacks. Ursa does 732 dmg to Isaac

"Sigh...both Enrage and Fury Swipes are additive damage, so both bypass my armour...and I can't get his HP down in time..." huffed Isaac, looking at the fiend before him. Isaac's left hand glowed golden yellow as brambles began to grow all around the Ursa warrior, but did not get any closer.

"Did you really think that you could attack an Earth elemental with an Earth-based attack?" laughed Ursa, the brambles parting, allowing Ursa to pass. Ursa's right claw glowed golden yellow as he made an upward swiping action. Isaac blocked with his Gaia Blade, but was knocked off the ground by the blow.

"Overpower!" remarked Ursa, moving so fast that he landed four hits in a row on Isaac while he was still in the air, knocking him to the ground, metres away.

"Get up" ordered Ursa gruffly. Isaac got up as he wiped the blood from his mouth, gouges torn through his platemail by Ursa's vicious attack.

"An ursa's rage is terrifying...especially when kicked...I guess its best for me to run now..." muttered Isaac. He got up and mocked a bow, the atmosphere around the warrior warping as he prepared to leave.

"As if I'll let you get away!" roared Ursa, leaping towards Isaac, the impact causing the ground to shake, causing Isaac to lose his footing. Ursa knocked Isaac to the ground, then pinned him down with both paws.

"Earthshock, huh...I guess I underestimated you...Rylan..."

"Tell me...who are you, and what do you want?"

"Who am I? I am a nobody, someone insignificant who wants to make something of his life...I am a mere shell. As for what I want...I want what you have...your life, your existence...then I can be a somebody..."

"..."

"Yes, I know, not today, but there's always tomorrow." laughed Isaac, melting into darkness as he sunk into the ground.

"In your hurry to 'save' Marche, you left Mia undefended, didn't you? I'd be worried about her if I was you..."

"Leave her out of this!" yelled Ursa, though there was no one around.

A blue portal opened before Ursa, making him jump.

"If you truly care about her, then take this portal. It'll teleport you somewhere near the town. You will not make it in time, but who knows...if you hurry maybe you'll be in time to see her die..." laughed Isaac, his voice fading away.

Sighing, Ursa stepped through the portal...

...to appear on a plain covered in snow, a blue tome lying on the ground besides him. The blue portal faded behind Rylan, who noticed that he was human yet again. He picked up the blue tome, and read the words "Tome of Town P..." before it faded away. Noticing that a crude arrow in the snow had been drawn with fresh blood, he sighed, before grimly tracking through the snow, back towards Fridgt...

## Chapter 2

*“Wake up Mia...there is much we have to do...”*

Snow drifted down upon the plains, falling down upon the weary figure. Rylan shivered – the leather armor he now wore clearly not keeping him warm enough. He had long lost count of the time that had past since his encounter with Isaac...no, not Isaac...the person he had fought a while ago was no longer the priest that had traveled with him. The threat that the mage had uttered after their duel was still fresh on his mind...he knew that no matter what, he had to reach Fridgt, reach Mia before that madman could get there. Exhaustion was stepping in, but he dared not rest, lest he was too late. One step lead to the next, lead to the next, lead to the next...but all he could see was the whiteness of the plains. He wished that he had not lost the ability to Teleport...

Suddenly he noticed a figure appear on a nearby hill. Ignoring the pain searing through his muscles, he sprinted toward the figure. The figure seemed to be walking away from him, but he soon caught up. He could clearly see the black hair billowing under the mage's hat, the red robes that the mage wore.

“Mia...?” Rylan asked, hesistantly, and he reached the top of the hill.

The mage turned around, and what Rylan saw stunned him. The hill overlooked the town of Fridgt...or what was left of it. Every building had been burnt to the ground, leaving behind the charred remains, as if the earth itself had suffered a terrible scar. Rylan had failed. He did not reach the town in time...

But that was not what filled his heart with anguish.

"Ry...lan..."

“Mia?” The figure standing before him...the figure standing before him...blood had stained its beige robe rust red...its hands were shriveled up, as was its head...its...eyeless head. Even though it did not have any eyes, Rylan could feel its gaze. She was near unrecognisable, but it was indeed...Mia.

The air shimmered as Isaac appeared behind Mia, smirking.

“Look who's late...again...”

“DAMNIT! What did you do to her!” screamed Rylan, as he unclipped his mace and unsheathed his dagger.

“She used to be so headstrong...so wild...so untamable. After death though...she has become so much more obedient...”

Blood surged through Rylan’s head...all he could see was red. He rushed towards Isaac, mace in his right hand, dagger in his left, wanting desperately to end the bastard's life. As he approached, he tripped as something grabbed his ankles. He turned around, and to his surprise withered hands had sprouted from the ground, holding him down. Rylan struggled, but could not break the iron grip of those hands. He was forced to watch as Isaac took off Mia’s hat, then placed his right hand on top of her head. Mia let out a wail, then her robes, her skin, her flesh, was seared in blue flames, until only her skull and spinal cord was left behind. Isaac grabbed the spinal cord by the sacrum with his right hand, the cartilage between each vertebrae glowing red. The eye sockets in Mia’s skull glowed red, and turned towards the fallen rogue, as if looking upon him.

The hands holding onto Rylan’s ankles released their grip, allowing him to leap away. He looked behind him, and he could see the ground splitting as another withered wretch appeared from the ground. He gazed upon the plains, and could see countless more people sprouting from the ground, their clothes in tatters, their white eyes focused upon him.

“The people of Fridgt were peaceful folk...it wasn’t their fault that you got them involved. Due to your failure, they have all perished...I have merely given them all a second chance, a chance to finally have revenge. Brace yourself Rylan, for they will not tire, will not falter, until you have joined their ranks.”

A knight clad in golden armor materialised in the middle of the plains, riding an equally armored chocobo.

“Huh...?” muttered Rylan quizzically.

“Finally...the Judgemaster is here...just ignore him Rylan. You have much bigger things to worry about...”

Rylan grasped Major and Minor in his hands, looking around him as the zombies limped towards him, the putrid smell of rotting flesh wafting in the breeze.

"Forgive me for what I must do...that you must suffer death at my hands yet again..."

*We mourn our dead. We shroud our dead. We bury our dead. Too often, it seems, we must kill our dead again...*

The rogue dashed forward, slamming a zombie's head upwards with Major, snapping its neck. He buried Minor in the chest of another zombie, then with a well-placed kick to the chest sent it flying, its decomposing heart still impaled upon the curved dagger. The next zombie made him pause for a few seconds - he recognised the girl...the zombie in front of him, but he could not for the life of him remember who she was.

"You bastard! You didn't even spare the women!"

"Are you telling me to be sexist? Women are just as good as men. At least for this purpose anyways." The rogue gritted his teeth as he slashed off her hands, then raked the dagger across her face, making it flinch. Seizing the moment, he jumped onto her head, then as she fell forward kicked at her spinal cord, which acted as a springboard before it snapped in two. As he fell back to earth, he slammed down Major onto another zombie's head, crushing it to bits, as he sliced another zombie in half with Minor. As he picked himself up from the fall, he swung both claw and paw in an anti-clockwise direction, knocking one zombie out cold while beheading the other. He surveyed the horde around him...7 zombies were down, but the rest of the town was still limping towards him. The necromancer looked on, impassive, as if savouring the moment.

"Stealth Hit". Clipping Major, he grasped Minor firmly in his left hand as it glowed golden yellow. The rogue vanished, the zombies temporarily losing their target. Soon after, zombie heads began to fall off, brutally slashed off, Rylan appearing behind the fifth before pulling at his hair and slicing its throat from behind, effectively ripping his head off. Hurling the head, he unclipped Major as the headless zombies crashed to the ground. These were still not enough to deter the zombies, who yet again advanced towards the rogue, walking over the dead again zombies as if they were speed bumps. Enough was enough. It was time to end it.

"Shockwave Pulsar" He crouched down, stabbed Minor into the ground, then slashed up, the golden pillar of energy that spawned vaporising any foolish zombie that got too close. The rogue lowered the claw, then smashed down with Major in the middle of the pillar, sending a wave of energy crashing through the zombies' ranks. The necromancer raised his right eyebrow at the incoming wave, which died out before it could reach him.

"Interesting skill...but since when did the Tauren develop the habit of teaching strangers their secret moves...I mean moves?" Rylan ignored him as he searched for any survivors. Other than a few twitching corpses, the only beings left on the field was the mysterious knight in golden armor and the necromancer. Rylan did not know where the knight's allegiance laid, for he had not moved throughout the entire battle, choosing instead to stare aimlessly at the battlefield.

“Now its your turn...You shall pay for wha...” Rylan stopped mid sentence, slight pressure on his left ankle alerting him that something was grabbing it. He looked down, and horror filled his heart when he realised that it was one of the decapitated hands that he had cut off the girl. Frantically he tried pulling it off, but it maintained its death grip on his ankle...he could not rip it off. Composing himself, he slashed down with Minor, cut off the hand's thumbs and fingers, making it fall apart. He resisted the urge to hurl as he saw the fingers wriggle on the ground like worms.

“What...” He looked ahead of him, and could see that the horde he had fell rise again. Many carried broken limbs in either their remaining limbs or in their mouths, swinging them like weapons. Those that only had a single leg left leaned on others that suffered a similar fate for support, as in a 3 legged race, minus a leg. Those that had none crawled on the ground towards him. He turned around to look behind him. He could clearly see on the ground the second decapitated hand, a zombie with no hands, one with a caved in skull, and two halves of a zombie, cut neatly in two, both sides of its decaying brain exposed.

“What...what have you done...” Rylan could feel his strength melting away in the face of such terrible sorrow.

“You have condemned them all to undeath, a fate worse than death. They will hunt you down relentlessly for as long as you live. Try to run away from them, but know this: You will tire before they will...”

“FRESH MEAT!” An oversized arm shot out from the ground, making a desperate grab towards the rogue. Sensing the attack, the rogue evaded the arm, but was not able to stop a metal chain winding around his right arm. Before he could unwind it, the chain was tugged back, yanking him towards the sharp edge of a bloody cleaver. Ignoring the pain, the rogue rolled into a ball, dodged the cleaver's sharp edge, then back-flipped onto the weapon to stop himself rolling into the zombie. As quickly as he could, he pulled off the hook, unwinded the metal chain around his arm then let it go as he jumped out of the way of another hand. The metal chain fell down, then grew taunt as the zombie pulled harder, the hook catching onto the cleaver. The rogue fell back as he looked at the zombie. The zombie standing in front of him was huge, towering over him, being at least twice his height. It was bald, had white eyes, bulging muscles and stitches covering his entire body, much like a patchwork quilt. It had two monstrous arms, and a smaller one sprouting from the elbow of his left arm. The most disturbing part of the zombie's appearance was its chest, or what was left of it: Its ribcage had been ripped open, revealing all of the creature's organs pulsing and beating. In the two large arms bloody cleavers were held, metal chains ending in hooks dangling off the cleavers, while in the smaller left arm a normal metal axe was held. Rylan looked at the welts on his right arm and sighed. The hook had only latched onto his arm and not hooked into it - If it had, the monster might have been able to rip it off. The rogue watched as the zombie tried to break free – the left hook had caught onto the blade of the right cleaver, and it did not help that the zombie pushed on the blade and pulled on the chain.

“That Abomination has the strength of seven men. In fact, it used to be seven men...” Uttering a grunt, the abomination gave the chain a might yank, breaking off the hook. It turned towards the rogue, red veins threading through its white eyes.

“FRESH...MEAT...”

“Earthshock” Major glowed golden yellow, as he slammed it down onto the ground, causing the ground to tremor, slowing down the zombies behind him and making the abomination in front of him fall flat down on its face.

“Shadow Strike” Rylan seemed to melt into the ground, then immediately reappeared behind the necromancer, striking down with Minor. Before he could land the hit, something wound around both his arms, constricting them as it cut into them. Rylan looked down, and could see something resembling a spinal cord, dagger-like protrusions sticking out of each vertebrae. The skull hovered in front of Rylan’s face, as if mocking him, lunging towards the immobilised rogue at the very last moment. Before the hit landed, Rylan disappeared, reappearing at the spot where he had initiated the move ‘Shadow Strike’, blood seeping out of the deep wounds apparent on both arms.

{Uyh’g nyi gzehp nyi’dv rvehx gyy zqdfz yh gzv szeau? E tvqh, tyspehx zet kegzyhv yw zef qaaevf sqh’g rv fvvh qf baqnehx wqed...}

{...Fzig ib, E’aa uy qf E bavqfv. E gqpvyduvdf wdyt hy yhv, vfbvseqaan wdyt gzv aepvf yw nyil!}

{Yhan fytywdevhuan qujev...Uyh’g bifz zet yjvd gzv vuxv.}

{Zv keaa rv qrav gy zqhuav gzv vtygeyhqa fgdvff, yd E keaa gqpvsqdv yw zet tnfvaw.}

{Uy nyi fgeaa dvfvhg tv wyd kzqg E zqu gy uy...ayhx qxy?}

{...E ihuvdfgqhu gzqg kzqg kqf uyhv kqf hvsvffqdn, rig E uy hyg gzehp E syiau vjvd wydxejv nyi wyd peaaehx zvd.}

{...lhuvdfgyyu.}

“When will you stop sprouting this nonsense about justice and freedom, Rylan? Accept it, your destiny is to follow me, undead or not.”

“I...can never...forgive you for what you have done ...I would never join you...you hear me? Never!”

“It does not matter...If I can’t twist your mind into obeying me, I’ll just have to make do with Mia doing my dirty work for me...”



Rylan could not take it anymore...something snapped within him. His ears were ringing with the sound of breaking glass. He raised his eyes towards the necromancer, his pupil constricted, his blue iris dilated.

"...So the legend is true...very well then. Pudge, attack!". The abomination got up to its feet, roared then lumbered towards Rylan, the ground shaking with each step it took. The rogue evaded to the left as the creature slashed down with a cleaver, back flipped to evade the metal chain flicked in his direction as Major glowed golden in his right hand. He hurled it at the creature's face, the impact stunning it for a few seconds. As he landed, he did a mini-jump towards the abomination, caught Major as it was falling down, then dashed away towards the zombies, and ultimately to the necromancer. The zombies formed a barricade, but instead of forcing through them Rylan dashed up towards them, knelt down then leaped right over them. As he leapt, he curled up into a ball, breaking out only to heel the skull of the necromancer's whip, sending it crashing down into the horde of zombies. He landed, but before he could leap away a zombie managed to get its limbs around the rogue's arms and legs, greatly restricting his movement. He tried to take to the air again, but with the zombie on his back he could not obtain any appreciable height. The skull whipped zoomed towards Rylan, then punched through the back of the zombie. As soon as he felt the impact Rylan violently jerked to the right, allowing the skull whip's momentum to rip the zombie off his back. The rogue's feet found purchase on the heads of one of the zombies as he fell back to earth, then using the zombie's heads as stepping stones he leaped from one zombie to another, somersaulting over the last zombie towards the necromancer.

"Lets try this again shall we?" muttered Rylan as he slammed down with Major. To his frustration, the skull of the skull-whip blocked at the very last moment, absorbing the impact. The spinal cord wound around Rylan's right wrist, dagger protrusions pointing outwards, as the skull bit upon the curved blade of Minor, its corrosive bite causing the blade to rust as it was worn away.

"Face it Rylan...you can not harm me."

"Who said anything about harming you?" The rogue let go of both his weapons, caught Major in his left hand, the weapon glowing gold as he slammed it down on the skull-whip around his right wrist. The sound of cracking bone resounded through the air as the rogue groaned in pain – the bones in his wrists had been shattered by the blow. His bones weren't the only ones to go, for cracks had begun to run along the skull-whip. The blow had disrupted the magic keeping the skull-whip intact, causing it to fall to the ground in many pieces, then melt away as pyreflies. Rylan looked around for his weapons, but could see that they too were damaged beyond repair, the rogue sighing as they melted away as pyreflies too.

"At least now she is free of your evil clutches."

"...I guess they are right...the bonds of loyalty do tie one to the grave." The zombies parted, allowing the abomination to pass through.

"Now Pudge, dismember him...start with the arms first, go on to the legs then tear his head off. His will is too strong to subvert anyways..." The abomination snarled, whipped both metal chains so that they wound around his arms then pulled, causing Rylan to scream in agony. Suddenly, a bloody howl echoed through the night, making Rylan shiver. Mist began to roll in, and the last thing the rogue saw was a pair of yellow eyes, glowing through the mist...

{Why are you fighting this battle Rylan? Why didn't you just run away? You barely know her.}

"But...I...I made a promise to her..."

{One you couldn't keep?}

"Yes...and now...she's dead...the least I could do was let her have peace..."

{Rylan...have more faith in them...in your companions...}

"But..."

{Have you not noticed? Even though they are not here now, they have always been behind you...supporting you from the shadows...}

"...Thank you for being there for me...everyone...the times we had together...I will cherish always..."

Rylan has obtained the element of Ice.

The sound of breaking chains could be heard in the mists, followed by the sound of the abomination falling to the ground. As the mist cleared, Isaac could see Rylan within the mist, his eyes glowing sapphire blue. He wore a chainmail vest, a blue shirt beneath it, a sapphire amulet around his neck glowing blue, cracks running through the jewel. He wore chain pants, chain boots, a normal green leather glove adorned his left hand, while the one on his right hand the glove only covered his palm and his index finger. A small pouch could be seen attached to his belt on his right side. On his back he wore a quiver full of arrows on top of a transparent blue cloak, in his left hand he firmly grasped a blue bow. At his side was a huge wolf, its fur as white as snow.

Name: Fenrir

Nickname: Lunaedge

Race: Wolf

Class: Alpha Male

Title: Spirit of Friendship

Element: Ice

Final Attack: Alpha Strike

"Who are you?"

{My name is Fenrir, Lunaedge, the Spirit of Friendship. I was summoned here to give you aid, to lend you my strength.}

"...What happened?"

{You changed classes yet again. You are now a hunter, and before you were a rogue, which you changed into when Ursa leant you his strength.}

"You know Ursa?"

{Yes, for as they say there is strength in numbers.}

"Can you tell me what's going on?"

{...That is not my department. The blademaster would be mad if you knew...before you were ready...}

"Ready?"

{Now is not the time, young one.} The wolf snared, arching its back, then charged towards the butcher, who had managed to get up again.

{I'll distract Pudge, deal with the rest of the zombies.}

"Wait Fenrir, I know your secret! You were destined to follow me!"

{Maybe so, Isaac, but I still don't like you!} The wolf charged towards the abomination, dodging both its cleavers before gnawing down on its right leg. The abomination roared in anger, ice forming around the wound.

{Looks like someone's suffering from a little Frostbite...}

"Wait...Fenrir...deal with zombies...how?" yelled out Rylan frantically, watching as the zombies edged towards him.

{Don't worry...you know what to do. Just let instinct guide your arrows.}

"...But...but...it wouldn't matter...they just wont die!" Hearing a moan behind him, Rylan looked backwards, only to see a zombie within reach.

"...Ice Arrow" Drawing an arrow from his quiver, he rapidly nocked it, then fired it into the hapless zombie. The arrow glowed blue as it struck through the chest of the zombie, poking through to the other side. The zombie paused, then frantically tried to pull out the arrow, ice spreading from the arrow to the rest of the zombie's extremities. Soon after, the zombie was frozen in place, unable to do anything.

{Isaac is drawing mana from these snowy plains to regenerate his horde of zombies...but then again, regeneration doesn't help when one's frozen solid...Behind you! Arrow Bomb!} Without thought, Rylan reached into the pouch strapped on his right, attached the concussion bomb onto another arrow, spun

around then shot the arrow into a pack of zombies, the resulting explosion knocking them into the air and stunning them. The hunter fired six Ice Arrows at the six airborne zombies, each finding their mark.

"...Multi Shot" Rylan nocked and fired another Ice Arrow, which split into three, each arrow striking down a zombie. As he nocked his arrow yet again, the airborne zombies finally crashed to the ground, shattering due to the impact.

"Blizzard Shot!" Rylan reached into his quiver and pulled out a blue crystalline thread, tied it around his arrow then fired it straight up. The crystalline thread followed, multiple arrows connected to the thread trailing behind, tied on like bows tied onto the tail of a kite. Rylan sniped down any zombie that got in his way as he watched the neverending thread ascend into the sky.

{That should be enough...you do only have 24k arrows...} Nodding, Rylan slashed the thread with his bow. As the last of the thread disappeared, the plains rumbled as icicles began to rain down on the plains, an arrow buried in each icicle. The zombies tried to get out of the rain, but they could not dodge every single arrow, and soon every zombie was frozen solid.

"Hail of Arrows? Sigh...shouldn't have attacked..." lamented the necromancer. He was surrounded by a ring of frozen arrows, but not a single one touched him.

{That's nice...Rylan...now can you help me?!} asked Fenrir dryly, weaving in and out of the abomination's reach, who roared in frustration.

"Oh, opps, sorry..." muttered Rylan. His bow glowed white as he drew the bow string, a ghostly white arrow forming between the bow and its bow string.

"Soul Arrow!" He released the arrow, a beam of light streaming from the bow towards the abomination, striking him square in the head. Pudge screamed as it's head was consumed entirely by the light, then the abomination collapsed to the ground, headless, his body breaking into pyreflies.

Pudge's head was pawned by Rylan for an extra 400 gold.

"...Soul Arrow?" asked Isaac, confused, who shook the feeling off. "That's it... the time for playing games is over!" A gauntlet appeared on his right hand, an eye opening on the gauntlet as the necromancer raised his hand to the sky.

"...What?"

{Careful, Rylan, its an Oni Gauntlet!}

"Oni...Gauntlet...?"

{Its an artifact given to the chosen warrior of the Oni...I have no idea how he got a hold on it...} Rylan looked around, the hunter noticed that all the frozen zombies had all turned to pyreflies, a gust developing as the pyreflies raced towards the eye of the gauntlet. Bones entwined around the necromancer's arms,

his arms deforming into bone spears. Bones tore through his robes, tearing them apart, showing his leather jerkin. Bone formed around his kneecap, his skin turning pale white as it was converted to bone. Two horns appeared from his forehead, curling backwards as they formed.

{It is fitting I guess...His first D2 character was a necromancer...and careful Rylan, he's stronger now...}

"Bone Wall..." The necromancer stabbed both arms into the ground, bone spears piercing out from the ground beneath the hunter. The hunter backflipped out of the way, then continued to do so, avoiding the line of bone spears directed at him.

"How...he's not a rogue...Judge?" The judgemaster snapped back to attention, scrutinised the hunter, then shook his head apologetically at the necromancer.

[All is in order...Hunters can be just as agile as a rogue, you should know better, Isaac.]

"Tsk...fine...Bone Cage!" Bone spears pierced out of the ground all around the hunter, who could not get away in time, the spears merging at the top to form a makeshift cage. Rylan tried squeezing through the gaps, but the bone spears were too close together.

"Bone Spirit!" Isaac opened his mouth, a ghostly white skull exiting from it. It moved left and right, then dived straight for Rylan.

"Soul Arrow!" The hunter fired off a beam of light at the ghostly skull which exploded on contact with the beam. Isaac withdrew his arms as he dodged the beam, releasing the cage around him. Seeing his chance, Rylan attached as many concussion bombs onto an arrow as possible, then fired it directly at Isaac. The uber Arrow Bomb connected with the necromancer's chest. The spectacular explosion that followed was rather stunning, but all it managed to do was blow off Isaac's jerkin, showing that his chest too had become bone.

"Ugh...Arrow Bombs stack?" muttered Isaac, the blow giving him a massive concussion.

{Err...I think you went overboard there...anyways...lets end it...sound the call Rylan.} commented the wolf, strolling up to Rylan's side. The hunter laughed sheepishly, then nodded as a golden horn appeared in his right hand. Fenrir howled as the horn sounded nine times, its call drifting through the breeze. Howls filled the air as wolves responded to the call, nine other wolves materialising around the necromancer.

{To be one with them...you must first become a wolf yourself...}

"How?"

{Just leave it to me...} Fenrir dissipated into blue pyreflies as he disappeared, Rylan realising that he was glowing pale blue. White fur began to cover his skin, his face elongated to form a snout, his teeth sharpened and yellowing as they formed fangs. He grew larger as his muscles bulked up, his back hunching up as he grew, his fingernails growing to become claws. A black tail formed behind him, black fur forming on his shoulders and chest. The only thing hinting at his humanity was the cracked sapphire amulet around his neck. His eyes remained blue but the transformation was complete...he was now a lycanthrope.

"Ah...crap...a Lycanthrope...oh...look at the time...I better be going..." muttered Isaac, blinking to get rid of the stars he still saw.

{It's Fenrir to you...and you're going nowhere. Frostbite!} Ice in the form of two wolf heads formed behind the necromancer, then bit down on his ankles, holding him down.

{Know that the wolves attack as one...move as one...think as one...all in!} Fenrir howled, the nine other wolves around Isaac joining in.

"Wait...are you sure about this?"

{Positive. Alpha Strike!} The wolves dashed in to engage their prey. Isaac plunged his right arm into the ground, impaled the nearest wolf, but to his surprise the wolf turned into ice, which surrounded the bone spear, stopping Isaac from being able to retract it.

"Tsk...they become ice when they die?" Isaac fired a bone spirit at a second wolf, then fired his left arm at a third one. As both died, they both fired icicles at the necromancer, the ice sticking to him as the barrage connected.

"...You are sending them on suicide runs? How honourable of you." remarked Isaac dryly.

{Well, as honourable as you are, in sending what Rylan believed were Mia and the people of Fridgt against him. And wolves will be sacrificed if the pack wants to take down a large prey...} The remaining six wolves dashed in. Isaac's left bone spear reformed as he slashed at the wolves, but everytime a wolf died more and more ice began to accumulate on him. Soon, there were no wolves left, but the ice had completely immobilised the necromancer. Seeing this, Fenrir got onto all fours then dashed towards Isaac, dodging bone spirits the desperate necromancer fired at him. The lycanthrope jumped as he reached Isaac, raising his right claw.

{Time to end this!} yelled Fenrir, slashing down with his claw.

"...In respond...I resign..." The judgemaster snapped to attention upon hearing the words, teleporting in front of the necromancer, blocking the lycanthrope's slash with his shield, then knocked the lycanthrope away with his shield. The lycanthrope fell to the ground, blue pyreflies evaporating off it until it became Rylan again. Fenrir appeared besides the hunter, thoughtful at the turn of events.

"What the...how did he...he responded to something that happened in a split second..."

{...}

"You should know, Rylan...resigning does not use the stack."

"Stack?"

[Isaac has resigned. The winners are...Rylan and Fenrir.] As the judgemaster annouced the result, Isaac regained his human form, his robe untouched by the events. The ice surrounding Isaac cracked then flaked away, the necromancer dusting the snow off his robes.

"Until next time Rylan...until next we meet..." muttered the necromancer, putting up the hood of his robe as he waddled away, the snow beneath his feet steaming as it turned black.

"Damnit, he's getting away!" The hunter fired an Ice Arrow after the retreating figure, but the attack was intercepted and blocked by the judgemaster.

"Get out of my way..." growled Rylan, frustrated.

[The battle is over. Do NOT make me give you a red card for misconduct...] The judgemaster towered above Rylan upon his chocobo, the mount utterly silent.

"Red...card...?" Rylan looked towards Isaac, but found that he was long gone, the trail of steaming black footprints the only indication of where he went.

"Look what you...where did you go?"

{The judgemaster has left...and so has Isaac.}

"Sigh...I guess we'll have to start tracking him...You lead..."

{So you can't see the black footprints in the snow?}

"Of course, but when he leaves these snowy plains, he might start travelling on rocks, through streams to hide his tracks."

{Why me? You should be able to track him down.}

"A hunter, not a ranger, Fenrir. Seriously...he's getting away..." muttered the hunter, frustration in the hunter's voice.

{Relax...Isaac's not going anyway...he's up ahead somewhere...waiting for us.}

"...How do you know?"

{I just do...let's go...} The hunter sighed, wading through the snow after the white wolf...

### Chapter 3

*What do you do...If everything you knew...was turned upside down... everything you did...amounted to nothing...if all along...you were living...a lie...*

Rylan tightened his grasp on his bow as he moved through the swamp, cringing his nose as he took in another whiff of the foul stench of rotting plant material. His companion, a large wolf, its fur as white as snow, did not seem as concerned...Rylan wondered if the wolf could smell at all.

"Are you sure that Isaac went this way?" asked Rylan to the wolf, his eyebrow rising in skepticism.

{Yes...there is no doubt about it...} commented the wolf, before continuing on. Ice formed as the wolf proceeded forward through the swamp, giving the hunter a solid surface to step on. Annoyed, Rylan batted the bugs that hovered around him, then continued after the wolf.

"Sigh...why did we have to come here...of all places?"

{In the middle of this swamp, lies an island that houses an underground temple, in which a great evil was said to have been slain...many were lost that day...legend says that once the evil being was slain, its split blood corrupted the land around it, forming what we know today as the Swamp of Sorrows...}

"Really?"

{Well...it is just a legend...} The wolf suddenly stopped in its track, so abruptly that Rylan nearly tripped over the wolf.

"What the...?"

{Isaac!}A figure was hovering above the muck, smirked at the duo, then started to rapidly move away from them.

{I'll go up ahead and try to slow him down, I'll meet up with you later!} commanded the wolf, jumping up ahead, ice forming whenever it landed.

"...er...wait up!" yelled Rylan, but the wolf had moved on. Without the wolf's presence, the ice beneath the hunter started to crack. Before it could crack completely, Rylan jumped onto a nearby floating log, looking on as the ice platform was swallowed up by the muck.

"Tsk...what the heck am I to do now..."

## Mission Start

-Catch up to Isaac before he gets away!

The log grew fangs, then turned around to bite the hunter. Rylan cursed, for how could he have mistaken a crocodile for a floating log? Jumping to avoid the fangs, he landed upon the crocodile's snout, then catapulted towards another section of the swamp. Looking for a place to land, tentacles shot out from the swamp, winded around his torso, then began to pull him in. Without hesitation, the hunter fired off an Ice Arrow directly into the mass of tentacles, a shriek emitted from the beast as it was frozen solid. Firing off an Ice Arrow, he broke off the frozen tentacles from his chest and he propelled himself forward yet again. Landing on the temporary ice platform his arrow had created, he jumped off and let off another Ice Arrow into the muck, landing on the second ice platform. Via this method, he was able to jump from platform to platform, Ice Arrowing anything that wished to pull him underneath the muck. As he finally reached the isolated island, beyond the decaying tree husks he could see a stone structure. As he ran past the lifeless trees, towards the structure, he could see that its entrance was rapidly descending. He ran as fast as he could, and at the last few metres he dashed underneath, barely making it into the temple.

The place was well-lit, even though Rylan could not see any windows or any sources of illumination. Looking behind him, he could see that there was no way back, and that the only thing he could do was move forward. Looking around, he could see he was in a large, featureless room, the walls dripping with moisture, patches of moss growing on them, the ground consisting of packed earth. At the other side of



the room, Rylan could make out Isaac. Before the hunter could approach the assassin, the wolf Fenrir appeared from the shadows behind Isaac, to take the assassin's side.

"You did well, slave." congratulated Isaac, patting the wolf on the head.

{...Thank you, master...}

"Fenrir's job was to lure you here, to your death. You should have been pulled under by the denizens that resided in this swamp, but I guess you lucked out. Fenrir...finish him off."

{...Understood...master...}

"...Fenrir?" Mist began to form around the wolf as it got larger and larger, towering over the hunter, its eyes became blood red, blood dripped off its fangs and its claws.

"Fenrir Lunaedge had a different title before he became the Spirit of Friendship long ago...would you like to know what it was?" chuckled Isaac as he melted into darkness. The great wolf let out a bloodcurdling howl, then charged towards the hunter.

"He was called...The Deserter..."

Warning! Warning!

Mini-boss battle:

Name: Fenrir

Nickname: Lunaedge

Race: Spirit Wolf

Class: Luna Berserker

Title: The Deserter

Element: Ice

Final Attack: Luna Edge

"Fenrir...what are you doing?"

{What do you think? Killing you of course...}

"Why?"

{Because Master Isaac desires so...} The hunter dodged the spirit wolf's attack, but was forced closer and closer to one of the walls of the temple.

"Please Fenrir...I do not want to hurt you..."

{What a pity...cause I do!} The hunter ran up the wall as the wolf swiped at him with his left claw, then pushed against the wall to propel himself forward, landing on the spirit wolf's back.

"You're not like this...please...wake up...wake up!"

"It is useless...that is his true nature...Fenrir, show him why you are known as a Luna Berserker...Berserk!"

{Yes...master...} The wolf's tail knocked Rylan off the wolf's back into the wall as Fenrir let out another howl. His fur glowed white as each individual hair became fine icicles, mist spewing from his mouth as the creature breathed...

\*\*\*\*\*

"Awww...isn't he cute..." commented a woman as she cradled a little baby boy in her arms. The baby giggled as his mother tickled him, his arms randomly grabbing things in his reach, a silver pendant hanging around his tiny neck.

"That's because we're lucky and he takes after you," laughed a man, as he walked over to peer at his son. "Look, he has your eyes and your ears...Oh, look, he even has your nose..." Reluctantly, the woman handed the child over to his father, who proceeded to make funny faces to the boy, which resulted in another fit of giggles.

"Nonsense, look, he has your chin... Ooo...look at his hands, they're so tiny!" The woman sighed happily, content with the moment at hand...

"Open up!" commanded a voice, followed by a series of knocks upon the door. Clearly annoyed at getting visitors during their private moment, the man handed the child over to his mother, then went to answer the door. To his surprise, he saw three people standing at his doorway, all donning robes showing that they were mages. The mage that knocked on the door was a male, his hood let down. He was flanked by the other two mages, whose hoods were up, obscuring their faces.

"What is the meaning of this?!?"

"We are here to take care of that thing," declared the male mage, pointing to the baby boy.

"That thing is MY SON!" raged the man.

"We've talked about this before... He is... no longer your son, but something that can become a danger to us all. He must be taken care of before he ever gets the chance..." spoke the mage calmly as he coldly looked at the child.

"Blurghh!" interjected the baby boy, menace radiating off him.

"He must be destroyed..."

"He's just a child! Isn't there any other way..." pleaded the mother.

"No...he's too much of a threat to the village...it's the only way..."

"NO! I can't allow it...I will not allow it!" yelled the man. He waved out his right arm, a wave of ice rushing in its wake. The mages jumped backwards, out of harms way. In a flash, he created an Ice Wall in between the mages and the door, temporarily blocking them. He then proceeded to rip a hole in the air, creating a portal in the air, black mist swirling out of it. "Go, go! Take him with you." The mages flung fireballs at the wall, but the wall held for now. The child's mother hesitated, reluctant to leave her friends, family, her home behind, but if her husband was willing to do so then so would she. Without any more thought she plunged into the portal then vanished.

"Dispell!" yelled the three mages at once, finally shattering the wall of ice. They confronted the man, who was ready to jump into the portal himself.

"Stop letting your feelings cloud your judgement! Think rationally for a moment...Do you really want such a monster to go free!" argued the male mage, who cursed under his breath for not foreseeing that this would happen. The man ignored him and jumped through the portal. The mage tried to stop the man, but fell to the floor as the portal collapse.

"Darnit!" cursed the mage, hitting his hand against the wall.

\*\*\*\*\*

The wolf opened his mouth, firing icicles at Rylan so fast that the hunter could not react. Rylan closed his eyes, putting his right hand in front of his eyes as he braced himself for the attack, but all he could he was the shattering of glass. Opening his eyes, he could see that his cloak had moved to block the icicles, shattering after it had done so.

{Now that your glass shield is down...} The wolf fired another volley of icicles. The hunter dodged left, then started to run horizontally on the wall, avoiding the spray of icicles behind him as Fenrir ran to catch up to him. The hunter jumped off the wall, hit the ground, then promptly fell down. As he looked down, ice was forming around his ankles, locking him down in place. Rylan stood up, vainly trying to free himself from the frostbite.

{It ends!} The wolf clawed down, but stopped right before the claw connected. The creature looked in great pain as it lowered his claw, the wolf looking pleadingly at Rylan.

{Rylan...please...kill me...kill...me...}

"But I can't!" protested the hunter.

{Kill me...before I kill you!} The wolf raised his claw once again, the crazed look returning to his eyes.

{Fjtgz, Gfhle Syvd, aldnllz yfs ljls...}

"But I can't..."

{Diosd hl...yl nfft zvd efl...dyl vztj dyfzk jvo nfft ev dv yfh fs rill yfh rivh Fsggp's kifx...}

"I hope you are right...Aimed Shot!" Quick as a flash the hunter drew an arrow, pulled as hard as he could on his bow's string, then let it go. The force snapped the bow's string in half as the arrow punched a hole in the wolf's head. The wolf stopped, then collapsed to the ground, his body turning into blue pyreflies.

{Thank you, Rylan...thank you...} muttered Fenrir with his last breath, then disappeared completely.

"Useless cretin...I guess I'll have to finish you myself..." muttered Isaac as he reappeared. He wore a brown flax robe, a ceramic mask adorned his face, a katar grasped in both hands.

"Shouldn't be that hard...seeing that you're defenseless..."

Isaac charged towards the unarmed hunter, raising up his right katar. The hunter grimaced, then grabbed his broken bow in his right hand, wielding it like a melee weapon. "Dark Sight!" The hunter slashed out at the approaching assassin with his bow, but the bow passed right through. The assassin became immaterial, passing through the hunter, who felt cold as the assassin did so.

"Die! Savage Blow!" The assassin rematerialized, a red symbol briefly appeared in front of the assassin. He slashed three times with both katars, each hit blocked by his quiver of arrows before bursting into blue pyreflies.

"Tsk, Sonic Blow!" The assassin unleashed 8 consecutive hits on the hunter, but by then the hunter was ready, twirling his bow to block the attack.

"Who's defenseless now?" taunted the hunter.

"You are...Assaulter." Rylan closed his eyes as he blinked. He felt a cool breeze rush past him. He opened his eyes. The assassin was no longer there. He turned around...then stumbled as a deep gash opened up on his chest, his bow dispersing into blue pyreflies as it split into two. Isaac stood behind Rylan, his right katar drenched in blood.

"Game over, Rylan...game...over..." The assassin crouched then dashed forward to deliver the finishing blow. Rylan braced himself...

...then opened his eyes. Isaac had stopped dead in his tracks, mere inches away from him, the sneer on his face frozen in place.

"What the...?" A blade was stabbed into the ground to his right, its blade glowing a florescent yellow. The hunter quickly turned around, but could only see a bare glimpse of a retreating figure.

"Huh?"

{...Osl dyfs...ljtgz...}

"Who are you!?"

{Yoiij...Evz'd ngsdl dfhl...} The voice in Rylan's head faded away, filling his head with more questions than answers. He stared at the blade to his right, then carefully grasped his right hand around it...

*Strive to become one with nothing...for when nothing remains everything is equally possible...*

The hunter twirled the Z-saber around, blocking both of the assassin's katars. Isaac staggered backwards, the sudden appearance of the weapon catching him offguard. Seizing his chance, the hunter slashed at both of the assassin's katars. His blade cut through them as if the cold steel was butter, cutting halfway through the assassin's right wrist in the process. The assassin knelt on the ground, gasping from the assault.

"Give up..." suggested Rylan, pointing his Z-saber at the fallen assassin.

"You have come this far...and still you understand nothing..." The assassin slammed his left fist into the ground as he got up. Rocks formed from the blow rose up around the assassin, as if levitating. Rylan could see wiring poking out from the wound he inflicted on the assassin's right wrist, electrical sparks jumping in between the gaps.

"You know...nothing..." The assassin removed his mask and threw it on the ground, the ceramic mask shattering into countless pieces.

"...What..."

"You are nothing more than a copy, something that is destined to fade into darkness..."

"...What..." Shivers ran down Rylan's spine. He knew the person standing before him. He had seen him countless times before...in the mirror. The person standing before him...was himself...

{Yl hgj nlgi jvoi rgpl, aod yfs hfze fs yfs vnz.}

"...What does this mean?"

"You gallivanted around the place, thinking that you were the hero of this story. Heroes aren't born, they are made, moulded by the people around them, the actions they take, the events they experience, to become the legends they are. Enough with these illusions of grandeur Rylan! Time to wake up!" A fluorescent green Z-saber appeared in Isaac's hand, his right wrist regenerating from the wound Rylan gave him.

"I'll show you the true skills of a legendary warrior!"

\*\*\*\*\*

{You're back, Ninetails.}

{I've been to see him...he looks a lot like you.}

{I know...it's...eerily disturbing.}

{What does it mean?}

{It means that the end to this world has finally begun...maintain surveillance on him...}

\*\*\*\*\*

"You were never chosen by the Ideals..." hissed Isaac, slashing down with his Z-saber. Rylan parried the hit with his saber, but only barely managed to do so.

"The Ideals?" Rylan was forced to defend as Isaac attacks became fiercer and fiercer.

"They were merely mocking you, lending you power only to withdraw it from you when you needed it the most. That is why Fenrir listened to me...he was in cohorts with me all along..." Isaac swung down his blade at the hunter. Rylan parried, but the force broke his guard, Isaac able to slice through the hunter's chainmail. Before the reploid could withdraw, Rylan quickly slashed upwards at Isaac. Z-saber met metal, tearing a hole in Isaac's chest.

"Tsk!" muttered the reploid, slashing out with his sword. As Rylan dodged, he could see wires running through the hole he had created before the hole closed up.

"You're...a robot?"

"You may have my abilities...but you do not have my battle experience!" roared Isaac. He started to glow red hot as he charged towards Rylan, his Z-saber bursting into flames.

"Shouenga!" He jumped up as he attacked with a rising slash. Rylan backflipped, the heat from the attack terrible. He looked up, and saw Isaac was glowing an earthy brown, pointing his saber downwards.

"Tsuibangeki!" He slashed down, trying to impale Rylan on his downwards saber. The hunter quickly dodged out of the way, slashing the boulders created in the attack's wake. Isaac started to glow icy blue, mist forming around his saber.

"Shougetsujin!" Isaac slashed upwards with his saber, a ice crescent blade created in its wake. Rylan brought his saber out to block the incoming blade, but the attack did not cease, so the hunter was stuck blocking it.

"Isn't that...Luna Edge?"

"Buraitotsu!" Isaac glowed electric yellow as he dashed forward, electricity dancing on his Z-saber. Before Rylan could even move, the maverick hunter had plunged his saber directly into his chest, the hunter gasping as a thousand volts surged through his body. Isaac withdrew his bloodsoaked blade from the hunter, who collapsed to the ground, his blood soaking the ground.

"Please...let this be the end of this madness..." muttered Isaac, walking away from the hunter...

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Total darkness engulfed the hunter. Was this death? He did not know...how could he know if he was still alive...if he still existed? The last thing he remembered was being pierced by one of Isaac's katars, straight through his chest. Looking around, he could sense illumination to his right. Turning around, he could see a blue projection, rippling as if the screen was submerged under water. Rylan went up to the screen to touch it, but jumped back as images, tinted in blue, began to play upon the screen. The hunter tried to look away, but found that his gaze was transfixed onto the screen...

A lone priest staring down a cloaked figure, a bear, a wolf, a kitsune and a dragon standing behind him...

The same priest, running frantically from the bear, a warrior rushing in to defend him...

The wolf pouncing, snapping up the warrior in its jaws and chomping down, the sound of broken bones could be heard, a shocked look on the priest's face...

A necromancer, facing down the kitsune, two swords of light materialising in the kitsune's hands as he charged...

A death knight, falling off a cliff after being knocked off by a mighty swipe of the dragon's tail...

The images began to speed up, blurring together. After a while, the images slowed down, allowing Rylan to see a lush forest, the air polluted with pyreflies. Rylan could see two mages, standing within a circle of fiends. The image zoomed in on the pair, letting the hunter examine the mages more closely. The larger of the two, a male, was breathing heavily, fireballs within his open hands. The smaller of the pair was a female, who held a baby in her hands. In front of the mages, also within the circle, was Isaac, a bear, a wolf and a kitsune behind him.

"...I'm sorry, dear...but you have to leave without me. I'll hold them off for now...just take our son and go..."

"But...but..."

" I said GO!" yelled the man. Turning around, he combined both spheres of fire, then unleashed the fire spell Pyroblast at the fiends behind them, consuming all those that got in the wake of the huge fireball.

" Remember, I'll always love you..." muttered the mage, who started to glow red.

" And I love you too..." trailed the female mage. Taking one last look at her husband, she dashed towards the gap in the fiends. Fiends on both sides tried to take her down, but the female mage raised her hand to her mouth, her hand glowing blue as ice formed around the legs of all the fiends around her, immobilising them as she disappeared into the forest. Sensing the departure of the female, the lesser fiends surrounding them started to break ranks and chased after her.

{Looks like she got away} commented the kitsune.

"...Fenrir...stay behind and finish off this mage, we will take care of that woman" muttered Isaac.

{Understood, my Liege.} Isaac, Ursa and the kitsune teleported away, leaving behind Fenrir. The wolf looked at the mage, who had completely transformed into Ifrit. The fiend let out a howl, then started to grow larger and larger, dwarfing Ifrit before taking a swipe at him.

The image skipped to the female mage. She was cut and bleeding everywhere...she had long lost her shoes during the pursuit, so the bramble she ran across, ran through to get away, was able to tear her flesh open. When she could run no further, she laid down her son underneath the bough of a tree, then projected a shield of ice around both of them as she saw the incoming fiends. The fiends started to rain blows on the shield, draining the female mage to the point where she finally collapsed, the shield breaking into shards of ice outwards. The shards of ice impaled anyone within its range, but it was not enough to stem the flow of fiends. A lizard fiend rushed in, saw that the mother's body was protecting the child, then made as to claw the body in half. In a flash, the fiend's claw was cut off, then ice sprouted through its chest, killing the fiend instantly. As the fiend's body dispersed into pyreflies, a cloaked figure could be seen, a sword made from crystalline ice protruding from his right sleeve.

"Ma'am, are you alright? Ma'am!" urged the figure, but the female did not stir. The figure took her pulse, but could not find one. Underneath the mother, he could see a baby, who must have been crying. The figure did not hear any sound though...the mother must have Silenced the child to stop it giving away their position. Picking up the child in his left hand, the figure retracted his ice sword, looking upon the fiends approaching.

"May this fire burn as fiercely as the undying rage I feel now! FIRAJA!" roared the figure. Flames erupted from the ground, the firestorm burning to dust the trees, the shrubs, the fiends, the heat so extreme that the ground turned to lava. The mage maintained the spell for an entire minute before releasing it. As the dust cleared, the mage could see that Isaac had projected a golden shield around himself, the kitsune and the bear untouched by the terrible heat.

"Mm...I choose you, Kyuubi. Crush him."

{...Understood} Suddenly the vision paused...the people locked in position, not a thing stirred on the screen. Except for the kitsune. The kitsune turned around, as if looking towards Rylan, dusted off his robes, then walked closer to the hunter. When he reached the screen, it rippled ever so slightly as he passed through it, becoming coloured as he got to the other side. Surprised, Rylan tried to back up and ended up tripping, staring up at the figure before him.



{I mean you no harm, Rylan. My name is Kyuubi, the Seeker of Truth.} The kitsune's voice in his mind sounded assuring, soothing, calming down the hunter.

"You...you were the one who gave me the Z-Saber..."

{Yes...it was me...}

"...What was that...Ursa...Fenrir...and you...what happened?"

{It is a merely an event, that happened long, long ago, suspended in time.}

"But...why did you guys do such terrible...?"

{Isaac was our master...is our master...but his hold over us is waning...his time in this world is soon coming to an end...something Isaac loathes, dreads...The child you saw was you, when you were young...the people you saw die your parents...}

"...My...parents?"

{Are you going to rephrase everything I say into questions?} laughed the kitsune.

"Oh...sorry...like Isaac said...I don't know anything...anything at all...I have all these questions I'm burning to ask...What is he? Who is Isaac? Why does he look like me."

{Isaac is a shapeshifter, a morphling, an illusion...he has no true form...he is able to adapt his appearance to look like anyone, even you, as you are aware.}

"Where is he from? What was he talking about when he meant chosen? Am I chosen? If so..."

{Woah, woah...slow down. I can answer all your questions, but we have precious little time. You have lost a lot of blood...and soon Isaac will claim your life with his scythe. Take my hand...you'll be revived, and all your questions will be answered...if only momentarily...} The kitsune offered Rylan his paw, but the hunter was reluctant to grab onto it.

"How do I know...this isn't some sort of trap...like how...Fenrir..."

{How badly do you want these questions to be resolved? How long have they plagued your mind...about who you are...what is going on...everything? And all I am asking for in return is for you to let me help you.} Looking at the kitsune's right paw, Rylan sighed, then finally decided to hold onto it. His hand grasped around the paw, he felt the softness of the kitsune's fur, then his hand went right through it. The hunter gasped, looked up to the kitsune's face, who was smiled softly as he faded away.

{Thank you...for believing in us...Rylan...} The kitsune faded away as Rylan stumbled, falling as the floor disappeared. The darkness was cast away, to be replaced by a glaring light, light so bright it utterly consumed Rylan. Words, faces, places, events all flowed into his mind, so overwhelming that he could not breathe. Soon, he too faded away...

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*I don't recall ever calling myself a hero...I have always only fought for the people I believe in...*

Isaac paused, sensing something was wrong. Hesitant at first, he turned around, only to see Rylan was slowly getting back up to his feet. The hunter panted, drained from the effort, smiled weakly at Isaac. He fished through his left pocket, then revealed a stone the size of his palm, a tree engraved on it, which began to glow with a harsh light.

"Is that a Selesnya Signet...no wait...that's...an Earth Seal..." Realisation hit Isaac, who immediately drew his Z-saber and charged. Rumbles could be heard as lightning assaulted the temple, the building shaking from the blows. As the maverick hunter approached Rylan, the hunter raised the stone to the roof. Lightning tore a hole through the roof, engulfing Rylan in a flash of light, illuminating the dank temple. Seeing that he was too late, Isaac jumped back, shielding his eyes from the harsh light...

Rylan has obtained the element of Thunder.

Isaac uncovered his eyes, blinking to chase away the flashes of light that he still saw. Moonlight was shining through the hole the lightning tore open, shining down upon the figure that now stood there. He was clothed in a pearly white silk robe, the sleeves so long they completely concealed his hands. The barest hint of a tail, white and velvety, poked out under the robe. The only uncovered part of the figure's body was his head. Long, slender ears protruded from either side, soft white fur covered his snout. However, what was most striking was the figure's bright yellow eyes, for the figure's gaze seemed to pierce through the darkness itself, through the depths of Isaac's soul.

"...Sensei Ninetails..."

Name: Kyuubi

Nickname: Ninetails

Race: Kitsune

Class: Blademaster

Subclass: Sage

Title: Seeker of Truth

Element: Thunder

Final Attack: Flash Lightning

{You do not seemed to have changed a bit, Uvslxy. Reckless as always.}

"Uvslxy? What do you mean? My name is Isaac, dagnamit!"

{You may deny it...but you are still who you are, Uv.}

"Silence! I've changed! I am no longer that weakling...I discarded that name long ago...when I couldn't save her...when all I could do was watch her die..."

{You say that you have changed...but you are still as cowardly, as weak as always.}

"Shut up, shut up, shut up! I am Isaac, Lord of this Realm, and I will not be mocked by a mere pawn!" Isaac's Z-saber glowed red as the reploid charged towards the blademaster.

{Pointless.} Before Isaac could reach the blademaster, his legs gave way and he fell to the ground, paralysed.

{Rylan has the ability to control the element of Thunder in this form...which runs through your circuits, controlling your every move. Give up...there is no way that you can win in that form.} Isaac could only watch, helpless, as he got to his feet, his hands frozen by his side.

"It isn't...over...yet!" Electricity surged around Isaac as he broke free of Kyuubi's grip, then immediately stabbed his Z-saber with both hands. A groan was uttered as the Z-saber cut through.

{...You...} Kyuubi flinched, but he was not the target of the attack. Isaac had driven his own Z-saber through his chest, the sword sticking out on the other side.

{Why would you...} Isaac grunted as he pulled out the Z-saber, which faded as it was pulled out. He slowly got to his feet, sparks jumping around the hole in his chest before dying out.

"Time to show you how heartless I can truly be..." The hole in his chest widened as his muscles bulged, his skin taking on the ashen colour of gloom. Bone began to form on Isaac's face, forming a bone mask, obscuring Isaac's facial features.

{So, you have chosen to reveal your true form Uvslxy...chosen to show the emptiness inside of you, the hollowness you feel deep down...fine, so be it.} Kyuubi thrust both his hands backwards, two electric yellow Z-sabers appearing from underneath his sleeves, seven more floating in a circle behind the blademaster, held up in the air telekinetically.

{Just as I thought...electricity does not run through your body...guess I'll have to do this the old fashioned way.} muttered the blademaster after finding that he could not control the beast before him.

"Let's end this..." grunted the demon. The demon slammed his oversized fists into the ground, then picked up a huge piece of the broken concrete, hurling it towards the blademaster. Kyuubi dashed forwards and slashed, passing through as the concrete split into two.

"Soulfire..." Emerald fire began to gather in the demon's hands as they began to glow fluorescent green, which the demon released onto the blademaster.

{Bladestorm.} The emerald fire formed a twister around the blademaster as it engulfed him. As the fire subsided, the demon could see that the blademaster was untouched, the seven blades circling his back now circling around his chest at tremendous speeds.

{White Lightning.} The seven blades glowed white hot as they stopped spinning, positioning themselves by the blademaster's side, the tips of all the swords pointed directly at the demon. A flash of light surged through the room as bursts of lightning were emitted from each of the seven swords, striking down onto the demon.

"Ugh...is that all you have got?" muttered the demon, disoriented from the attack but was relatively untouched.

{Final Attack...Flash Lightning.} Kyuubi aimed both Z-sabers upwards as he announced the attack. The blades hovering around the blademaster flew up through the ceiling, one by one, and were soon followed by the Z-sabers the Kyuubi held in his hands. Soon after, thunderbolts began to crash through the ceiling, surging towards the demon. The demon dodged the attacks with ease, but then realised that he was not their target...for in fact he was now surrounded by a circle of the nine blades, each impaled into the ground, each glowing electric yellow. The blademaster dashed towards the nearest blade, plucked it out of the ground, then disappeared. The demon felt a searing pain as he felt the wind whip pass him...looking down he saw that the blademaster had pierced his thick hide which the move. He turned around to look, and could see that the blademaster was near one of the blades behind him, which he plucked out of the ground yet again. Once again, the demon felt searing pain, and once around the blademaster was behind the demon, plucking out another blade from the ground. Kyuubi's attacks were unrelenting as he zoomed from blade to blade, each subsequent attack fiercer than the last. As the blademaster slashed past the demon towards the 9th blade, multiple gashes had opened up in the demon's hide. The blademaster quickly dashed towards the wounded demon, slashing down with the lone Z-saber in his hands. As he did, the temple itself rumbled, a tremendous hole forming in the roof as a pillar of lightning slammed down onto the weakened demon. As the lightning subsided, Kyuubi could see that Isaac had reverted to his human form, gasping.

"F...ngs zlmli g hgdpy rvi jvo...Slzslf Zfzldgfts."

{Jvo efe nltt, kfmlz dyl tfhfdgdfvzs xod vz jyo.}

"Dlth hl...nygd nfft ljtgz ilhlhali?"

{Yl poiilzdtj sorrlis gzdlivkigel ghzlsfg, dv sdvx yfh rivh alfzk aoiezle aj dyl diody tgdli vz. Ev zvd nvii...jvoi slpilds gil sdfth sgrl nfdy hl. Dyl vztj dyfzks yl nfft ilhlhali gil dyl dyfzks F ygml dvte yfh...gze yfs rgdl.}

"Dygd's kvve...F ev zvl bzvn yvn yl nvote ilgpd fr yl bzln dyl diody..."

{Jvo kfml yfh dvv tfddtl pilefd...gze pgilrot, jvo'il gpdfzk vod vr pygigpdli.}

"F evz'd ygml dv gpd fz pygigpdli givoze jvo, ifkyd? Srwpl jvo gtilgej bzvn hj diol felzdfdj." Isaac smiled as darkness surged behind him, forming a portal.

"Anyways...your final attack destabilised the entire building, so I would advise you to leave this place. And I bid thee farewell, Sensei Ninetails...until we meet again." Isaac mocked a bow towards the blademaster, then walked through the portal, disappearing as he did so. The entire building started to rumble as parts of the ceiling began to fall to the ground, as if obeying some sort of cue.

{I guess I have no choice then...} muttered the blademaster. He strolled through the portal...emerging at the foot of a mountain. Rylan could not for the life of him remember what had just passed beforehand. The last thing he remembered before he blanked out was talking to Kyuubi...and now the only thing he knew he had to do was climb to the top of this mountain. He grasped the handles of the two swords sheath by his sides, which both seemed oddly familiar, as he began his trip up the mountain...

## Chapter 4

*You have cheated me for the last time, Rylan...It is time to pay up...it is time...to die...*

Rylan sighed as he reached the top of the mountain. The climb had not been easy for the blademaster...many of the steps carved into the side of the mountain crumbled away when Rylan stepped on them, making the journey to the top of the mountain perilous and nerve-wracking. He tightened his grip on his Z-sabers as he reached the plateau, his head covered by the hood of his silken robes. He had bested Isaac three times now...and he did not know what desperation would drive the madman to do.

"You're late..." muttered Isaac, leaning against one of the two broken pillars that stood erect in the middle of the plateau. Rubble laid in between the two structures, remnants from the column that once spanned across the two pillars. The death knight stretched as he straightened himself up, the platemail he wore clanking as he did so. His white hair billowed in the wind, his face pale and sickly. The death knight unstrapped his broadsword and gripped it in his right hand, grinding his teeth as he did. As Rylan approached, he noticed that the sword was pitch black, that its edges were coated with dried, flaking blood, but more importantly that the death knight's right hand had begun to bleed, his blood dripping to the ground, staining it red.

"The Executioner...the dark blade forged from your own dark soul...created to match the holy blades Judge and Jury wielded by the angel Jarna..."

"I see that Kyuubi's clairvoyance still lingers within you...it matters not...for it will do you no good. As my friends know, I hate losing...I loathe it...I despise it...and I'm sick and tired of losing to you! No more games Rylan! It is time to end this...once and for all! Metamorph!" Tattered robes began to form around the death knight, his flesh withering away. A hood formed around his face, casting a shadow upon his face. The flesh on his right hand turned to dust, revealing bone, as Executioner too changed, forming the shape of a scythe, its edge glistening...with fresh blood? Rylan did not know if he really wanted to know...

{If I must become Death itself to kill you...then so be it...}

"The ability 'Metamorph' is not allowed to be performed until your opponent has performed a Job Change..."

{Well...you're playing by my rules now...} snarled Isaac. His transformation was complete. He had become the Angel of Death itself...the Grim Reaper.

"Now...all I have to do is defeat you once again..." muttered Rylan uneasily. He felt queasy in Isaac's presence...his hands quivered as he wielded his Z-sabers...he did not know how he was meant to kill Death.

{Puny mortal...do you think you can conquer Death...when millions have failed before you?} cackled Isaac. Isaac whirled his scythe, dashing in towards the blademaster and bringing it down on Rylan, so fast he could not react. The scythe ripped through Rylan's robes, blood spilling out as Rylan collapsed to the floor, breathing his last breath...

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"Now...all I have to do is...defeat...you...once...again?" muttered Rylan quizzically. He thought that he had died...but he was still alive. Was it a daydream? Rylan shook his head. He had to focus...

{Puny mortal...do you think you can conquer Death...when millions have failed before you?} cackled Isaac. The blademaster was silent...he had heard this...seen this all before. Isaac whirled his scythe, dashing in towards the blademaster and bringing it down on Rylan. Instantly the blademaster blocked the scythe with his left Z-saber, slashing through the spirit with his right Z-saber, the blade passing right through. Even though the spirit did not seem to be affected, it took a step back, as if uncertain of what had occurred.

{What...you were meant to die...} Without warning, the spirit slashed horizontally with his scythe, but almost immediately the blademaster blocked with both Z-sabers, pushing away the scythe. Electricity surged through the blademaster's Z-sabers as he slashed at the spirit. Isaac grunted as one of the charged Z-sabers connected, retreating before Rylan could do any more harm.

"Ethereal beings may be immune to physical attacks, but they are not immune to elemental or magic-based attacks." stated Rylan, electricity surging through his Z-sabers as he maintained a defensive stance.

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Isaac's heartbeat was racing. Terror gripped his heart...He was so high up...and there was nothing to stop him from tripping, plummeting to his doom...How did he get so high? Grimly he took one step after another, his heart in his mouth as he ascended the steps up the mountain. Nervous laughter escaped from the terrified assassin's mouth...he always laughed when he was nervous...it was as if he was mocking himself...laughing at his own pathetic ness...even in this world he was utterly paralysed by heights.

"Why...here...?" despaired Isaac, as he raised his right foot to step on the next step. Isaac tripped, collapsing to the floor, but he was gratefully – He had reached the plateau. There were no more steps to climb.

"Are you lost? There is nothing up here...I would advise you to turn back." Isaac got up to his feet, dusted his leather armour, looking upon the person who had addressed him. It was a person, who Isaac guessed to be middle aged, draped in dusty brown robes. Isaac could not make out the person's face...the hood of his robe concealed it from Isaac. The only thing Isaac could see was the ends of the person's hair, bluish-green, the colour of an aquamarine. Isaac could not ascertain the person's gender, but judging by

the person's build, and the hoarse-ness of the voice he heard, he hazarded a guess at Male. He was not too sure though, for he had been wrong before...

"Oh? Nothing here? I beg to differ." The assassin shook away his irrational fear of heights as he glared at the person before him, before settling his eyes on the structure behind the person. Two pillars remained erected in the middle of the plateau, a column spanning across the two pillars.

"Isn't this the remnants of Dragon's Gate...Nils?" taunted the assassin.

"What?" If the assassin was looking for a response, he got one immediately. Even though the figure had not moved a muscle, Isaac could feel the hostility radiating off Nils.

"How do you know about Dragon's Gate...human..."

"Once upon a time...humans and dragons co-existed peacefully on this world. But...Man soon lusted for war...and he lashed out at the dragons, wanting to claim this world for himself. Many lives were lost in the ensuing war...a war known as the Scouring. Seeing the pointlessness of the war, the dragons constructed Dragon's Gate, and the remaining dragons escaped through it to another world, untainted by the touch of man. Left without a foe, Man soon flourished...but could not contain his lust for war, and thus turned on his own people...such terrible wars the humans fought amongst themselves..."

"What has this got to do..."

"This gate, however, remained...one day...two dragon whelps were called across the gate by the dark druid Nergal. He sought to use their energies, their quintessence, to open Dragon's Gate...so he could enter the dragon's safe haven and harvest the quintessence of the dragons there...all in the name of gaining power... Much fighting ensued to stop this from happening, and after Nergal was defeated the dragon whelps decided to stay in this world. The female decided to give up her power, her immortality, to be with the one she loved...while the male stayed behind at the gate as its sworn keeper, to stop such a terrible event from happening again. Ring any bells, Gatekeeper?"

"Even so...that is all in the past...what has that got to do with your visit?" snapped Nils.

"Well... history is destined to repeat itself...I have come to do what Nergal could not...I will open Dragon's Gate..." The assassin flicked his wrists, two katars appearing in both hands as he charged towards Nils...

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{You even know my weakness...curse Kyuubi and his clairvoyance...I guess it's time I took things seriously then.} The spirit produced a white card, a red symbol glowing in the middle of it.

{Judge?}

[What is the matter?] The judgemaster materialised on top of his chocobo, the chocobo warking as they appeared.

[Calm down Boco...now...what seems to be the problem?]

{This.} The spirit raised the card above its head and let it go. The card levitated in the air, then burst in a flash of white light. The judgemaster blinked, then raised his whistle, blowing it at Rylan. The judgemaster urged his chocobo towards Rylan, then promptly disarmed the blademaster.

“What the...Hey!”

[Broadwords are prohibited in this fight...Spears are recommended...You are in violation of the law...and thus your weapons have been confiscated. You will be handed a yellow card for misconduct...do not break the law again.] The judgemaster handed the distraught blademaster a plain yellow card, making as to leave.

“Wait...wait! Those aren’t broadwords, they are sabers! Z-sabers!”

[They are classified as weapon class: Broadsword due to their double-edged nature. The ruling is final. No appeal is allowed.] Blue light surrounded the judgemaster as he teleported away, leaving Rylan with only a yellow card in his hand.

“Gah...A Law Card...” muttered Rylan as he put the yellow card away.

{Now you’re defenseless...a blademaster is nothing without his blades...this should be a piece of cake then...}

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“Is that all you’ve got?” taunted Isaac, slashing upwards with his right katar. Nils dodged, but the katar managed to draw blood, making the gatekeeper flinch and fall to the ground. He tried to get up, but to his surprise he could not stand upright, for his left leg had become paralysed.

“How’d like my crippling poison?” taunted the assassin.

“...I guess there’s no choice...” whispered Nils, reaching within his robes, as if searching for something.

“I thought this would be a challenge...like the previous three...but you’re nothing but a pushover! Assaulter!” The assassin disappeared as he moved at incredible speeds towards Nils, not noticing that Nils had produced a fiery red gemstone as large as both his fists combined from his robes, which started to glow red hot. Isaac’s attack connected with Nils’s chest, but was utterly ineffective...he could not even pierce his skin.

“Wha...” muttered Isaac, before Nils knocked him away lazily with his right claw, the force slamming Isaac into one of the pillars of Dragon’s Gate. Disoriented, the assassin winched as he got up unsteadily to his feet.

{Puny human, you now face before you the final dragon in this world, the fourth guardian of this realm...Shinryu, The Fallen Star...} Shinryu roared, its ferocity making the ground shake.

“Heh...no matter...I guess that I’ll just need something stronger to pierce your thick skin.” Setting his katars down, Isaac closed his eyes as he concentrated on materialisation.



"There once was an angel by the name of Jarna. Pure of heart, she wielded the holy blades Judge and Jury... delivering justice with their blessing. I am not able to corrupt such holy weapons to do my binding, but I might be able to forge a weapon to match them..."

Darkness seemed to coalesce in front of him, slowly taking on the form of a great sword. The sword was pitch black, so dark that it seemed to absorb all light. Only the hilt and the edges of the sword were different, as they were coated in dried, flaking blood. The warrior grabbed the sword in both hands...and as he did his hair began to bleach, root to tip...his skin became pasty white...his flesh began to wither away...but by then the warrior was beyond caring...beyond hope...

"As it was once said: 'Shadow lances are crafted from harvested souls. The more wicked the sinner, the keener the blade.' Thus, a wicked soul is needed...does it matter whose soul is used?"

{...Are you even human anymore, Dreamer?}

"I once was...but I soon realised that in this world...being human meant being weak...I have long since traded away my human weakness for power..."

{...You still can't accept that it was her destiny to die...can you?}

"...Silence! By sacrificing my own soul, I am able to craft the dark blade...The Executioner! It longs to cut you, longs to end your pitiful existence, and I can not deny it anymore. Time to die, dragon!"

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{...I died on that day...in my battle with Shinryu...But in death I found true power...I came back, stronger than ever...and as a token of my gratitude I granted the dragon a swift death...}

"What?"

{You just saw our battle, am I correct?}

"How do you know?"

{Because I know Kyuubi...for he was the only guardian I ever respected...that and your eyes glaze over and you remain motionless during a flashback.}

"...Why don't you attack me during a flashback then?"

{That is because of your vision...there is nothing I can do to take your life before your vision comes to past...}

"My...vision?"

{Don't play dumb...I know you have seen your own death...You may be able to see into the future to prevent things from occurring, but you know, deep down...that you will die today...and not only that...you know exactly how you will die...}

“No...you’re wrong...you’re wrong!”

{Does it eat away at you ...knowing that your death is creeping ever closer to you...and there is nothing you can do about it? Kyuubi did not give you a gift...he gave you a curse...a countdown towards your own doom...} Isaac whirled around his scythe, stopped it, then surged forward towards the blademaster, slashing down. The blademaster was able to dodge the attack relatively easily, but without his two Z-sabers he was hard-pressed to mount a counterattack.

{Why do you resist...Rylan Holger...your death has been noted...why bother doing anything at all...when the final destination is exactly...the...same...} Appearing behind the blademaster, Isaac slashed horizontally with his scythe, slashing through the blademaster’s robes, through his hamstrings, crippling him in one felled swoop. Rylan collapsed to the floor, blood soaking into his robes, turning them crimson red.

{Why...didn’t you dodge?}

“I knew I was not fast enough...no matter what I did...you would still be able to land that hit...still be able to cripple me...”

{That’s the spirit...now tell me how you die, and I’ll be happy to oblige.}

“...After you cripple me, you slash me in half with your scythe...I did not feel a thing...when I...died...” Nodding, Isaac walked up towards the fallen blademaster, shook his head slightly, then raised his scythe up and slashed downwards.

...

A teal dragon towered over Rylan, its appearance making the blademaster jump. Calming down, Rylan realised that he knew who the dragon was.

{You now stand before the final Ideal...}

“Shinryu...The Fallen Star?”

{My title has been changed since my death...I am now Shinryu, Harbinger of Courage.}

“Didn’t you die. At least...that’s what Isaac said?”

{He was speaking the truth...He did indeed best me...But my spirit lived on long after that battle.}

“...Why am I here.”

{Why did you climb the mountain Rylan...why did you face Isaac...if you knew it would only lead to your death?}

“Because...Kyuubi...I was destined to die by his hand...there was nothing that I could do to avoid my fate...one can not run away from death...we all have to go, sooner or later...”

{Know that your death is not set in stone...destiny is what you make of it.}

"But how can I...there is nothing I can do in this situation..."

{Learn not to fear death...for know that Isaac draws strength from the fear of others, as you do with rage and sorrow...}

"He draws power from Fear?"

{Yes...he used to represent both Hope and Fear...but I fear he has lost hope...he is now merely a shadow of his former self...}

"...Could I ask one more question...if I may?"

{Sure, fire away, whelping.}

"Why don't you speak in cipher...as the previous Ideals before you did...?"

{Simple...the other three were created by Isaac...I was not. He still holds power over the other three, but has none over me...Thus, they were obliged to partake in his silly word games, while I face no such obligation.}

"But..."

{Courage is the key that unlocks all doors...Remember that...}

"Courage...is the key..."

...

A metallic ring ensued as metal struck metal as Rylan parried the inevitable deathblow. Caught offguard, Isaac staggered as he was knocked away by the counterattack.

"I no longer fear you Issaac...or the death you may bring..."

{You turned...into a Bangaa...how...how...?} Golden metal grew along the lizardman's skin, forming the gilded platemail that covered the dragoon from head to tail. A symbol of the sun was carved into the breastplate, the gem of his amulet glowing ruby red. Rylan stared at the glowing red ethereal weapon in his right claw and watched as it solidified, taking on the form of a spear, a single strand of metal winding itself around the dragoon's right arm, fastening the weapon to it.

{That crest...and the Brave Lance...No...this was not meant to happen...you were meant to die...and this nightmare should have been finally over!}

"The future isss not sset in sstone...asss long asss you do not give up hope...miraclesss can occur..." hissed Rylan, his forked tongue darting in and out as the bangaa spoke. His weapon glowing red hot, the dragoon leaped upwards, pointing his spear downwards as he hurtled towards the spirit. Wisely deciding not to parry the blow, Isaac evaded, the blow shattering the rocky surface as Rylan drove his spear into the ground.

{Why wont you just die!} yelled Isaac in rage, slashing downwards with the scythe as the dragoon blocked with his spear.

“Becaussse it isss not my time to go…”

{Not your time? You are merely living on borrowed time! You were meant to die when you were born…but somehow…something spared you that fate. Ever since that day I have been stalking you…waiting to claim your life…but despite my best efforts…despite all I have done…you still will not DIE!}

“…Why do you want me dead…what’sss it to you?”

{Because I have foreseen that you will bring about an end to the world as we know it…that under your rule…your tyranny…many will suffer…I will not allow that to happen…even if it costs me…everything.}

“I have had enough of your liesss Isaac…” Rylan knelt down and whipped at Isaac’s feet with his tail, knocking him to the ground. The dragoon raised his spear to deal the final blow, but hesitated as a piercing howl sounded from the fallen angel’s scythe.

{Howl Executioner…Reaper’s Scythe!} A scream erupted from the scythe as Isaac slashed upwards…for a moment…there was silence…then…the chain of Rylan’s amulet broke, allowing Isaac to snatch it away.

{Sm sj tpjm cj H gacfar…ia icj nl jlpk…nl ycmmaf…} Isaac stared at the amulet before him as the ruby red gem dulled to complete darkness, as if reflecting the void within him. Shuddering as if in pain, Isaac crushed the gem in his hand, opening his fist to allow the shards of the gem to fall to the ground.

“Hey! That…wasss…my…” Rylan kneeled over in pain, the red aura surrounding his body growing in intensity.

{When a child of a mage is born…it is born with its full potential…but being inexperienced these newborns are unable to control their latent abilities. Thus…to stop the child from harming themselves and others, their abilities are sealed away via the wearing of a Voidstone…a stone that has the ability to negate the effects of magic. When the child is old enough, they are then trained to control their magic, to keep it in check. You…on the other hand…have never received such training…You have managed to maintain control of your abilities with its help, but without it…” Rylan roared, his eyes blazing red hot as he swung widely at Isaac.

{It is as I thought…you are not strong enough to control the beast within you…now it is time for rest for you…}

{…It will not be so easy…Dreamer…} Flames erupted from the ground around Rylan, Isaac leaping out of the way to avoid getting torched.

{No damage...but still...} The angel watched silently as he saw the fire spread in a circle, forming the crest of a dragon.

{Polymorph...Form of Shinryu, the Dragon...} Massive leathery wings sprouted from the bangaa's shoulderblades as its neck elongated. It grew in size as dragon scales began to form upon its skin. The ground quaking as the dragon slammed its tail downwards, and Isaac looked blankly onwards as yet another dragon towered before him.

Name: Shinryu

Race: Dragon Spirit

Class: Mage

Title: Harbinger of Courage

Element: Fire

Final Attack: Dragon Dive

{A mere one-headed dragon? Ceh! I'll killed two-headed dragons...even the three-headed Doom Dragon...what is another dragon to me?}

{You had Mia, Ivan, Garet, and later Felix, Jenna, Sheba and Piers to help back then...and it seems like they are nowhere to be found in this battle, does it?} sneered the dragon.

{I do not need them...Howl Executioner! Reaper's Scythe!} Yet again Isaac's scythe screamed as the angel slashed upwards with it, but yet again it was rendered utterly ineffective.

{Pathetic...Dragon's Tail...} The dragon spun as it whipped Isaac with its tail, slamming him into the ground in one stunning blow. Isaac rose unsteadily, cracks forming in the ground around him from the hit.

{Dragon's Breath...} Breathing in deeply, the dragon breathed down fire upon the fallen angel, bathing the ground in dragon fire.

[That is enough...Rylan...] The judgemaster stood amongst the flames, his left hand glowing pale yellow.

{Why do you insist on protecting him...}

[Because the laws of this realm must be followed.]

{The laws can go to hell for all I care!} The dragon seethed as the judgemaster helped Isaac to his feet.

[Go now, Isaac...the outcome of this duel has already been decided, and Rylan is victorious.]

{...Fine...it will be up to you to quell the beast though...I do not think I can do so...with the current limits in place.} The judgemaster nodded as Isaac melted into the shadows, leaving behind the ruins.

{You leave me no choice Judgemaster...prepare to die!} The dragon breathed down fire yet again on the judgemaster, but to its annoyance he emerged from the attack unscathed. Undeterred, it immediately lashed out with his tail.

[Know who you are dealing with dragon...] Blocking with his right hand, the judgemaster grabbed the dragon's tail in both hands, and with a mighty heave tossed him upwards. Enraged, the dragon spread out its wings to stop its ascent, its entire body glowing red.

{Dragon Div...} Before the dragon could unleash its Final Attack, the judgemaster disappeared, reappearing near the dragon's forehead, his speed catching the dragon offguard

[These will help soothe the beast for now Rylan, but you must learn to control your powers on your own...] The judgemaster unclipped the amulet around his neck, its gem glowing electric yellow, then plunged the amulet straight into the dragon's head. The dragon roared out in pain, then plummeted, crashing into the ground. Returning back to earth, the judgemaster calmly walked up to the dragon, the beast stirring as the dust settled.

{...Where am I...}

[Welcome back...Rylan Holger...]

{...I'm a dragon?}

[Yes...I trust you heard what Isaac had to say before you Polymorph...A replacement Voidstone has been issued to you to replace the one destroyed by Isaac.]

{So...what now?}

[Fly northwest and reach the summit of the highest mountain in those mountain ranges...your final confrontation with Isaac is waiting.] The judgemaster whistled a piercing sharp note, his chocobo appearing soon after, which the judgemaster swiftly mounted.

[Godspeed Rylan...godspeed..] muttered the judgemaster, before taking off on the chocobo.

{Sigh...there's no going back now...} Rylan shook his head wearily as he stretched out his wings, before taking off in flight into the horizon...

## Chapter 5 – The End

*The end draws near...I have been looking forward to this...*

“5...4...3...2...1...0” whispered Isaac, looking at the open notebook in front of him, the words “Rylan Holger” glistening on the yellowing pages.

“Is he dead?”

[I don't think so...] The judgemaster walked up towards the dreamer, his helmet hiding his face from Isaac.

“I guess one without a heart can not die of a heart attack...I'll just have to try something else then.”

[Is this necessary? He is flying over here as we speak, and soon after he will meet his end by my blade...]

“I guess want some insurance...in case he really is the one...why don't you take off your helmet? It must be tiresome to have it on all the time.”

[And let you see my face? I think not.]

“But how do I know you will not use this book behind my back?” grinned Isaac.

[...Firstly, I do not have the ability to read a person's name by looking at their face...and even if I did have your name, writing it down would be pointless...the Fortune Law protecting you would stop you from dying...]

“It's that good?”

[Yes...and you don't have to sound surprised...I know you know that the law makes one invincible.]

“I guess I have nothing to worry about then...I guess I better start writing then.” Isaac closed his eyes as he scribbled in the book, intent on finishing what he started...

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Neimi closed her eyes as she listened to the roar of the waterfall behind her. She sighed...she was still not used to being a commander, of the burden placed upon their shoulders, of the responsibility they entail. She just wanted to escape...if only for a moment...and it was only in the mountains would she find peace and quiet...

“GWAORGH!” A roar erupted over the roar of the waterfall, snapping Neimi out of her daydream. A fiend appeared, gusts of wind whipping through the valley as it zoomed overhead.

“A dragon…no…they were wiped out during the Scouring…it must be a fiend…” Neimi grabbed her serpent bow and nocked an arrow, both glowing golden as she took aim.

“One shot…one kill…”

“Nei…mi!” The shout broke the sniper’s concentration, making her miss her shot, the fiend oblivious to the attempt at its life.

“What brings you here…” muttered the sniper as she watched the fiend fly away. Colm wheezed, struggling for breath, before straightening himself up.

“Where have you been? Ever since Alberta Keep was attacked by fiends, there have been escalating attacks on all the major towns and cities.”

“Sorry…I just wanted a moment’s peace…how’s Glenn?”

“The Wyvern Lord is still out…Commander Selena found him and the alchemist Anila unconscious after her battle with the Golem summon…he’s currently resting in the keep.”

“Ok, lets go…I dunno if I can be of much help though…”

“Much help? You are one of the four commanders of Alberta keep, Commander Neimi the Sure Shot…you’ll do fine.”

“I hope so Colm, I hope so…” The commander took one more look at the disappearing fiend, then made her way out of the valley, back into the fray…

\*~\*

Rylan flapped his wings as he soared over the mountains, the land racing below him. He had never experienced the thrill of flying before…and the dragon found it to be exhilarating.

“GWAORGH!” Rylan’s roar thundered out, announcing his presence to the world below him. Soon after, he felt wind rush pass him – someone had dared to shoot at him. But the dragon did not care, for it was merely an annoyance to the great beast. Snorting, the dragon continued onwards towards his goal, leaving the archer far behind.

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[He has arrived.]



“He is early…Make sure he receives a warm welcome, judgemaster. I still haven’t finished up yet.”

[What if I refuse?]

“Then I’ll have to go up there myself…and you wouldn’t want that, would you?”

[…There’s no escaping destiny, is there? I know what awaits me up there…]

“It is best not to dwell on such things…”

[Fine…I pray today may bring an end to all this bloodshed.] Isaac turned and watched as the judgemaster left, the expression on his face strangely sad.

“As long as humans exist…the bloodshed will continue…there is nothing that I can do to stop that…” Isaac closed his eyes and sighed, then opened them as he grimly continued on writing…

\*\*\*\*\*

Rylan landed on a plateau on the mountain described by the judgemaster, his body shrinking as he regained his humanoid-reptilian body. He wished he could regain his human body, but he did not have a clue on how to initiate the transformation…he was utterly clueless when it came to polymorphism…

[You are here…good.] The judgemaster seemed to appear from the side of the mountain, the opening in the mountain closing behind him. Hesitating at first, the judgemaster walked towards the dragoon, uneasiness creeping into his usual confident gait.

{Where’s Isaac…}

[Strike…Judgement Thunder…] The judgemaster held his right hand in front of him, thumb facing down, as a bolt of lightning struck the ground in front of him. Grasping, the judgemaster pulled out a blade the shape of a lightning bolt, the sword glowing yellow.

[Draw your weapon…]

{Why judgemaster…}

[My name is Nylarx, bangaa…]

{But…why…}

[I am the voice of reason of this chaotic world…that is why…]

{That does not explain…}

[I said draw!] snarled Nylarx, rushing forwards as he slashed downwards, Rylan's lance materialising just in time to block the hit.

{You are not the one I want to fight…Isaac…is…} pleaded Rylan.

[And yet fight we must…] muttered Nylarx grimly. Knocking the dragoon off-balance, he lunged forwards, the tip of his sword cutting through Rylan's platemail.

[I shall show you the true power of lightning…what you gained from Kyuubi was merely the tip of the iceberg!] Electricity coursing around his blade, Nylarx slashed upwards, sending lightning bolts towards the dragoon. Rylan twirled his lance around, deflecting the bolts, then his hair began to stand on end.

[A little slow…aren't we…] Rylan twirled around, trying to use his tail to knockdown the judgemaster, but once again he had disappeared, reappearing in front of the dragoon

{How…that speed…}

[You were able to manipulate the electrical currents flowing through Isaac's metallic body when he assumed Zero's form…but you were unable to control the minute current that flows through everyone's body even yours and mine. I, however, do not suffer such limitations, for I have mastered this element. I am therefore able to increase the speed of these impulses through my body, as well as being able to slow down the speed of the impulses in yours…In short…you can not hit me…]

{So what of your speed? I have my lance, and that is all I need…} The lance in Rylan's hand glowed red hot, as if it was proving the dragoon's bold statement. Soon after the judgemaster's sword began to resonate, as if responding.

[It's…resonating…Fine…Lets end this Rylan…Disaresta…] The judgemaster disappeared as a whirlwind began to form around the dragoon. Tears began to appear in Rylan's platemail, and soon his armor was torn to shreds. Deep wounds cut themselves into the bangaa's hide, spilling his blood into the wind. Soon after, Nylarx reappeared, the winds dying out as he did. The dragoon swayed, then fell to the ground, the winds being the only thing that kept him up. The sword in the judgemaster's hand shattered, disappearing after the attack.

{An…Exe…cution…I guess…this…is…the end…}

\*\*\*\*\*

“However, Nylarx knew that it wasn't the end of Rylan…he watched as flames engulfed the dragoon's body…watched as the dragoon re-emerged, clothed in crimson robes, black wings

spread out on both sides, a fiery spear by his side. As the judgemaster had tapped into the power of a Grim Angel, so too did Rylan. Though the judgemaster struggled valiantly...in the end he was finished off by Rylan with the Execution level overdrive 'Lost Seraph'." Muttered Isaac as he wrote in the notebook.

"I guess he should be coming down here any moment...I better get ready then." Closing the notebook, Isaac got up and left the dank, dark room behind...

\*\*\*\*\*

Rylan felt something brush past his face, and noticed that it was a black feather...there seemed to be many floating in the air around him...after his wings had disappeared. His spear crumbled away, burning away on the ground, as the judgemaster fell to the ground, gasping. Even though Rylan had now somehow mastered the element of fire...he still felt cold inside. This was a death that could have been avoided...Nylarx's blood was now on his hands.

"Tell me Nylarx...why..."

"It was...because..." The judgemaster coughed up blood, his right hand covering the gaping wound in his chest left behind by the spear.

"I needed to know...if you were ready...I would not be able to defeat Isaac...so...if you couldn't defeat me...I would have...sent...you to...your...death..." The judgemaster grunted as he breathed in a deep breath, then continued.

"Only through the fury of battle could your mastery over fire be achieved..."

"I'm so sorry...Nylarx..."

"I knew of my death at your hands long ago...and I have accepted it...Isaac, however, does not. Please...Rylan...defeat him...for me..." Nylarx sighed as he closed his eyes, and thus was the voice of reason silenced...

"Nylarx..." muttered Rylan, adding the name to the list of casualties that had died because of Isaac, then headed through the doorway that had opened in the side of the mountain, and headed down the stairways within the mountain, down towards Isaac...

*After this point there is no turning back...would you like to save?*

*Saving...*

*Insufficient space in memory card.*

*Continue without saving?*

Rylan carefully made his way down the stairs, the small flame dancing in front of him providing the illuminance needed to avoid tripping down. As he finally reached the end of the stairs, the flame was snuffed out, plunging the caverns back into darkness. It was of no concern to the fire mage, however...Isaac was here...he could sense it...

“Why do you seek my destruction, Rylan?”

“It is because I seek to bring you to justice...for all you have done...”

“So you seek to destroy this world...for revenge?”

“What...” Light filled the vast caverns, revealing its smooth walls...it was as if the cavern itself was made by hollowing out the base of the mountain itself. Far in the distance, at the other side of the caverns, stood a figure clothed in black and white robes.

“I see you are admiring my handiwork, but we both know that you did not come here to admire the architecture. Tell me again...why do you seek to destroy this world?”

“I do not intend to do such thing! I merely want to destroy you!” growled Rylan.

“The end result is the same...destroying me will inevitably destroy this world too.”

“I’ve had enough of your lies!” Flames surged around Rylan, which the fire mage sent crashing down onto Isaac. Isaac watched, unflinchingly, as the shadows gathered around him and swallowed up the fire effortlessly.

“I am this world’s dreamer...without me this world would cease to exist...”

“How can the existence of an entire world rely on the survival of a single person?”

“...Rylan...have you always felt that you weren’t in control of your life...that no matter how hard you tried, you were being pushed along...like a character in a story?”

“...So what...”

“This world is a story...a story I wrote...am writing now...”

“...You’re saying that this world is a story...that this world is merely fiction?”

“Yes...and that I am this world’s narrator.”

“...I don’t believe you...I can’t believe...”

*{I think it was too early for you to mention that to him, Isaac.}*

*{He had to know...sooner or later.}*

“When faced with things that conflicts with our understanding...our narrow view of things, people tend to go through 5 stages...Denial...Anger...Bargaining...Depression then Acceptance. I think you are currently in denial...”

“Shut up! I refuse to believe you Isaac...why should I...after all you’ve done!” The air rippled around the mage as the temperature rose, his rage giving him strength.

“I guess you’ve jumped to anger...”

“Don’t you know when to shut up?!” Flames started to surge around Rylan, coiling around him, as if waiting for his command.

“If you still intend to fight, then I guess you leave me with no choice.” Darkness coalesced in the dreamer’s hands, forming the dark sword Dawn.

“Let me show you the power of a dreamer!”

Name: Isaac

Nickname: N/A

Race: Hume

Class: Mime

Title: The Dreamer

Element: Light/Shadow

Zanpaktou: Dawn and Dusk

Shikai: Dance of Day and Night

Bankai: Imagination’s Revel

“Burn him to ashes!” Hearing the command, the fire around Rylan leapt forward towards Isaac, eager to obey. Much to Rylan’s disgust, the shadows once again formed around the dreamer, negating his attack once again.

“Your attacks may have some bite to them, but unfortunately are too slow…avoiding them outright is child’s play.”

“Well then…Avoid this…Hellfire!” Rylan slammed down both his hands onto the ground, forming cracks in the ground. Fire surged forth from the cracks all around him, then leapt forth towards Isaac, bathing him in a sea of fire.

“Interesting…you have access to the Fiend level spell Firaja…” As the inferno dispersed, Rylan could see that the dreamer was unnoticed, and that even his robes were left unsinged.

“What are you…”

“Even though you have the ability to manipulate the fire that surges through this world, I have access to the darkness that dwells in people’s hearts…and there is much darkness indeed…” Before Rylan could move, he realised that shadows had formed all around him, and that the fire he commanded could not pierce it.

“Sayonara…Rylan Holger…” Isaac clicked his fingers, plunging the fire mage into utter darkness.

“Fireblast!” The fire mage made the gestures, could feel the spell build up, but before the flames could leave his palm they seemed to be swallowed up by the darkness.

{Wallow in your own despair, Rylan…Drown in everlasting darkness…} The fire mage could not break free of the darkness that held him…could not escape its clutches…no matter what he did. Soon…the deadly cold set in…Rylan thought he could feel his lifeforce ebb away…he felt cold…

So…cold…

A cold breeze stirred through the caverns, accompanied by the sound of breaking glass. Shattered ice surrounded Rylan, the mage levitating in the air, cold white mist drifting off his azure robes. His transformation complete, the ice mage fell back to the ground, thin sheets of ice forming on the ground as he did.

“It seems your affinity to ice has allowed you to master that element…as did your affinity to fire. But…know that it will take more than the mastery of two elements to defeat me.”

“It’ll take more than mere trash talk to make me lose my cool, dreamer.”

“Fine…be plunged into darkness, yet again!” Rylan looked on at the stream of darkness heading to him, a large piece of ice floating besides him. Without warning, the ice shattered into innumerable shards, the shards tearing through the darkness towards Isaac. The shadows that formed around Isaac were too torn apart, leaving the dreamer defenceless.

"I beseech thee, Dawn, lend me thy strength! Dark Wave!" Striking downwards, a wave of darkness lashed out, devouring the shards of ice. The dreamer cringed...one shard had escaped his attack, and had grazed across the right side of his face, blood trickling out of the wound.

"It seemed that your blade is not just for show...and that you are not as invincible as you thought."

"Tch, you've seen nothing yet..." The wound on the right side of his face closed up as the dreamer brandished his sword. Isaac faded away, the shadows reforming behind Rylan as the dreamer struck.

"I think I have seen enough." Turning around, Rylan grabbed onto Dawn with his left hand, ice spreading to coat the entire sword. The ice mage clenched his right hand into a fist, ice forming around it into a large icicle as Rylan plunged it towards Isaac's chest...

A brilliant light shone forth as the icicle struck, the blow shattering the weapon. The ice mage's attack had been blocked by a pane of hardened light that had formed.

"What..." Before the ice mage could finish his sentence, a burst of light erupted from the dreamer, knocking him back.

"One who walks the boundaries of light and shadow...that is the true nature of a dreamer..." Light streamed forth, melting the ice that had formed upon the dark blade Dawn, then materialised in the form of the pure white sword in Isaac's left hand.

"Do you think you can defeat a being that wields both the powers of light and shadow...one who wields both the Dawn and the Dusk?"

"We'll have to see, wont we?" Ice surrounded the ice mage's fists once again, forming the icicles that he would use as swords.

"Do you think mere ice can stand before the fury of my blades?" Isaac slashed down with Dusk, the white sword shattering the icicles with ease.

"Aren't you forgetting something?" The shards of the broken blade stirred, then slammed themselves into the panes of light that immediately formed around the dreamer, the shards dispersing into mist.

"As long as I hold the white sword of Dusk, light will immediately harden around me in response to any attempts at my life, as the shadows gather around me when I wield the dark sword of Dawn." The dreamer held forth Dusk, the white sword shining as Isaac pointed it at the ice mage.

"As the light of day disperses the morning mist, so too shall my light banish you from this realm. Devouring Light!" A flash of light burst forth, filling the caverns with its radiance as it bore down

onto the ice mage. Rylan put forth a wall of ice in front of the streaming light and watched as the light tore through it, just as it would tear through him...

As the harsh light faded away, the shadows crept back through the caverns, reclaiming their territory. However, the shadows did not dare approach Rylan, as the light shed by the shield of fire emitting from his right palm kept them at bay.

"Finally...I don't have to play rock-paper-scissors with you anymore...or should I say shadow-ice-light-fire?"

"What's...happened to me..."

"When you mastered ice, you did not lose your mastery over fire..."

"I did not mean that...why...ever since our first battle..."

"You do know that you are a fiend?"

"A...fiend? One of those...monsters?"

"Denial is a very powerful thing...it can blind us to things that are right before us...why else would the four greater fiends lead a human their strength?"

"I know that I am no longer human...but..."

"When most fiends are born, the form they take on is usually the form they keep. However...there are fiends that have the ability to change their form at will...they are known as morphlings...or more commonly as shapeshifters."

"...If I am a fiend...then why...why have I only been able to change after our first battle?"

"You changed much earlier...when you were bullied in the orphanage, you transformed into a blistering firecat...and the reason is simple. The voidstone that you wear around your neck had, in the past, restricted your abilities...suppressed them...sealed them away. However, your abilities are linked to the emotions of rage and sorrow, and during your abuse at the orphanage, the rage that surged forth within you had cracked the voidstone...the stone had been deteriorating ever since."

"Then how do you explain my ability to use magic now? I'm still wearing the necklace Nylarx gave me." The mage took out the necklace from under his robes and stared at the voidstone. No longer was the voidstone scarlet red...the crimson flames that one inhabited the stone alone were now joined by an azure mist.

"Do you feel the effects of gravity on your body?"



“Gravity? What is that?”

“A constant force that pulls down on us…Our bodies have grown accustomed to this world’s gravity, and thus we do not think much of it. It is only when you go to a different planet, where there is a different gravitational force, that we can feel its effects.”

“So…what has that got to do with me?”

“Your body has grown accustomed to the constant drain of the voidstone…your abilities have developed under its influence. Technically, if you were to take off the necklace the power of your abilities should rise exponentially…but I fear your body would not be able to handle it…you would succumb to the storm that dwells within you.”

“Oh…so that is what happened at Dragon’s Gate…”

“Yes…that is indeed correct…”

“…How do you know all this?”

“Like Kyuubi, I too am clairvoyant…Glimpses of the future are ever being painted before me…but…sometimes…some things are better not knowing…”

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{You knew long ago Isaac…knew long ago that you were only a steward of this world… and that someone more worthy than you would appear and claim both your life and your throne.}

“But…”

{There are no buts…you can not fight destiny…}

“I remember once…a historian once said that fate is not something forced upon you, nor something you yield to…rather it is something carved with your own hands.”

{So you would rather believe the historian Crawford rather than me?}

“Believing you means giving up…even if I am doomed from the start, I need to try…to have hope that things turn out for the better.”

{I pray for your sake that I am wrong then…but you should know that I never am…}

“There’s a first time for everything, right?” A nervous laugh escaped Isaac’s lips, the laugh as hollow as Isaac was now…

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Isaac stared at the wall behind Rylan, lost in thought, then shook his head furiously.

“Dangnamit! I got sidetracked again… I did not come here to give an exposition… to expand on the plot… I came here to end this story once and for all!” Gritting his teeth, Isaac pounced forth and slashed down with both Dawn and Dusk, Rylan blocking with the flame shield that had formed on his right hand. Ice formed around the mage’s left hand as he lunged forth, tearing through the barriers of light and shadow that formed around the dreamer. Isaac leapt backwards, withdrawing as soon as he felt his defenses breached… to his annoyance his robes had been singed from Rylan’s attack.

“Frozen Flames… I see you can mix your elemental attacks now…” Underneath the ice that coated Rylan’s left hand surged blue flames, the flames escaping at the tip of the icicle that had formed.

“I guess you are strong enough to advance to the next level…” The dreamer held out his two blades, the black blade of Dawn in his right hand, the white sword of Dusk in his left hand.

“Light and shadow are but two sides of the same coin… ever aware of each other but never meeting… as are these twin blades of mine. They are mirror images of each other… Didn’t you ever wonder… why it is the black sword that is called Dawn whilst it is the white sword that is called Dusk?”

“… Because they were named incorrectly?”

“No… Dawn and Dusk are both times of twilight… times of the day where both light and darkness are present… with Dawn leading into the day… Dusk sinking into the night… such is the cycle of day and night…”

“What are you trying to say… get to the point.”

“Fine… Rise Dawn… Fall Dusk…” The edge of the black sword in Rylan’s right hand glowed with a brilliant light as the edge of the white sword in his left dulled, becoming as black as the night.

“Cycle of Day and Night.”

“… So all of that was to change the colour of your blades?”

“Laugh all you want now, but when the dawn rises, it will be I who will have the last laugh…” Isaac slashed downwards with both swords at Rylan, the mage blocking with his icicle sword. The sword shattered yet again, but the mage fell back in time, out of the way of the twin blades

“They are no different than last time…”

“No different? Take a closer look…” Rylan looked at the two blades, and realised that the swords were changing, ever so slightly…the white edge of Dawn was spreading, covering up its original dark surface, while the dark edge of Dusk was also surging forth, swallowing up its original white surface.

“…What will happen when Dawn becomes completely white, and Dusk becomes completely black…”

“You’ll just have to wait and see…I promise it will be a blast…” grinned Isaac.

“I’ll rather not…” Flames surged around Rylan’s right arm, a whip of fire lashing forth as the mage flicked his wrist, coiling around Dawn’s edge. The dreamer quickly slashed at the whip, breaking Rylan’s grip on the weapon, then slashed the air with Dusk then Dawn. Rylan braced himself, putting forth a flame shield as a wave of darkness then light crashed down on him.

As the dust settled, Rylan realised that the caverns was slowly dimming…that the ambience that once filled the caverns was slowly dying out. As the lights gave out, the only significant source of light came from the sword held in Isaac right hand, which by now had turned completely white.

“Arise, Noon!” Dusk faded away into the shadows, plunging the room in absolute darkness as Dawn began to glow, the glaring light subsiding, revealing the broadsword Noon in its wake.

“Where did Dusk go…”

“It has returned to the shadows for now…Noon is all I need for now.” Gripping Noon in both hands, Isaac slashed upwards with the massive broadsword, a vertical crescent of light formed in its wake screaming towards Rylan.

“Firewall!” A wall of fire appeared in front of the mage, but was torn aside, the mage forced to teleport out of the way of the attack. Rylan watched as the crescent of light screamed onwards, carving up the floor. Seeing that his attack missed, Isaac slashed yet again, creating a horizontal crescent of light. Icicles formed around Rylan as he jumped, the mage firing the shards of ice at the dreamer as he fell back down again. Seeing this, Isaac aimed Noon in the general direction of the icicles, a beam of light bursting forth, vaporising the missiles Rylan had sent at him.

“There is nothing that compares to the destructive power of Noon…”

“There must be a way…that weapon must have a weakness…”

“No it does not…anyways…it is over…” Rylan felt something cold crawl up his legs…Looking down, he could see that the darkness was coiling around his body, rooting him down in place.

“As Dusk returned to the darkness, it plunged all of the caverns into darkness…amplifying my shadow abilities. Now…prepare to die!” The dreamer slashed upwards with his broadsword,

forming yet another crescent of light in its wake. Rylan watched, helpless, as it screamed towards him...

The crescent of light dispersed before it could hit the mage as the light returned to normal levels in the caverns. Rylan fell to the ground, gasping, the shadows retreating from him once again.

"Sigh, I guess time was up..." The dreamer held a white blade in his right hand, a black blade reappearing in his left.

"What happened..."

"I can only use Noon for a limited amount of time...guess you got lucky. But...watch...the cycle repeats..." Once again, a white edge appeared on the black blade in Isaac's left hand, while a black edge appeared on the white blade in his right.

"Didn't you have Dawn in your right hand? Why is it in your left hand this time..."

"Know that as the dawn gives way to the day, so too does the day give way to the dusk...Dawn has turned to Dusk as Dusk has turned to Dawn...representing the neverending cycle of day and night."

"But...isn't the end result the same?"

"No...Dusk is in my right hand now...and wouldn't you like to know what happens when the night swallows up the last of the light in this blade..."

"I'm not going to give you that chance..."

"You've tried everything, right...what more can you do..." A snowflake landed on Isaac's nose, making him pause.

"Snow..."

"Countless of hapless traveller have succumbed to the might of a blizzard...and it time for me to add your name to that list...Diamond Dust!" Snow drifted down from the ceiling, then thundered down, filling the caverns with their presence.

"Tch...Blizzaja..." Isaac looked around, but found to his frustration he could see anything...all he could see was white. As the blizzard cleared, the dreamer could make out walls of ice surrounding him, trapping him.

"Shatter!" yelled Rylan, his voice accompanied by the sound of cracking glass. The walls around the dreamer had crumbled, splintered, the shards of ice left in its wake hovering in the air, all pointed towards Isaac.

“Interesting display, but you are too late Rylan…Take a look around you…the caverns have been filled with Dawn’s glory…” A glaring light had filled the caverns, the walls reflecting a light so harsh it was painful to look at.

“It matters not…this is the end!” The icicles that swarmed around Isaac zoomed towards the dreamer, the shards raining down upon him

“It is…for you…Awake, Night…” The sword in Isaac’s left hand, the twilight sword of Dawn disappeared in a burst of harsh light, the explosion disintegrating the incoming projectiles of ice. As the light faded away, Isaac was holding yet another massive broadsword, coloured as black as the night.

“Feel the terror that is the night…” The dreamer slashed upwards with his dark broadsword, a crescent of darkness created in its wake.

“All I have to do is weather this storm…then I’ll have my chance yet again…” muttered Rylan, dodging the wave yet again. The dreamer followed up the attack by slashing horizontally, sending a horizontal dark wave at the mage.

“This is just exactly the same as Noon…” taunted Rylan, jumping to avoid the attack.

“Not exactly…” The wave of darkness broke apart, taking on the form of bats as the zoomed towards Rylan while the mage was still air bound. Seeing this, icicles formed around the mage, striking down the bats as he fell back to the ground. Rylan got back up to his feet, the twitching corpses of the bats fading away into the shadows as he stood up.

“Is that all you have got?”

“No…Prism of Light!” Panes of hardened light appeared around the mage, connecting as they trapped him within his prison of light.

“Teleport!” yelled Rylan, the mage disappearing, reappearing as he slammed into one of the sides of his prism.

“It is pointless…Constrict!” The walls of Rylan’s prison closed in on him, crushing down on the mage. Isaac strolled up to Rylan, watching as the mage struggled to break free.

“Know that the cycle of day and night gets stronger with each passing day, and that a day has already past.” The light prism shattered, depositing Rylan on the ground as the light returned to normal levels.

“So…your strength is greatly reduced between the periods of Noon’s and Night’s manifestation…all I have to do is defeat you now…”

“I think not...the time for games is over...you are currently struggling with my Shikai...I wonder how you would fare against my Bankai...” The dreamer brought his twin blades together, pointing the twilight blade of Dawn upwards, Dusk downwards.

“Ban...kai!” Dusk glowed brightly, disappearing in a burst of light as Dawn dispersed in a mist of darkness. “Imagination’s Revel!” Rylan cringed, waiting for something to happen...anything...but was a tad disappointed when nothing happened.

“Err...is something meant to happen now?”

“It is done...I have unleashed it...my bankai...”

“Grr...if you will not take me seriously, then so be it!” Flames surged around Rylan’s arms, the mage firing them towards Isaac. The dreamer smiled, a blue cannon materialising on his right arm. The dreamer fired a burst of energy from the cannon, the resulting explosion blowing Rylan’s attack away.

“What?”

“With my bankai... I can use any attack...do any move...nothing is impossible to me now...With this bankai...I have become more powerful than you could ever imagine.”

“You’ll have more than enough to gloat when you are dead!” yelled Rylan, icicles forming upon his hands as he lunged forward.

“Not so fast.” The cannon disappearing from his right hand, the dreamer clicked his hands, freezing the mage in mid-air.

“I have the ability to freeze time at will now...amongst all the other things I can do.” Isaac walked past the mage, clicked his fingers and watched as Rylan crashed to the ground.

“There must...be a weakness...”

“There is one...but in this world it does not exist.” Perturbed, Rylan created an icicle, and hurled it at the dreamer, only to watch the dreamer shatter it with the two familiar fluorescent yellow blades that had appeared in his hands.

“Aren’t those...Kyuubi’s...”

“Mmm...Zero used to have a similar blade...but instead of yellow it was fluorescent green...” muttered Isaac, looking at the blades that he now wielded. “Oh, you were saying?”

“How...”

“I’ve already said… I can use any ability… wield anything weapon I desire…” Isaac pointed at Rylan with his index finger and middle finger, the two fingers glowing white hot.

“White Lightning.” Lightning surged from his fingers towards Rylan, the mage teleporting away in time. Looking around, Rylan realised that Isaac had disappeared.

“Let me show you a technique you never got around to doing… Dragon Dive.” Looking up, Rylan realised Isaac was near the ceiling of the caverns, flames forming around him in the shape of a dragon. The dragon spread out its wings and roared, shaking the caverns themselves, then dived down towards Rylan, bathing the ground in waves of fire.

“Shinryu’s final attack… Dragon Dive… if only it was less suicidal.” muttered Isaac, his feet once again planted on the ground.

“… You do know fire is my element, right?” The flames died down, the mage untouched by the inferno.

“Of course. I’m trying to make a point here. Seriously…”

“And I’ve already made it clear to you… I do not care.”

“Why don’t you just give up… you merely have mastery over the elements of fire and ice… while I have mastery over everything in my current state… there is absolutely no chance you can beat me now.”

“I’ve already told you… I do not care!” Ice formed around his right arm yet again, the mage dashing forwards and striking down with the icicle.

“It is pointless…” muttered Isaac, the icicle shattering as it struck the golden barrier that surrounded the dreamer.

“A law currently protects me… it makes me immune to both physical and magical attacks.”

“This… can’t… be happening… Fireball!” The mage hurled a ball of fire at Isaac, and watched as the spell fizzled.

“Answer me this… why do you still seek to destroy me, Rylan?”

“For Mia… for all the people in Alberta Castle… in Fridgt… I will make you pay… make you answer for all that you have wrought…”

“So you seek to destroy me… out of revenge? You seek to rob this world of it’s dreamer over something so petty?”

“I do not need any other reason…Revenge is a good enough reason for me.” Rylan got to his feet, fire gathering up in his palms yet again.

“…When a dreamer awakes…what becomes of the fading dream left behind…” Isaac clicked his fingers, snuffing out the flames in Rylan’s palm. “Is it still there, waiting for the dreamer to return…or does the world disappear, a bubble popped as soon as the dreamer awakes…lost forever…”

“What are you saying…”

“I am saying that I am this world’s dreamer…trapped in this neverending dream. I want to wake up, to finally be free…but I fear what will become of this world once I awakened…” The dreamer seemed saddened, his expression solemn.

“But still…one can not remain in dreams forever…that is why…that is why I must end this story…and only with the death of this story’s main character…only with your death am I able to leave this place.”

“…If what you say is true…what will happen to this world when you leave?”

“I do not know! And neither do I care anymore…I have stayed in this world for far too long…my grip on reality is slipping…my sanity is shattering…soon I would cease to exist…I can not afford to waste any more time. Cage of Hands!” Disembodied hands, clad in white gloves, appeared all around Rylan, holding the mage down.

“Key of destiny…come to me…” A keyblade appeared in Isaac’s right hand, a notebook appearing in his left.

“Go me na sai…This is truly The End…” Isaac pointed the keyblade at Rylan, the weapon glowing white hot. A burst of harsh light shone forth, and Rylan slowly began to disappear…

## The End

“Finally…the story has ended.” The narrator sighed as he put down his pen, closing the notebook that he had been writing in.

{Jo, I don’t think the story ended like that…}

“It’s my story, and I’ll damn well end it the way I want!” The narrator sighed as he got up, adjusting his glasses as he took one more look at the hooded figure before him.

{Don’t you have an obligation to the story…you are its creator…}



“I’m sorry…but…unlike you, I am merely human…I have grown tired…grown weary…I’m sorry…”  
The narrator sighed, dragging himself out of the room, closing the door behind him.

{It seems that the original narrator has abandoned this story…it matters not. Know that this story has not ended…relinquish to me the four keys, and I shall show you how things really proceeded. The four fiends are the current holders of the keys…and Shinryu has already given up his…}

## Chapter 5x – The End of The World

*It can't…end like this…*

The fragrant smell of flowers wafted through the air, stirring awake the figure lying on the ground.

“Where…am I?” muttered Rylan, slowly getting back up to his feet. He was standing in a field of white and yellow flowers, the air thick with pyreflies.

[You have reached The End of Time…also known as the Farplane.] A woman appeared in front of the mage, her robes the same verdant green as her hair.

“The End of…wait! Where did Isaac go?”

[The Dreamer has left this world, and without his presence this world is slowly crumbling away…Look, it is happening as we speak…] Rylan looked behind him, staggering backwards as he saw the meadow of flowers crumble away, a dark void left in its wake.

“What’s…happening?” The mage hastily took a few steps back, away from the crumbling edge.

[Running away is pointless, for fading away is the destiny of a forgotten story. It is as Isaac said…“I came to this world in darkness, and so shall I leave it in darkness.”]

“…So it is true…this world is nothing more than a story…”

[This world may merely be a story to him, but it is real enough to us…]

“Then why would he leave us?”

[He has been trapped in this dream…enthralled by this story for around 30 years…all those years had eaten away at his mind, his sanity…he left before he became insane…]

“Still…I can’t let it end this way…I can’t…”

[That is why you must stop him from leaving…at least until a replacement can be found.]

“Stop him? I can’t even touch him with that law protecting him…how am I meant to stop him?”

[The law surrounding him may make him invincible, but the law itself is not.] Pyreflies swarmed, coalescing into a pitch black card in the sage's hand, which she then handed to the mage.

[You are to give this to the judgemaster...he will know what to do with it.]

"Give it to the judgemaster...oh...there might be a problem with that plan..."

[Even if the judgemaster was still alive, he would not be able to do a thing, for Isaac has already left. You must go back in time, back before the judgemaster was killed, and back before Isaac leaves.]

"Go back...in time?" The sage nodded, the pyreflies gathering in her right hand forming into a blue ocarina. She played the instrument, the haunting melody drifting through the air. A doorway appeared behind the sage, as if answering her call. Rylan peered through the doorway, and could see a long corridor, closed doors on either side.

"How far does this corridor go..."

[It goes all the way to the beginning of time, but that is not your destination. Take this.] The sage handed Rylan a dagger, then pushed him through the doorway.

"What was that fo..." The mage trailed off, realising that the ground he had been standing on had too succumbed to the void.

[That dagger will open one of the doors in this corridor...you will know it is the right one when both the door and the dagger glow ghostly blue. When that happens, you must stab the dagger into the door, then rotate it clockwise...that should open the door.] The sage was now levitating, the ground beneath her long since crumbled away.

"Why don't you come too? You still have a chance..."

[I have resigned myself to this fate, Rylan Holger. Leave now while you still have a chance, for the corridor is also connected to this crumbling world...]

"At least let me know your name..."

[My name is Saria...now go... but know that you can not change destiny...] The sage faded away, the doorway itself crumbling away as she did.

"Saria..." muttered Rylan, his grip tightening on the dagger in his right hand.

The mage ran through the corridor, his eyes constantly looking down towards the dagger. He could not risk teleporting...he did not know how close he had to be to the correct door for the dagger

to light up. His legs began to become sore, but he dared not drop his pace...from the corners of his eyes he could see the corridor crumbling behind him at a rapidly increasing rate.

“Just...a little...more...” muttered the mage, desperately willing for the dagger to glow blue. He could feel the ground crumbling as he ran...and soon he would fall down, into the void...

The dagger began to glow a ghostly blue, nearly stopping Rylan in his tracks.

“The door is nearby? Where?” Frantically looking around, relief filled the mage’s heart as he saw one of the doors glowing the same ghostly blue.

“Alright!” exclaimed the mage, just as the floor gave way in that entire section of the corridor. The mage fell into the void, fervently wishing he could do things over...

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The dagger began to glow a ghostly blue, nearly stopping Rylan in his tracks.

“This dagger can turn back time, huh?” The mage quickly started running along the wall, watching as the floor in this entire section of the corridor give way. Rylan ran along the wall until he was directly opposite the ghostly blue door, then leapt across, stabbing the dagger into the door and twisting it clockwise. An audible click was heard as both the dagger and the door disappear, the mage tumbling through the open doorway. Rylan got up and dusted himself, the doorway crumbling away behind him.

“Glad that is over...but where am I...” The mage found himself standing in a lush forest, the air thick with pyreflies. Claw marks appeared on the trunks of trees...the undergrowth had been trampled into the ground...it seemed that a chase had begun...

“Where have I seen this before...” muttered Rylan, the scene vaguely familiar to him. The mage could smell smoke in the breeze...a battle had occurred nearby, recently...the mage searched his memories, desperately trying to recall where he had seen the scene before him. He did not know why he was possessed by such urgency...all he knew was that someone’s life was at stake...someone important...

A bloodcurdling howl tore through the tranquillity of the forest, triggering a distant memory...a vision...the mage reeling in horror as the truth finally dawned upon him. The mage raced through the forest, his expression grim, Saria’s last words echoing in his mind...

*Know that you can not change destiny...*

***End of Act 2 – Betrayal***

*Please insert Disc 3.*