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Tales of Ungdar: Prophecy of the Eldests

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Tales of Ungdar: Prophecy of the Eldests

By

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An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for Graduation from the
Western Oregon University Honors Program

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Tales of Ungdar: Prophecy of the Eldests

Prologue

The Durlengo Solar System consists of 14 planets both inhabitable and uninhabitable that orbit an average yellow star. Seven of those planets are gas giants while the other half are either terrestrial or dwarf planets. One of the gas giants, known as Ungdar, has five moons: Aristes, largest of the moons and fully populated by humans; Malkon, a moon with an immense desert wasteland; Winndel, a moon with a fire-like glow; Lorica, a mostly rocky moon with recent colonization; and finally Trychondria, a jungle moon where monstrous beasts roam and few humans dare to trek.

Over a span of one thousand years, the human population that inhabit the moons of Ungdar have experienced a time of peace. During that time, a sense of complacency developed among humans. However, a deadly secret lies somewhere in the Ungdar System which could spell destruction for human civilization. There are two clues left behind: a rumor of an approaching apocalypse, and a stone which has been lost for hundreds of millennia. These two items will soon be key pieces to the survival of humanity.

On the moon of Lorica, a new establishment, just two centuries old, has begun to flourish. It is here, in the city of Dolor, where this tale begins. In Dolor, humans are divided by financial inequalities. One group of thieves attempts to overturn the balance. This group, known as the Douze Brigade, will arrive on the turn of the tide in a world about to be thrown into chaos...

Chapter 1-The Heist

“Fyra! Bank left now!” A voice shouted against the headphone dangling from the ear of the brunette. No sooner had she been given the command Fyra Marang quickly stopped running and quickly dashed to the left.

“A little more warning next time please!” Fyra scowled as she continued down the hall.

“Sorry babe, I had to focus the angle on my camera so I could watch you turn.” The annoying voice cackled on the other end of the headphone.

“Can it Johnny! We are in the middle of an operation. Will what is our status?” Fyra said typing some digits into a handheld device that projected a map.

“I-I’m on the...outside o-of the building n-near the...window...” A timid voice piped in after a second or two of static. Fyra shook her head at his shy nature.

“Roger, I’m almost at the door. Johnny, please try to give me the code this time without the added innuendos,” Fyra shouted back as she then got a reading on her map and ran off to her right. The door would be on the left.

“Got it Mom. Sheesh! No fun at all...” His voice trailed off as the dark haired man daftly typed in the next directions in his security scan from their group’s base of operations.

I swear that man drives me crazy sometimes... Fyra soon found the door marked ‘Security.’ For several months now, Fyra and her organization, the Douze Brigade, had been planning this heist. The plan was simple; they would rob a corporation called Dolor Banking run by a corrupt politician known as Robert De Vasco. In the last few years, Fyra had uncovered a plot that De Vasco was taking excess tax money from a recent reform, and storing it in his own facilities. The very thought of this corruptness left a bitter taste in her mouth.

“You ready for the code?” Johnny said with a slightly serious tone.

“Go ahead,” Fyra knelt in front of the door. Her piercing blue eyes focused in on the code entry as she readied her fingers which twitched in anticipation.

“1-5-7-8-3-6-2-1,” Johnny slowly spoke to make sure Fyra could hear every single digit. As Fyra then entered the numbers, her green, felt jumpsuit began to sweat under the bronze body armor that partially covered her vulnerable areas. It was warmer

in the building than she anticipated and though what she was wearing normally would be ventilated, she was hunched over...and surprisingly nervous. Though she had done this before, it hadn't been under this much pressure. The minute she screwed up, the security system would activate and guards would be there in minutes. Again, it wouldn't normally be a problem, but the time frame of the corporate headquarters had prevented the group from deactivating the system ahead of time.

After Fyra hit the two button she suddenly forgot the last number. For half a second her face filled with terror, every time the code was incorrectly entered or she hesitated for more than five seconds, the code would reset...a new security measure placed in the building recently. Fyra then quietly thought to herself as she took a leap of faith. Worst case scenario she had to start again...

With a deep breath Fyra lightly dialed the one button vaguely remembering a repeating number as the last one. A grin crept across her face as the light blinked green indicating she had entered the combination right. She stood up as a refreshing wave of reassurance washed over her. Confident now, Fyra opened the door with her strong hands.

Entering the dark room, Fyra quickly walked towards the giant vault in the back corner which was bolted with an old turn dial, rather than a more modern electronic keypad she was used to. She hoped that after ten years of being a thief she could crack a simple case the conventional way. As she pressed the device to the vault and stuck the earpieces in their corresponding way, her radio crackled and she scowled.

“WHAT?!”

“Fyra...I-I'm in...p-position...” The familiar timid voice sounded on the other end of the radio. Fyra briefly looked at the window nearby letting in a pale ray of moonlight. On the other side was the second member of her operations. The skinnier redhead looked shy as he slowly took out his tools and began to quietly work on the window. He wore a pair of goggles on the top of his head, a brown vest over a white fuzzy shirt, a pair of tan, leather pants that ended at his ankles, and a pair of steel toed boots on his feet.

“Great, now please shut up so I can concentrate and we can go home ...” Fyra snarled as she went back to concentrating on the vault. Droning out the rest of the

world, she curled her fingers around the dial and began to turn slowly. Every second of silence waiting for the reassuring click of success was torture. Nothing else mattered in that second, not even getting caught...

As this thought crossed her mind the first click restarted her heartbeat. With this newfound hope she began to turn the dial the other way. Fyra focused her thoughts as she closed her eyes. It was easier to concentrate if she let her ears take over. The second click startled her like an alarm the minute her ears took over.

She did what she could not to lose her focus as she twisted the dial the other way. Her palms were sweating as she went around the circle and to her dismay, there was no third click. She cursed as she sent the dial spinning and started over. The second time through was quicker as she already knew the first two numbers of the combination. She once again made her way to the second number and closed her eyes.

Fyra could feel her heart race through her fingers as she tried hard to find the right number. She bit her lower lip as she focused harder with every beat. The familiar copper taste of blood eventually trickled into her mouth as she felt sweat pour down her face. She was way too tense...as she calmed herself with a couple of breaths, she tried again. With a renewed sense of calmness, she carefully turned the dial, eliminating any impatience in her body.

She passed the twenties...*nothing*, the thirties...*nothing*, the forties...*no*- Just before getting to the number fifty she heard the click that gave her confidence that she had finally succeeded.

“GOT IT!” She yelled into her microphone as she turned the lever and opened the door to the vault.

“R-roger!” Will piped in as he heard her shout. This was his cue to create an exit for her. She had picked him to handle the logistics for the missions due to his ability to clean up any mess she or Johnny left behind. He was also good at making a speedy getaway. While he worked his magic, she opened up the small bag she brought with her and pulled out a rolled up black duffel bag. Fyra scooped as much money as she could. The vault also contained some classified documents that she also put in the bag alongside the money. After a moment or two to bask in the glory of having cracked the case, Fyra got up; it was time for the getaway.

“Ok guys, I got it, let’s pull out!” Fyra said as she made her way over to the window. Will seemed to be diligently working on the window as she stood a few feet from it. She could tell he was making a precise cut with his tools because sweat was on his brow. She appreciated the fact that someone on her team worked hard and generally cared about what they stood for. Though she had a hard time keeping people on her team, both Will and Johnny had stuck with her through the end. Their mission was to take back from the rich what they stole from the less fortunate. It was a growing pandemic in the city of Dolor. Wealthy Senators used the Government to tax Dolorian Citizens and let big businesses take all of the profits with the promise of highly publicized re-elections.

“O...okay, hold on!” Will said as he removed his hand. As if by magic, a portion of the glass window in front of him fell towards the ground below, as he was dangling 10 stories up in the air. “There we go!” he smiled. Fyra nodded in agreement and returned the smile as she took a couple steps forward. As she did a shot rang out. Diving left, Fyra rolled out of the way and looked up. In front of the window Will coughed and dangled limply as blood was splattered on the glass in front of him.

“WILL!” Fyra screamed as she got to her feet to help him. As she did though, an alarm pierced the otherwise silent night. She quickly ducked back into the darkness as she could now see Will’s line move. Though he was still breathing, she could see him now being lowered and a voice on a megaphone telling everyone to surrender. She cursed as she quickly fled the room. Quickly pulling out her device she turned on her headphones again.

“Johnny, they got Will! Our cover is blown! Get me out of here!” She shouted as she began to run back through the halls. The alarm began to sound off as she reached the end of the hallway. She had to be careful from this point on if she wanted to survive this ordeal.

“Fyra, take the next left! If you find the women’s restroom you can climb into the air ducts, which should lead you out to the back alley through the lower laundry chute in the room at the end of the duct. I’m going to see what I can do for Will ok?” Johnny sounded frantic on the other end.

“Got it, keep me posted if you see trouble!” Fyra yelled as she quickly pushed against the wall to boost herself left into the nearby bathroom. Once in the linoleum-lined room, she quickly made her way to the stall where the vent in the room seemed to go into. She quickly stood on the seat and locked the stall as she took out a few of her tools and began to unhinge the vent cover. With a couple of easy adjustments, she pulled it quietly away. She then quickly unlocked the stall door hinge as she climbed up; this way no one immediately assumed she had gone anywhere. As the final part of her escape, she quickly sealed up the vent so she was completely locked in. No sooner had she finished she heard yelling as the door kicked open to the restroom. She stayed quiet and covered her mouth as she watched several soldiers scour the area.

After several moments, the guards were convinced they had found nothing as they left to go search other rooms. Fyra waited a second longer as she then began to crawl down the vent.

“I’m in...” She whispered as she continued down the tunnel.

“Fyra, you said Will was attacked right?” Johnny curiously said.

“Yeah, I watched him get taken right in front of me...” Fyra said, furious that she was being questioned.

“Well, usually by now the guards have a positive ID on any prisoners or people of interest...and nothing has come up on him. It’s...it’s like he vanished...” Johnny trailed off.

“Impossible! Keep looking...” She replied in a hushed, harsh tone. Though it sounded like she was being snappy, Fyra was just worried; she had a tendency to show her concern in tough ways.

“On it boss...by the way you will be taking a left at the next intersection.” He said to her as he went back to his typing. Fyra could see the fork coming up ahead and followed her technician’s advice as she took the left exit. She could now see herself crawling above a room that looked like a meeting. As she did, she noticed several people talking as she took a few seconds to eavesdrop.

“...policies are too harsh.” The elderly gentleman in the room was saying towards the three other younger looking ones.

“If we don’t enforce them, people in the slums will continue to be the festering wound keeping our city from greatness...” Another man with long, brown, curly hair said leaning back in his chair.

“I agree with Senator Davis on this one...” The third, fatter man piped in. As he did Fyra stifled a gasp looking at the man. Though she had never met him in person, his face was highly recognizable. It was Senator De Vasco. “I feel as if the policies we have in place are not hard enough. We need to convince Head Senator LeMarcus to start forcing the DF to become stricter.”

“Hah!” The last gentleman with short blonde hair scoffed. Fyra wrinkled her nose. She knew this man also... “That would be the last thing LeMarcus would do. We need to find a way to remove him. He is too weak to lead this city to greatness.”

“Senator Garmon, surely you don’t mean what you are saying...” The older man looked appalled as he stood up from his seat. “You younger Senators seem to be all the same, wanting to end the problem by letting the less fortunate die off...I will have no more part in this secret meeting...” He said as he walked off and slammed the door.

“Senator Yegor seems to know what we are thinking and that it is right...the only way to fix the issues in this city is to stop helping people in the slums. Though, he is hesitant to join us. We will need to be more persuasive next time. Until then...” Senator De Vasco stood up. “Let us get back to the theft in progress. Having a scapegoat may help our cause...” He said sneering as the three left the room.

Once they were gone, Fyra continued on, wanting so much to burst through the vent and slash their throats open. Stop helping people in the slums? It will only make them more dependent on the welfare of others. The citizens of Dolor were forced to live in the underground dwellings where the city had built on top of itself. Owning a piece of property above the underground was near impossible for those who didn’t have a consistent, stable job that paid above minimum wage. It had been an ongoing problem in the city for years.

Fyra continued to crawl as she made her way towards the vent at the end of the tunnel. As soon as she saw the empty supply closet she began to unhinge the vent cover once more. Struggling with the screws for a moment, she eventually twisted them away and let herself fall into the laundry basket below; multiple white towels broke the fall.

Quickly reassessing the situation, she saw the laundry chute that Johnny had mentioned as she scrambled out of the basket and over to the metal shaft.

She pried the door open as she scrambled inside. One moment of hesitation could cost her life. She let herself then drop into the chute as she used her hands and legs to help her descend in the slightly ramped tunnel.

“I’m going through the chute, what do I do at the other side?” She said gritting her teeth as she carefully made sure not to slip. If she wasn’t fast enough her hands would get sweaty from the stress of the situation and that could spell disaster.

“The room will lead you into a lounge. From there you should be able to escape through the emergency exit. Normally this would trigger an alarm, but...you already have managed to do that.” She detected sarcasm in his voice. “Also, there was a report filed...a man fitting Will’s description, but he disappeared once he was brought down. It’s a very vague report, but from what I understand Will is no longer on the radar...It’s really puzzling...” He said as his voice trailed off again.

“Thanks, I’ll check in once I’m in the clear. Until then keep me posted for any hiccups.” She said as she continued her slow descent into the chute. A couple of times on the way down she felt herself slip slightly, but she was able to catch herself each time. Once she could see the bottom, she let herself fall the rest of the way, bending as she landed on her feet.

Standing up, Fyra wiped the sweat from her brow as she pushed the chute open and headed into the lounge. Though it was empty, Fyra suspected she wouldn’t have long as she briskly strode across the room towards the door with the giant, red ‘Exit’ above it. Again, Johnny had come through for her when she needed it the most. Pushing the door open, she took one last look back and left. The exit lead her down a small set of stairs and into an alley. There she quickly made her way down the street as she avoided the guards in the area and slid into another dark alley.

“Johnny, I’m good. What is the stitch?” She said as she then continued walking, the duffel bag dangling from her side.

“Nothing on Will...Again the report is vague and no suspects have been taken into custody. The search is being called off as we speak actually...Though...oh shit...” She heard some shuffling as a loud pound could be heard in the background.

“Shit...Fyra...it’s them...I’m going to log off...get back here ASAP!” He shouted as a loud buzzing noise rang in her ear. She threw the ear piece to the ground and shook her jaw as she focused her thoughts. Whenever ‘log off’ was used, it meant their operations had been compromised and they were about to be captured. Not sure what to do, Fyra momentarily slumped to the ground. One team member missing...one now captured...what an awful mess this otherwise simple mission had become. How had she failed so miserably as the leader of this resistance faction?

“Don’t think like that...get up...” She said and picked herself back up. With a quick crack of her neck she headed towards a nearby train station. The neon lights above the station were only half on. It was obvious after some recent tax reforms that the Dolorian Government wasn’t concerned with the present struggles of the lower class citizens. The run down station now seemed like a relic from the distant past, though the city itself had been around for only half a century. She pushed her way past the double glass doors and continued past the cobwebs as she approached the counter. On the other end was an elderly woman who looked like she should have long since retired. It wasn’t uncommon for people in this city to have a job their whole life and still remain in debt.

“One ticket for Sector Twelve please,” Fyra said holding out a small sum of cash from her earlier heist.

“One way or round trip?” The lady smiled with an obvious pain in her eyes. She wasn’t in good health though she was pushing herself to be a good employee...

“One way...” Fyra said as the woman gave her the ticket. “Keep the change.” She took off leaving the woman no chance to give her change. Though it again seemed like she didn’t care, she wanted this woman to have something to put on the table for dinner...at least this way she could recover from her obvious illness to continue working, *but for how much longer?* She thought to herself as she boarded the large graffiti-covered vehicle in front of her. Maybe it was a weakness of hers to help others in need; it is how she ended up in her current situation. Pushing the thoughts aside, Fyra focused on Johnny and Will. What had happened? How had their operation been compromised? Where was Will? Thoughts and Questions drifted in her head causing her to begin to lull as her eyelids shut...

Fyra's eyes fluttered open as a voice over the intercom began to speak about approaching their final destination. She noticed that passengers that had been on the train earlier were now gone and she seemed to be the final remaining one. She sleepily rose to her feet as she sauntered over to the door. Though she was only half asleep she felt a warm aura wrap around her and noticed a faint glow towards the back of the train. As she left the vehicle, an intense and boggy odor wafted into her nostrils. *That smells familiar...* she thought as she quickly brought a small copper mask up to her face to cover her nose and mouth. She noticed a man in uniform sitting on a nearby bench as she walked over to him. He looked like he was the conductor for the train she had just exited.

"Do you know what is going on in Sector Twelve of the slums?" She asked him as she could now see the glow was coming from that general area.

"A fire broke out around thirty minutes ago in the sewers...got really bad when it hit the houses in Sector Twelve," He replied wiping sweat from his head with a white handkerchief.

"Are you serious?!" Fyra gasped as she turned towards the sector. All of her friends...people she had grown up with...the places she had called home...in flames? The thought frightened her. Without a second hesitation, her right foot kicked her body into motion as she sped off towards the sector. Her heart raced as she ignored all other outward distractions.

"It's too late to do anything..." The man called out to her as he stood up to protest...but once he saw the determination seeping from her body, he knew there was nothing left he could do to stop her. He sat back down as he merely observed her run off into the apocalypse that was Sector Twelve.

Dolor had started out as a prototype settlement on the moon, Lorica. The moon city of Aristes had been looking for a way to slow down the population overgrowth and Lorica had a compatible atmosphere to start looking into expansion. Their plan was right on the money, as Dolor soon began to grow and flourish. To make room for the new development, the city had needed to build on top of itself and become a complex system of layers.

This divided the city into a system of 13 sectors. Sectors One through Four all lay on top of the city and typically were inhabited by those with more money, whether they were upper or middle class citizens. Sectors Five through Twelve were inhabited by people who didn't have stable jobs or didn't have enough money to afford houses in the first four sectors. It was in these sectors where disease, poverty, and death ran rampant. Most people never got strong enough to fight for their rights as citizens of Dolor, and for this reason they were often not represented within the Government. Sector 13 had been labeled as restricted. Though most people in this day and age were not sure why, terrible rumors enforced the restrictions. Rumors of a terrible disease that had been sealed away, rumors of weapons left over from an ancient war, rumors of a creature that could destroy you with one look...rumors of the sector seemed to run rampant throughout Dolor, but no one truly knew the reason of the restriction.

As Fyra tore off into the run down streets of the slums, she narrowly avoided hitting her head on the loose piping that dangled from the walls and the ceiling. She continued down the sewer-like streets on the outside of Sector 12 as she narrowly avoided tripping over a giant rat. It hissed at her as it scampered off. She brushed the encounter aside as she then turned a corner. At the end of the street, the fire was visible now as it hung on the edges of several buildings. She dashed down the street to make her way into the main square of the sector to see what she could do to help. As she finally arrived, she saw several people fleeing buildings, a few brave souls using water to try and douse the flames, and a child crying in the middle of town, unsure of what to do. Fyra quickly ran over to the child.

"You need to leave!" She yelled at him.

"But mommy told me to wait for her..." He whimpered as he looked around calling for his mother. The sight tore at Fyra's heartstrings.

"If we don't get you out of here, then you may not be able to see her anyways...please come with me." She said holding the hand of the young boy and pleading with him.

"O...okay..." He let out a small cry as he followed Fyra. She quickly led him to the street where she had come in from. "Okay follow this path to the train; someone will help you there...maybe even find your mother. Got it?" She said with an encouraging

smile patting him on the shoulder. The boy nodded, his eyes lighting up at the mention of his mother, and he peeled off into the darkness of the streets.

Convinced she had helped him all she could, Fyra ran over to the villagers attempting to douse the flames by grabbing some of the buckets and pouring them on the flames covering one of the houses. As she did a familiar face with brown hair, yellow eyes, and a chubbier build gave her a grateful look.

“Gram!” She shouted as she tossed another bucket.

“Fyra, glad to see that you are still alive. Though it is a shame you should come back to find this...” His head drooped.

“It’s ok! I’m here now, how bad are things?” She said knowing that the question was probably not needed...it was obviously bad.

“We got control of the flames near the general store and several of the homes in the surrounding area, otherwise...its chaos...” He said as the pair threw another bucket each.

“I see...has the fire department been issued?” She asked curious why it was the villagers fighting and not someone else who could handle the situation better.

“They are busy with another incident in the Sector One...” He gave her a frustrated glance. The thought caused Fyra to scowl. The first four sectors always got priority over the slums for everything...better healthcare, better support from the government, better opportunities, you name it, Sectors One through Four had it. Fyra couldn’t let the thought dwell too long as her skin now felt like it was overheating. She continued to pour water onto the fire.

“We have a problem!” Another man ran over as he brought a couple more buckets.

“What’s going on?!” Gram shouted back to the other. He wiped his sweating hands against his shirt as he did.

“Our water’s been shut off!” The other shouted as he did what he could to not break down.

“WHAT?!” Gram furiously wrinkled his brow. “How the hell can they do this to us?!”

“Gram, stay here! I’m sure I can figure this out!” Fyra nodded to him as she put her bucket down.

“Are you sure?!” He gave her a concerned look as the flames raged around them.

“Yeah, I’d love to give those pompous pricks a piece of my mind.” She grabbed the hilt of her knife. There was a guard post located near the other edge of the town. She knew this would be the place to go. She dashed off giving Gram a quick cheer for encouragement as she avoided the falling debris and made her way past the slowly burning buildings on either side. It was awful...to see the paint charred on the buildings she had become accustomed to seeing. Those rats would pay out the ass for this one...

Nearing the end of town, she saw the familiar guard station and watched as several guards appeared, just standing there...and it fueled her flames even more.

“Hey, what is the deal with the water situation?” She yelled as she stomped up towards the soldiers.

“You have used up all of the water the government will allow for this sector for the month...” One of them said standing still.

“Bull shit! This sector is on FIRE!” Her eyes became enraged.

“Then you should wait for the fire department to-“

“They are busy in Sector One with an incident. Can we please have more water? You have control of the valve. I’m sure for emergency situations it can be overlooked...”

“Rules are rules ma’am. Take it up with the government if you have an issue.”

“Are you kidding me?! We will all BURN to death if you do not release that valve now...”

“Sorry Ma’am I’m just-“

“Bullshit! If you do not release that valve now I will do it myself!” She furiously stood her ground as she pulled out her knife. As she did the guards pulled out their guns and turned off the safety. Fyra knew that she needed to act now before they had time to fire. She dashed forward as she punched the first guard in the throat and kicked the gun out of his hand. After that, she slid on the ground as the second guard raised his gun to

fire. With a confused look he could not find her in front of him, until his eyes shifted to the ground...and by that time...

Fyra heard a crunching sound as her leg caused the man's to go inward slightly. He fell to the ground crying in pain as she kicked the gun away from him. Two down...and one to go...she thought as she looked up and saw the final guard pointing his gun directly at her. She would have to play this one a little smarter.

"Freeze and drop your weapon..." The guard said sneering as he knew he had her in a bind.

"Fine..." She said as she raised her hands. As she did, she flicked her wrist as hard as she could and the knife she held in her hand flew straight into the chest of the opposing guard. He gasped as his gun fired into the sky and he staggered backwards. Fyra took the moment of shock as she ran forward and kicked the guard into the nearby wall. After he was down, she walked over to the valve and with all her strength she turned it on. At least she had accomplished this small task to provide the sector with some relief. She then heard papers shuffle behind her. As she tried to turn around she heard an awful thud as her vision became blurred. She slumped to the ground as she realized a blunt object had just struck her from behind while she was attempting to help. She had only a second left as she looked up and saw a guard with steel blue eyes piercing down at her...and then all went black.

Chapter 2-Disappointment

“A fire broke out earlier this evening in Sector Twelve. The Fire Department is still working on trying to get a crew to the site. In other news, a new proposal in the Senate was brought up today to increase the business tax. This would affect both big businesses and small businesses alike...”

A teenager with blue, curly hair watched the professional blonde woman talk on the other end of the television as he passed by the store. For some reason the story on the fire intrigued him as he paused to watch it for a moment. The story did not seem to stay on the news long and switched to a topic that seemed boring to the teenager. As his white robe fluttered in the wind, he began to turn the other direction. His hazel eyes focused on a younger girl with long, blue hair and hazel eyes who had her right hand on her hip.

“Honestly, Reques...” She looked at him impatiently. “How are we ever supposed to get home if you keep getting distracted by the smallest things?” She rolled her eyes. Reques chuckled slightly as his soft voice did not seem to carry much weight. He then began to make his way over to his sister as she impatiently waited for him to take her home from school. He agreed as he took one step in his back felt boots.

“My dear Lil, you dare question the attention span of your brother?” He jested as he walked alongside her as they crossed the busy intersection. Making their way to the usual spot, they stood there as a driver in a black limousine pulled up.

“Reques and Lillian Altaire, it is my pleasure, as always, to see you again,” Their familiar driver Howard said as he gave them a weak smile as the front door window rolled down. He had been their butler since birth. The siblings entered the car as the door was opened for them automatically. As they clambered in the car, throwing their bags carelessly on the floor, they went through their usual routine of fighting over the remote control to the inner television on the side of the car. Lillian easily won though as she used her infamous tickle attack against Reques, causing him to reel in laughter as she snatched the remote away. Without another pout from her older brother, Lillian switched it to a typical cartoon which she would usually watch. Reques started to argue, but the moment he saw the smile on her tender face, all he could do was sigh and turn his head.

Looking out of the window of the limousine, he watched the clouds pass by in the nearly sunlit sky. It was breathtaking, but somewhat boring. Reques wasn't the adventurous type of person and enjoyed his comfortable life in Dolor; however, it was becoming somewhat mundane. He wanted some sort of change, but he was unsure what it would be. He had a faint idea this is why he was born into the family with the powers that he had. It would force him on a journey one day to go see the universe...though he knew that day was far off.

While these thoughts passed through his mind, Reques could feel a slight breeze and realized the window had rolled down slightly. He figured he must have bumped the lever with his elbow as he was mildly daydreaming. He took a quick look outside at their surroundings and soon realized they were nearing their home in Sector Two. He then reached for his bag as he gave Lil a nudge.

"Home is around the corner," He softly said as he knew she was enthralled by the cartoon that was on the television. She slowly peeled her glued eyes away from the screen as she nodded her head in acknowledgement of the notion. Her fingers easily wrapped around the strap of her own bag as she joined her brother and neared his seat. Once the limousine pulled up to their mansion, she quickly bounded out of the car and up the stairs into her mother's arms.

"Mamma! Mamma! Look what I made for you!" Lil said stretching out a scribbled drawing somewhat resembling two people holding hands to her long, blue-haired mother.

"That is quite beautiful!" She said as she then gave a look towards Reques. "How was school today, son?"

"Fine, I suppose," He replied as he got out of the vehicle and gave Howard a wave goodbye as he walked to the door, passing his mother easily on his way inside.

"Not even a hug?" She giggled.

"Sorry, I have a lot of homework."

"Oh, well, alright then..." She often worried about her son's mental state of being. Lately it seemed as though he was distant towards people and his surroundings. Secretly, she wondered if he was getting sick or something.

Reques ignored this statement as he continued on inside. He usually wasn't one to be impolite, especially to his mother, but he had been around people all day and it made him feel somewhat anti-social. Continuing through the door, he headed for the nearby stairwell on the right as he trudged up the stairs. Each step seemed longer and heavier than the last one making the small trip up feel like a space flight from Lorica to Aristes. As he climbed, his thoughts drifted back to the fire he had seen on the news before. Why had the reporter just skipped the topic like it was another boring story? Though most people in the city often skated by the subject of the lower Sectors, Reques had never really thought to question it. However, a fire was a serious thing and people were likely to get injured or killed. So why, even in situations as extreme as this, would people just brush the issue aside like a bug on one's shoulder? It made him think as he walked up, *why was he even worried about this at all?* It had nothing to do with him in any way.

Finally at the top of the seemingly lengthy flight of stairs, Reques took a second to lean against the wall to collect his thoughts. *Pull it together...you are a Caller.* He then pushed himself away as he made his way to his room. Being a Caller, Reques had been born into a line of people with special powers. This enabled him to call forth spirits left behind by an ancient race of beings. It had been a power he had been given by birth, which was both rare and coveted.

He entered his room at the end of the hallway and took a quick, refreshing look around. Everything seemed to be in its normal order, books on the shelf, sheets on the bed, and clothes in the drawer...yeah just another typical day in his room as he sat his backpack down. Though he pondered going down to apologize for his rudeness with his mother earlier, he decided against it to work on the assignments his teachers had given him. It would take him a good few hours in order to get all of the work done and the more he got done now, the less he would have to do before bed.

A few hours later, Reques put the final period on the short essay he was writing. Setting the paper down he thought he heard his name being called softly from somewhere. Leaving his room, he made his way to the stairwell.

"Reques? Honey? Dinner is ready!" His mother's soothing, full voice traveled up each step until they found their way into Reques' eager ears. He replied promptly to

let her know he would be down soon as he quickly knocked on the door nearby. As he did a tired looking Lil rubbed her eyes as she answered the door.

“Napping huh? You know you are going to be up all night now!” Reques chuckled as he ruffled her hair a bit. She pouted in protest as she quickly shut the door, barely leaving enough time for Reques to reel his hand back. He scowled a bit before he eventually pocketed his hands, letting the brief encounter pass as he sauntered down the stairs.

Looking at the walls that lined the staircase, he saw his long line of ancestors as their portraits traveled down the stairs. For generations now, his family had the power to Call the ancient spirits of the past. This had given them a prestigious name as most of those people eventually collected all of the spirits in a journey known as a pilgrimage. This journey was to obtain all of the Calls that inhabited the moons of Ungdar; doing this it was supposed to give them the power to stop a future calamity or something. Though, Reques didn't see the point of it since, for centuries now, no “calamity” had befallen humankind to the point that a fully fledged Caller was needed. His father insisted that ‘one day it would come,’ but Reques was just convinced that it was a hoax that became an obsession for those who could Call the spirits.

At the base of the stairs, Reques stumbled a bit missing the last step. He always had known he was a bit clumsy; he was often teased at school for being awkward in this way. Whenever he tripped or he stumbled or fell, there would always be his classmates around him pointing and laughing. It bothered him for awhile in his life, but he had learned to ignore it. He caught himself against the railing and prevented a full on fall as he regained his balance and headed over to the kitchen. As he did he heard a thud most likely indicating Lil's emergence from her room before she would down the stairs like a puppy.

The table was set eloquently; several candles lined the middle of the rectangle while nice china and silverware set each person's place. Reques moved towards the nearest chair as one of the butlers standing in the hall walked over. He took the chair and pulled it so Reques could sit down. In turn, Reques nodded towards the gentleman indicating he was ready to sit as he planted his rear into the seat. He then sat in silence as first his sister, then father, and finally mother trickled in and joined him at the table.

After a quick acknowledging prayer to the Eldests, the four began to politely eat their first course: a green salad with colorful vegetables decorating the middle.

“So Reques, how was your day at school?” His mother said as she spoke between bites.

“It was fine, I learned about anima today in Science,” He mumbled somewhat through a bite of his salad.

“Don’t talk to your mother with food in your mouth,” his father gave him a disapproving look as he did so.

“Sorry,” he apologized promptly once his bite had gone down.

“It’s quite alright,” his mother acknowledged him as she gave an interested look. “What about anima did you learn?”

“It was actually somewhat interesting. We learned that anima is the fifth state of matter, somewhere beyond the plasma state. We also learned that millions of years ago a sun exploded in an adjacent solar system and caused anima to be spread to our system. This explosion is the basis of all magic in the Durlengo System, or something like that,” Reques paused to take a sip of water from his crystal glass.

“That’s right,” His father suddenly looked somewhat interested as the main dish was then brought out: Sirloin Steak with a light basil sauce and mashed potatoes with hazelnut gravy. “Do you know what one of the most important forms of Anima Magic is?”

“Uhh...we didn’t really talk about that...” Reques got somewhat quieter as his dad’s personality was quite strong.

“You should already know it...” His father impatiently began to look away.

“Not sure...fire magic?” He took a guess playing with his food on his fork.

“No Reques...Call magic. The thing you are supposed to be learning at school...” His father sighed and angrily began to tear at the steak.

“Well I’m sure there is more information than just Call Magic...” Reques attempted to shift the conversation to something other than the normal dinner talk.

“But most of it is irrelevant for you! Darma, remind me why we are sending Reques to private school instead of home schooling?” The older man looked furious as he shot a glare at his wife.

“Because we agreed we wanted him to have a well rounded education Charles...”

“That isn’t the point!” Charles Altaire slammed one of his fists into the table as he grunted. “We agreed that Reques was to go get a well rounded education...to make him a better Caller! We send him to this school where he literally learns nothing about what he is supposed to be doing. Why are we letting his mind get filled with all this unimportant shenanigans? Like that choir class for instance...”

“Now, Charles, we agreed not to discuss this during dinner...”

“Damn it I don’t care! I’m tired of Reques learning about singing and drawing when he is supposed to be Calling!”

“Dad! Don’t yell at mom! I like being in choir! It’s fun and doesn’t make me want to go insane,” Reques stood up. He was tired of the usual fit his father threw during their meal.

“Fun? Do you even care about being a Caller anymore?” His father stood up right after to assert his dominance.

“Not since you have been shoving it down my throat for the past ten years!” Reques shouted back angrily, unnatural for his usually quiet demeanor.

“If you don’t care about being a Caller, then get out of this house.” His father nodded and sat down, content with his answer.

“Fine,” Reques hotly replied walking away and back up the stairs. Every step he took this time seemed to be of frustration. He was tired of his father disapproving of the things he liked to do. It was driving his whole family away from him; Reques’ mother hardly ever spoke to him, Lil was afraid to death of him, and Reques just wanted to be free of this regime. The young man entered his room as he threw some clothes into a bag and gathered a few of his belongings. He then left his room as he rushed down the stairs.

“Reques? Your father didn’t mean it...he is just...trying to adjust...please don’t leave,” His mother called as she left the dining room.

“Sorry mom, I need to get out of here.” He replied avoiding her glance as he put on some shoes.

“Darling, don’t be like that, your father only wants what is best for you.” She smiled as she tried to extend her hand out in a display of support for her son.

“Yeah? Well dad has no right to talk to you that way or force a future on me that I do not necessarily want!” Reques snapped as he edged his shoulder away to avoid contact. “You have my number if you need me, I’ll be back later.” He then stomped out of the door and into the driveway. As his mother protested and stood at the porch, Reques knew he only had to go a little farther and she would give up the chase. His father would most likely finish his meal and then go back to his room and meditate like always. He shook his head and walked towards the city; the fresh air of the wonderful afternoon was already filling his lungs and clearing his mind.

Eventually, Reques ended up at a bench, in Center Park, where he sat down and took out a small bit of the steak he had grabbed before leaving. Munching on the outsides of the meat, he pulled out his Calling Staff and easily called his Spirit Frey. Every Caller had a spirit dormant inside them at the time of birth. This was the first test in the journey to being a full-fledged Caller. Frey was a spirit that resembled a humanoid goat with wings. Every Spirit was attached to an element from the universe because of their internal Anima Coding. Though Reques knew about all of this, giving his father the satisfaction that he had actually learned something seemed beyond his willing capability.

“You called, master?” Frey tilted its head as it spoke to him. Frey’s element was gravity and his attacks would manipulate the gravitational field acting on an object. This allowed him to essentially use any object around him as a weapon that could smash an enemy, though limited mainly smaller objects.

“Yeah, I was just curious what you thought of my father’s spat back at dinner,” Reques chuckled tearing off another piece of steak with his front teeth.

“I think your father has good intentions, though he shows it in a very unloving way,” Frey sat down next to him as the pair talked.

“That’s an understatement.”

“While it may be, I think you should go home and apologize. Whether you like it or not those two are your parents and gave you life in this world. You should have a little respect for them.”

“How? My mother is a coward and my father is a bully. What respect should I give to either of them?”

“Well, for starters, at least you have parents who are alive and care about you...” Frey then looked distant. Reques had forgotten how lonely it could be as a Call. It had been awhile since he had a decent conversation with Frey and when the Call wasn't being used, he would sit in the back of Reques' mind waiting to be called. The only way to break the loneliness of his spirit accompaniment was to pilgrimage and get other calls to join him. For his whole life, Reques had yet to obtain a call and thus Frey still was alone.

“That is true. I guess I just need some time to cool down from that intense dinner. Plus it gives you a little time away from me...” He chuckled and looked at the sky. It had been awhile since he had been to the park; his father often wanted him to be focused on becoming a Caller so playtime had been something of a reward for his hard work rather than a usual activity. Lil always seemed to have plenty of time from both of his parents for playtime and fun. Unlike him, Lil had not been born with a Call. This was apparent when she had attempted to call a spirit and nothing had come. Reques did not dislike being a Caller, but he had other interests as well. He had a decent voice and was actively involved with his school group. He also like drawing and had just been recognized by his teacher for a piece he had done in ink.

“What is bothering you so much?” The ancient spirit tilted his head inquisitively. While inside of Reques, Frey was dormant and unable to connect with the outside world so it was no surprise that he was unaware of the current situation.

“My father doesn't like that I have interests other than just being a Caller and it frustrates him. I just needed to get away from him so I could clear my head,” Reques looked up into the sky as he did before. Though it was far away in his personal plans, he wanted to go visit other places. He had remained in Dolor his whole life and although it was a decent place to grow up, it was becoming boring. There were no other cities on the moon, no real things to do outside of the city, and there wasn't really anything keeping him here besides his family.

“He may just be looking out for your best interests...” Frey did what he could to put everything into perspective for Reques’ mind which was clearly in a state of confusion.

“My best interests? I’m sorry, but Calling is just a part of my life, there is much more to who I am than a single track,” Reques said feeling his blood grow warm again.

“You know what? You are correct. I was merely appealing to the fact that your parents do care about you and want you to succeed in whatever it is you are doing. If you spread yourself out too thin, eventually you will run yourself ragged.”

“That may be true, but I feel like you don’t have to enjoy just one aspect of life in order to succeed at something...”

“You are far wiser than you look and I didn’t expect less,” Frey chuckled. “I was only hoping to hear you answer this way.”

“You were just playing around?” Reques looked at his Call in disbelief.

“Not playing, merely...testing,” He contentedly sat back.

“Alright...thanks I suppose. Keeps my intentions clear I guess...” Reques mumbled as he then stood up.

“You ready to return?”

“More or less, I want to go home and tell him what I told you...I need to,” He replied confident in his beliefs. He held out his wand and with a quick downward motion Frey’s aura trickled back into Reques.

“Don’t forget any of the conversation we just had...” Frey encouraged him one last time before disappearing completely. After the scene, Reques set off back to his house with a new goal in mind, to let himself be heard for once rather than follow a plan.

Chapter 3-The Signal

And'theith Charal ran through the forest. His heart pounded as he could hear the alarm blaring through the trees. It was his goal to get back to the village as soon as possible. His giant, green feet could feel the moisture of the ground as he dashed back. It reminded him that just a few hours ago he had woken up to the rising sun. Along the way, he did what he could to stick as close to the river as possible, a crossing would present itself in a moment. As he ran, his yellow eyes darted back and forth watching out for possible beasts that could be waiting for him to become vulnerable. His jet black hair waved wildly in the wind while his muscular olive green skin drew beads of sweat.

He neared the stone crossing that connected the river as his green, pointed ears could make out the faraway sound of people shouting and screaming over the alarm. With an added effort And'theith reached the crossing a few moments sooner than expected. Leaping to the nearest stone, his muscular legs easily propelled him from the bank of the river. He jumped from stone to stone with relative ease as he finally arrived on the other side. Just through the next clearing would be Tar Tar'an, his village. The thought pushed him to increase his speed as he darted into the clearing. Pushing past a few leafy shrubs he found himself on the outer edge of Tar Tar'an and there in front of him were several of the other warriors.

"Andy? What took you so long? The Angel's Frown has been blaring for a good thirty minutes..." one of the warriors said with a gruff tone using his nickname.

"Yeah Andy, even someone who is only half Rogan should be able to get here in half the time," the other one scoffed.

"Sorry I was..." Andy paused for a moment as the image of the tiny, flowering plant he had picked up earlier flashed through his mind. "...running an errand. Do we know any details?"

"Nothing, other than the fact that this must mean the rumors about the object is true. In which case..." The first warrior said as an elder walked towards the trio.

"Emergency meeting in the town square!" He weakly said as he passed the trio and headed to the center of the village. The three nodded to each other as they headed towards the center, it was apparent to everyone who was an outside observer that Andy clearly looked more human than the beastlike Rogans running alongside him.

Once the group had reached the center of town, they noticed thousands of other Rogans inhabiting the village gathering and ran over. The Head Chief stood on a platform in front of the object known as the Angel's Frown.

"My fellow Rogans," He said through a voice projector in front of him. "In ancient times this machine was created in order to signal the arrival of a catastrophe intended to wipe out the entire universe. According to our legend, the Angel's Frown will only ever activate twice. The first time, to warn us that the end is near and that we must stop it. The second, when another object linked to it has been reached and will undeniably be used within the hour of its alarm. This object is that catastrophe we must avoid. We were tasked with the discovery of this stone to stop this from happening, and the only way to do this is for us to go out and destroy this doomsday device before it falls into the wrong hands. In this special event I am ordering that anyone who is old enough and able enough to fight to reconvene here in twenty minutes. We will be ordering our warriors and anyone else willing to make the travel to take the Arexus into space and journey to prevent our fate. Please gather what you need now...thank you."

Andy took a moment or two to process everything he had just been told as he began to make his way back towards his hut. Being one of the warriors, he knew he would probably be essential to this mission his village was tasked with. Turning another corner, he spotted his hut towards the middle right side of the slightly muddied path. The rain from the previous night was apparent in the damp foliage of the forest and in the mud of the path. He did what he could not to get too dirty as he entered his hut.

Inside of the hut sat two elder Rogans which were Andy's grandparents, Atteka and Romulus. Though they were aged they still retained the hint of pride that was common for their race. This was the defining trait of most Rogans.

"Andy, what is going on?" The elder woman sat in a rocking chair as she weaved a basket from reeds taken from the nearby river.

"The Angel's Frown has become active. The warrior's and able bodied Rogans are going to leave on the Arexus towards the Durlengo System," Andy then went to the far side of the hut and began to gather his things. Of which included his sword, Satyr, and several clothing items.

The Arexus was one of three Rogan Space ships created from parts that crash landed on U'Roga. They had repaired a few of the vessels using materials on U'Roga, their home planet, as if it had been a skill lying dormant in their minds. They used the vessels and eventually made first contact with humans around fifty years ago.

“Have you said goodbye to Medyna?” His grandfather’s weak yellow eyes looked up as he attempted to stand up. His legs shook as though they would snap in half. With a pained moan, he reluctantly returned to sitting. In a fierce battle against the Fuhrl tribe on the south side of the forest, Romulus had been badly injured, suffering physical and mental trauma that left him with weak knees. Because of this he was recommended not to walk or run as often as he used to, if at all.

“Is she around?” Andy asked unsure where his sister was. When they were young, a plague had infested the village. Their father had suffered and died. Their mother, who was human, had died about a decade after from a weak heart. Since then, Andy and Medyna had become nearly inseparable as siblings.

“She went out to Chek’val Forest awhile back to gather food for dinner, we thought she would be back when the alarm went off...though it is odd she hasn’t returned...” Atteka pondered this for a moment.

“Alright, I will go check up on her. If General Rouske comes by, tell him I will be back...” Andy slung his bag over his shoulder, turned around, and began to jog towards the forest. Unlike Teh’ral Forest to the south, Chek’val Forest to the north contained more fruit, but was more prone to danger. This would give good cause for concern for Medyna’s lateness.

As Andy scampered through the village, he noticed many of the women in town preparing their sons and husbands for the journey to come. A lot of tears and goodbyes were being exchanged, making the whole mood seem downright dreary. This was unlike the Rogans, as most of the time the women would be gathering while the men would hunt. Towards the evening the women would return first and be preparing meals for their mates and their children. The men would return in the evening, add the meat to the meal, and spend some quality time with their family. Occasionally, the whole village would come together to celebrate their deities with festivities or feasts, but otherwise this would be typical routine in Tar Tar’an Village.

This saddened Andy as he now neared the edge of town. He was not used to feeling this depression washing over the village like the chill right before winter. Though it caused him to be momentarily distracted, he had no choice but to go on. There was no way he could let it affect him until he could ensure his sister's safety.

Now passing the familiar wooden gate, Andy raced into the woods. He kept a sharp eye for any sign of his sister. Besides the fact that she was female, the pair of them were not that far apart in age and had similar physical qualities, such as the pattern on their backs. When Rogans were born, the mother of U'Roga would paint their skin with white stripes. This was the legend at least. No two Rogans, even twins, had the same stripes as one another. Certain stripe traits, however, were common in family bloodlines. For example, the pattern on the backs of him and his sister was the shape of a sideways eye.

A few more minutes passed before Andy caught the faint sound of whimpering in the drift of a slight breeze. His ears perked as he stopped running and he listened intently. After another passing moment, he again heard a whimper and tore off in the new direction, ignoring a branch that scraped his shoulder. He soon came upon a clearing as he saw his sister sprawled on the ground in the middle.

"Andy, is that you?" Medyna painfully looked over at her brother.

"Yeah, what happened?" Andy ran over to her, putting his sword and bag down as he looked for injuries on her body, noticing her lower leg was swollen.

"I heard the alarm and I tried to hurry back, but I tripped over that rock over there and I think I twisted my ankle," She winced in pain.

"Ok hold on, I'll do what I can to patch it up alright?" He nodded as he moved her underneath a nearby tree to protect her from harm as he began to look around for materials that would help patch the injury until they could get her back. As he did, he heard shuffling off to the far end of the clearing and quickly picked up his sword.

After a moment or two, a giant buglike creature walked out. It had a long head, beady eyes at the end, a mouth full of sharp teeth towards the middle part of the base of the head, and a long neck. Its body was green and scaly and about as wide as a tree. It looked as if it had a thousand legs running along its sides and belly as it crawled towards Andy. This Gristle Bug was one of the more common beasts found on U'Roga.

It was fairly aggressive and had a voracious appetite. Andy knew he would have to carefully take the beast down and distract it from finding Medyna.

“Come and get me!” Andy snarled at the beast. Though he was half human, Andy was a formidable adversary with his blade. The Gristle Bug hissed back as it reeled at the Rogan. Andy easily evaded the beast as he leaped in the air and slashed his sword. He nicked the side of the beast as he rolled forwards and quickly spun around. The bug howled as it tried to whip its back end to knock Andy off guard. Though he easily evaded taking the full brunt of the blow, it hit him in the shoulder slightly where he had gotten cut earlier. He winced in pain as he stumbled to the ground. The bug, now seeing its chance, got up on its hind legs to deliver a final blow.

Though most Rogans would have struggled or given up hope in fear of being squashed, Andy quickly held out his hand, closed his eyes, and began to focus. Clouds began to form overhead as the sky darkened. Andy could feel the hair on the back of his neck begin to tingle as his blood ran hot. There was a movement inside of him as the clouds now seemed to rumble with thunder. The beast was confused as its body twisted back. Andy could feel the moment arriving as energy now concentrated in his finger tips. He then opened his eyes and let out a scream as a lightning bolt erupted from the concentrated clouds. The powerful discharge struck the bug in the back, sending it flailing to the right side of Andy. He scrambled to his feet and grabbed his blade as he panted. His mother had been a lightning anima user and had passed the gift onto him at birth unknowingly. Rogans did not have the natural ability to use anima magic. Since Andy’s Rogan father had mated with his human mother, a rare instance had occurred where Andy was both a partial Rogan with lightning anima abilities. He could summon bolts of lightning or...

As the bug slowly gained its bearings it turned towards Andy, who now held out his sword. His sword crackled as the lightning that surged in his blood poured out through his fingertips and into the metal blade he held out. He felt powerful as he now threw his weight forward, screaming as he threw his weapon. It hit the beast square in the chest and it writhed in pain as lightning now paralyzed it from the inside. Andy leapt forward, grabbing the hilt of his weapon, and pulling back with his arm. Green blood poured out of the bug as it cried one last time before falling in defeat. Andy

quickly wiped the blood off of his chest as he landed on his feet. He stumbled, feeling weak from the taxing battle. Though he had anima magic and had used it before, it was hard for him and he wouldn't be able to use much before it drained his limited supply of Anima energy reserves.

Once the fight was over, he quickly gathered a few things, including some materials from the body of the bug as he walked over to Medyna. He patched up her ankle the best he could. After he was satisfied with its preparation, he draped her arm over his shoulder and slowly helped her up.

"Andy, thanks for helping me..." She smiled weakly.

"We aren't in the clear yet, will you be able to get back to the village?" He asked before assuming she was ready.

"If we don't head back now I'm a sitting duck. It would be better if we attempted to get back while I still have a strong brother to help..." She laughed.

"Sounds good..." He grinned as they hobbled back in the direction of the village. "Did you get everything you needed?"

"Yeah, it should be plenty to eat for the next few days," She said wincing with every step.

"So, I'm going to be leaving for awhile..." Andy trailed.

"I figured...the alarm has been going off this whole time and won't stop until you find the other sacred object correct?" She looked at him.

"I would gather so," He said not really sure how to answer.

"I see...will you be gone long?"

"As long as it takes to guarantee our safety..."

"I figured you would say that..." She giggled in a somewhat sad tone.

Andy continued forward with a heavy heart. "Are you going to be mad at me for leaving you with our grandparents?"

"Why on Earth would you think that?" She shot him a look of disgust, "You are free to leave whenever you are supposed to. Why do you think that I would be mad for that? I think that is pretty rude of you to say..." She fought back tears. The gate to the village was now in sight.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you..."

Andy, I love you. You are a wonderful brother, and one day I knew you would leave to find your place in this world. Unlike you I have no reservations living here as a Halfling. You on the other hand, you are lost. This trip is not just to protect me; your ulterior motive is clear.”

“Medyna...I...”

“Don’t say it...” She held her breath, forcing back tears as they entered the village, heading towards their hut. The rest of their journey was in silence until they got back home. As they entered Romulus looked up.

“Oh good, glad to see you are safe...Medyna?! What happened to your ankle?” He looked at her ankle with grave concern.

“Just a silly mistake, good thing Andy came to the rescue huh?” She smiled painfully as Andy helped sit her on her bed.

“I couldn’t agree more, speaking of which, Andy that General fellow you mentioned earlier stopped by. I told him the situation and he said he would wait for you, but that when you got back that you would need to get over there as soon as you could.”

“Thank you, Grandfather,” Andy quickly walked over to him and gave him a hug, then to Atteka, and finally he stood in front of Medyna.

“Andy, take this,” Medyna said handing him a bracelet made of beads.

“What is it?” He put it around his wrist.

“I made it for you, in the event you ever left. I hope it brings you luck and protection since I can’t...” She smiled past her personal pain.

“...Thank you, I will treasure it always,” Andy slipped the bracelet on as he gave her one giant hug. “Grandmother, if you could let the Gyter Family next door know about Medyna’s ankle, I’m sure they will help you.” He said as he headed out, giving them all one last wave goodbye. As he did, he saw several Rogans carrying the Angel’s Frown, the statue with the blaring alarm, into the nearby Arexus. The ship was a giant, blue vessel with several yellow stripes running alongside its hull. She had crashed a decade ago into the river near the village. All crew members aboard had died upon impact. Since then several of the craftsmen had repaired it with materials from the planet. It had served as one of the main sources of transportation and telecommunication with the humans in the Durlengo System.

Andy approached the ship and noticed General Rouske ordering some of the soldiers around. During the last major war, the previous General of the village had died, if Rouske hadn't stepped up, they would have easily lost the battle. He was immediately sworn in as the official General once the battle was over. It was the fitting way to celebrate their victory.

"Ah! And'theith! I see you finally decided to show up. Since you are the last one, I'm sure you won't mind taking the first shift on the gunner..." He laughed heartily.

"Yes sir," He replied wincing a bit. The General knew that the gunner was the dullest position on the ship and was essentially punishing him.

"Alright then, let's go," Rouske ushered the last group of warriors inside. Andy took his time, looking back for a quick moment at his village. It may be sometime before he would be able to return and he wanted to have the image of home planted deep in his mind. Once he had gotten one final glance of the village, he nodded and entered the ship for his long journey ahead.

Chapter 4-Jailbreak!

Fyra felt the cool, damp water trickle down her face. This sharp stinging increased with each drop. Waves of chills ran up and down her spine as she slowly opened her eyes. The world was blurry and she suddenly began to feel her whole body pressed against cold, damp cement stones. She moved her right arm slowly as feeling re-entered the appendage. As she did another cold drop hit her nose and felt like a needle penetrating her very core. She blinked and wrinkled her nose as her hand wiped away some of the water. Attempting to stand up, Fyra noticed she still weak from having just woken up and stumbled, catching herself on a nearby wall.

“I see you are awake beautiful...” A familiar voice floated into her ears as she pushed herself off the wall with her arms. She pushed back her hair with one hand as her vision slowly became clear. A rugged man looked at her with a strained smile.

“J...Johnny?” She managed to get out in a raspy tone.

“Who else could it be? Senator De Vasco?” He chuckled and stood up, offering her a hand. Though she would have probably tried to find a funny retort before accepting the help, Fyra was still too groggy and instead accepted the help with a thankful look. With a little effort, Johnny easily had her up within a few minutes. Fyra, however, didn't stay that way long. Her weak knees gave and she fell into her friend. For a moment or two she remained motionless until she finally draped her arms around him.

“Th...those bastards killed so many people...in Sector 12...and Will...I just...” Fyra felt tears stung forming in the corners of her eyes as her whole body shook.

“I...Fyra it's...I know...shhh...” Johnny tried to find more comforting words as he held her. He had been captured just hours before the fire broke out and hadn't seen the damage it had clearly caused. However, the physical and emotional toll was clear to him by Fyra's state of being.

“I got them water...but I couldn't stop it...” Fyra now cried and hugged her friend tighter. In this world where things were uncertain, he was one of the few people she trusted. Though he acted like a cocky jerk and a pervert, she knew deep down that he was her most loyal friend. Knowing that he was okay and that he was comforting her, gave her the bit of relief she had been looking for.

“Fyra, I’m sure you did everything you could, none of this is your fault...”

Johnny held her face close as he comforted her, tears now stinging his eyes. After awhile, Fyra felt her strength begin to return as she tried to pull away; to her surprise she couldn’t escape his grasp. Just as she was about to say something, she felt his hand grab her ass and squeeze. Her brow grew into an angry glare as she slapped his face.

“Damnit Johnny, do you really think this is the time for that?” She glared at him as he reeled back, shocked from the slap.

“I comforted you...I think I deserved a little somethin’ somethin’...” He rubbed his cheek and grinned sheepishly.

The look made Fyra’s glare soften and she chuckled a little bit. It was characteristic of Johnny to do something like that. It was nice to laugh with him despite the circumstance. Eventually, she turned towards the steel bars in front of her. Pressing her cheek to them, she looked around and saw a small pillar of light shooting down into a vat of darkness. The prison was a cylindrical room with a spiral staircase leading down from the top towards the bottom. Lined alongside the staircase were hundreds, if not thousands, of other cells.

“This is Castrus’ Prison? Isn’t it...” Fyra’s voice fell downwards into the darkness below.

“Yeah, they figured we were big enough criminals to get put here instead of being shipped off to Aristes,” Johnny leaned against the wall. Aristes was the second moon of Ungdar and it was entirely populated by people. Because of the over population in the city, there had been a need to develop new areas for people to live. Lorica had the perfect atmosphere for expansion. It contained the right concentrations of oxygen, nitrogen, and other common elements necessary for life to be sustained. During the move and establishment of Dolor though, Aristes had continued its control of the moon and established a Government that would remain loyal to its monarchy.

“Well then...how should we break out?” Fyra looked at him after a few minutes to assess their situation.

“I thought about that before you got here. Now that you are here, I think I may have a solution that will make Senior Officer Castrus regret ever putting us together,”

He grinned as he beckoned for her to come over. She walked over and became quiet as he whispered in her ear...

About fifteen minutes later, the door at the top of the stairs opened. Officer Breckner sighed and walked down the stairs. He hated having to do these hourly rounds but just like any other citizen in Dolor, the prisoners needed to eat, it was the even numbered cycle this time. He would start with cell 48 and work his way up just like his routine had taught him. It was boring, but it put food on the table. As he carefully carried the large pot of gruel down the stone steps, several hungry hands reached out begging for food.

“Wait your turn!” He would shout at them, but still they reached. Breckner was glad that he didn’t have to sit behind those lonely bars away from light and family. It was nice to be on this side of the law. Nearing the cell he thought he heard a thud as he looked inside.

“Officer, the lady fell and hit her head, I need you to check for a pulse...” Johnny pointed with fear in his eyes as he looked at Fyra who was on her stomach, motionless.

Breckner nodded as he sat the gruel down and crouched to stick his hand inside the bars in order to feel for a pulse. Just before his hand reached her throat, he felt a burning sensation as he yelped and pulled his hand back. The keys he carried detached from his pocket in the fall and landed near the woman who easily grabbed them and slid them under. She stood up with a confident grin as he cried and tossed his hand into the gruel to stop the burning fast. Before he had time to react, the thief opened the door with the keys and her accomplice ran out. He felt a thud on his back and became lost in darkness.

“Nice plan to use the loose stones in the cell to make it sound like I fell,” Fyra grinned as the pair of them began to run up the steps, leaving the unconscious guard behind. Fyra’s late mother had been a fire Anima user. As such, Fyra was given the gift to produce fire. Like other Anima wielders in the Durlengo System, she was only able to control and generate one type of Anima. It had come in handy while being a thief, she could easily heat metals if she needed to form a key, or make a hole in a door if she

needed to quickly unlock it. The uses of her powers were endless and she reveled in this ability.

“You did well too; it always amazes me when you can summon flames whenever you want to...” Johnny nodded to her as the pair continued to run up the stairs. It felt like old times when the Douze Brigade had first formed. At first the Brigade only consisted of a small handful of people tired of being oppressed in the slums. Their organization grew and flourished with the intent to help the down trodden, most of which involved re-claiming power and money from the wealthy. Though some members died, others captured, and countless others quit, Fyra, Johnny, and Will had stuck with the Brigade the whole time. Now, it seemed, it was just the two of them left...

“Save the chit chat for later, once we get to the top we will be spotted and an alarm will probably go off. We will need to navigate through the whole building...do you remember what it looks like?” Fyra smiled and knew Johnny would be on top of it.

“...from the time when we had to rescue Helga from jail right?” Johnny grinned knowing his knowledge of the building would come in handy for more than just a previous mission.

Fyra nodded as they now neared the top of the stairs. “Also, you remember where the weapon depot is right? I want Siegmund and Sieglinde back,” She said referring to her pair of knives she used as weapons.

“Yeah I got this hun, don’t worry!” Johnny grinned. Fyra rolled her eyes as she kicked the door open. The girl at the receptionist desk just beyond the door screamed as the alarm was triggered... With a snap of her fingers, Fyra summoned a fireball that caught the girl’s hair on fire. The receptionist screamed and ran away, presumably trying to not be burned alive.

“Easy...” Fyra scoffed. She nodded to Johnny who ran ahead of her towards the weapons depot. This room in the prison contained confiscated weapons from every prisoner. A few other workers ran into the hall scared, but got on the floor and put their hands on their head when Fyra glared at them, holding a fire ball in her hand. Just before they could arrive at the Weapons Depot, several guards began to shoot. Fyra ducked down with Johnny and looked at him with a plan in mind.

“Okay, I’m going to go all out against these guys, but there is a chance I will have to recover if I do, casting magic takes energy as you know. Go in, grab the weapons, and be fast because I will be vulnerable okay?” Fyra said as Johnny held his thumbs up. After a couple of minutes, the shooting stopped and Fyra jumped up. She put both arms in front of her with a grin as two giant columns of flame pierced the faces of the guards. They yelped as they reeled back and fell to the ground. As soon as she was confident they were unconscious, Fyra blasted a pipe above her head and water gushed out to douse the flames. She didn’t want to kill for the sake of killing...she had never been that way. No sooner had she burst the pipes, she felt her energy levels diminish and fell to her knees.

“Go!” She yelled as she attempted to recuperate some of her strength. Johnny got the cue as he ran past the guards and with the key set they had obtained earlier; he easily unlocked the weapons depot and went inside. Fyra agonizingly waited on her knees feeling some of her energy returning. After what seemed like hours, Johnny returned handing her the copper and silver daggers she had inherited from her father at the age of 13. They were more than just her weapons; they were a reminder of home...

“Fyra, are you good? I’m pretty sure we need to keep moving...” Johnny tried to be comforting, while at the same time trying to stress the urge that more guards and military would be arriving soon.

“I know...alright, I’m fine.” Fyra weakly pushed herself up. This would have to do...

The pair nodded to one another as they headed forward and back out towards the receptionist area. As soon as the first guard appeared and yelled at them to freeze, Johnny pulled up the gun he picked out at the weapons depot and fired several shots into the officer’s bulletproof vest. This caused the man to reel backwards and lose his balance. Fyra then rushed forward and slashed his arm so that he could not fire the gun. The guard yelped and lay in pain on the floor. They continued forward making their way right towards the exit.

Johnny vaguely remembered the layout of the building and as they rounded the corner he recognized several of the offices that lined the hallway. “This way!” He

yelled to Fyra as he took a right past Officer Castrus' office, towards the main lobby of the building where several military officers were waiting.

"...shit..." Johnny fired a few shots before hearing clicks. Fyra pushed him out the way as she used a few flame bursts to deflect some of the bullets, one she missed slightly grazed her leg as they tumbled behind a desk to safety.

"ahh..." Fyra stifled a moan as she held her bleeding leg close to her.

"I got this..." Johnny reloaded and waited for a break. With his semi-automatic handgun, he fired several shots in quick succession that hit two of the five guards. Before he could fire again, the shooting started up again as he quickly ducked to avoid being hit.

"Okay, I'm not going to get another break...Fyra, stay behind me ok?" He held out his hand and silently counted to three. As he reached three, he jumped out from behind the desk, screaming as he fired. Two of the guards fell, but the third aimed his gun square at Johnny's chest. Johnny continued forward knowing this shot wouldn't miss as his gun made a clicking sound yet again. This would be it for him...

"DUCK!" Fyra heard the clicking noise as she held out her hand and a fireball appeared. Johnny instinctively did as he was told and the fireball hit the final soldier full on in the face knocking him backwards. The pair nodded to each other as they then burst through the doors and bolted down the main steps towards the street. Fyra, being somewhat faster, bolted forward, while Johnny followed behind her. *We did it! We are finally free!!* Fyra thought to herself. Suddenly, a shot rang out from behind them.

Fyra blinked as she heard the shot but felt nothing as she felt a twinge in her stomach. Turning around she saw Johnny stagger for a couple steps as blood suddenly appeared from the center of his forehead. Fyra then watched in horror as he slumped to his knees, eyes wide open as his hands dropped the empty handgun. His fingers twitched somewhat as he fell face flat into the street. The whole world felt still as she then looked up to see a man in a tuxedo with a smoking gun stood with a grin. She had run into the officer several times before in attempts to break associates out of the prison. *Oh god...no...please...don't take Johnny away too...* Fyra felt numb as she now looked at Senior Officer Castrus who had just killed her last true friend.

He then raised his gun as rain began to sprinkle down. *He is going to fire another shot...* Fyra realized she didn't have time to mourn her dead friend. She had to survive...or else it would have all been for nothing...quickly thinking, she shot fireballs, which deflected the bullets before they could reach her. Before she could reach the nearby alleyway, Fyra felt the last of her energy leave. She had no choice as she pushed past the point of her limit and felt her nose bleed as it did. Her body would take a toll for using up so much energy in so little time, but she knew she had to.

As soon as she was in running distance, she stopped throwing fireballs and dashed into the alleyway behind her. A couple more shots were fired, but she had created enough distance that she could safely evade the shots. She could hear several military men now yelling as they entered the streets talking to each other about searching everywhere to find the fugitive girl. Fyra wiped the blood from her nose as she staggered through the alley. She had to keep moving...she didn't have a choice. As she continued along, using the wall as a support, she found a café and stumbled inside going immediately to the bathroom. She eventually got inside and forced herself into a stall as she locked the door behind her...she was weak and couldn't help but fall on the floor and pass out...

Sometime later she awoke to the sounds of the toilet in the next stall over flushing. She slowly made her way to her feet as she held her head. It pounded hard as she tried to process what was going on around her. Some of the strength she had lost from using so much magic had returned, at least enough for her to continue on. She looked at her watch and felt somewhat confused to find that it was still the same day as the failed robbery. To think that she had started the day at four in the morning and was still going in the late afternoon on the same day...that so much had happened and had gone wrong...how was it possible?

She knew she didn't have time to ponder these thoughts as she flushed her own toilet and left the stall. Walking over to the sink she looked at herself in the mirror, her hair was messy and her nose had a small red trail coming down from the left nostril that was caked over her upper lip, and her clothes looked wrinkled now. She coughed a bit as she then cupped her hands and splashed some cold water over her face to wake up. Taking a couple of moments to clean up, Fyra dried off her face with a towel and then

left the stall. As she did she quickly ducked when two officers walked up to the counter. While they were busy asking for details about her to the cashier, she slipped out the door.

Again on the streets, Fyra made her way out of the alley towards Center Park. This wouldn't provide the best cover for her, but with the mass amounts of people there she would blend in with the crowd as she casually walked towards them. For awhile this seemed to work until one citizen gasped.

“It's the girl that broke out of jail!!!” She yelled as several other people yelled and mass panic began. Fyra soon found herself floundering amongst a crazy mob of deranged citizens. Before she had time to escape back into an ally several officers blew whistles as they blocked her escape from the Northern side of the park. Fyra realized this would be it, unless...she picked a blue, curly-haired boy with a white robe out as she quickly ducked behind him and put a knife to his throat while the officers soon surrounded him. She would use her hostage to escape this otherwise impossible situation.

Chapter 5-Trapped

What the heck?! Reques felt the steel of the blade press against his throat. One minute he had been heading home to make up with his family, the next everyone was going crazy around him. He tried not to be trampled by the mob, but bumped into some woman who now had a knife pressed against his throat.

“Don’t shoot or the boy dies!” The woman slowly began to walk to the side. “Come along with me until I don’t need you anymore and I promise I won’t hurt you...” She whispered to Reques in a soft, sad tone...

“Trust me; I’m pretty sure you haven’t given me a choice...” He replied walking with her. “I’m sure if you tell me what is going on I could work something out. My father is a very powerful man and can probably get you out of this situation.”

“I was wrongfully put in jail for trying to help put out that fire in the slums you’ve probably heard about...” Fyra moved sideways. “I escaped with a friend, but they killed him, and now they are trying to do the same thing to me.”

“I see...did anyone do anything about that fire by the way?” Reques said as the tale piqued his curiosity.

“Besides the people who live there? No...” Fyra scowled as she turned around slightly so her back was to the ally.

“I see...well then what’s your plan?” He asked as they passed backwards into an alley.

“Well for starters, once we are fully inside this alley, I’m going to blast the guards with fireballs that should stun them long enough for me to escape and you to go on your merry way. Sound good?” She said, now in position.

“Perfect...then we can pretend this never happened.” Reques nodded.

Fyra then dropped the knife as the guards raised their weapons. Fyra quickly blasted the guards with fire. “RUN!” She yelled to him as the pair took off down the alley towards the street. The guards yelled in pain behind them. “Okay, once we reach the end you go left and I’ll go right! You will never see me again.” She pointed ahead.

“Got it!” He acknowledged as they neared the end of the alley. Soon he would be out of this mess and able to go see his family again. His thoughts flashed to his sister, probably sitting home worried sick trying to figure out why he left, his mother who

would also be worried but not making attempts to find him...and his father, probably not caring and still aggravated. But at this point he didn't care; he just wanted to go home, alive, and give his parents a piece of his mind. They neared the end of the alley as Fyra then gave him one last wink and began to bank right. As they entered the main street, however, they gasped as a dozen security guards were there, a man in a tuxedo stood in front of them.

"Well, it seems the hostage situation turns out to just be another one of your gang members, is that it Fyra Marang?" The guy sneered as he held his hand back halting the firing of guns.

"Who me? With...F-fyra?!" He looked at the woman. So this was the notorious leader of the Douze Brigade...he had heard stories about her from television how she and her group robbed people...had the whole story about the fire been just a way for him to be coaxed into her plan?

"The boy is not with me, let him go!" She yelled angrily.

Reques was now utterly confused as he stood unsure of where to go.

"And let a potential suspect and escaped convict go? I don't think so...If you come along quietly, I promise not to kill either of you..." The man coolly let off a smile as he put his weapon down.

"Where was this common courtesy for Johnny huh?!" The other woman screamed obviously furious about something that Reques had missed.

"I had to get you to see that I was serious. Plus, if I was going to bring someone back in, it would have had to have been the leader of the Douze Brigade..." He shrugged. "Just so happened to be you, if it was this Johnny person or whomever, you would be dead instead of him..." Reques watched as the woman clenched her fist. She was going to get them both killed by not going peacefully, and Reques didn't feel like going to jail...

Call me... Frey whispered. Reques nodded as he muttered a few words and then held out his hand. The tuxedo man gave him a confused look as all of a sudden the Call appeared before him yelling as the earth shook. Reques took the opportunity to run the other direction, grabbing Fyra's hand as he did. The pair of them took off running while Frey distracted the guards.

The light rain ended as Fyra and Reques tore down the street. They did not know where they were going, but knew they had to get as far away as possible. A few minutes down the road, Reques gasped a bit and felt to one knee. Though it required no additional effort or energy to Call a spirit, every time they were knocked out it drained a good portion of a Callers energy. He figured by the sudden lack of presence that Frey was now unconscious and back in his body. He quickly picked himself back up as Fyra motioned for him to follow her into the night.

Chapter 6-Senators

“All rise as I call this meeting into session!” A man dressed in black slacks and matching suit stood up. His grey hair rolled from the top of his head to his shoulders as he regally stood. He watched the other men and women in the room stand up to acknowledge the beginning of the meeting. Once everyone had risen up the elderly man cleared his throat.

“You all may be seated...” The man took his seat which prompted everyone else in the room to copy him. All of the monthly Senator meetings began this way. Of the fifty Senators in the room, half represented Sectors One through Four while the other half represented the other sectors. They often fought about every issue and never seemed to get along with each other. Every five years, one Senator would be chosen amongst the last group of fifty to become “Head Senator” for the future group of senators. Thus at each meeting 51 senators were present. The man remembered when his name was revealed as the last person to be voted in and now was known as Head Senator LeMarcus, it was his third term being Head Senator.

“On today’s agenda, we will be discussing the Business Tax Reform, the state of affairs in Sector 12, and filling the two representative seats from Sector 7 as both have resigned. We will start in reverse order...Does anyone have word on how elections are being handled for the Sector?”

“I have finished preparing the applications and am going to be making a formal announcement in the Sector at the end of the week...” A brunette Senator spoke up as she looked at LeMarcus. Her name was Eva Crane and she had gained notoriety recently, after officially advocating the right to give more ration supplies to the lower Sectors. As his intern her resume was extremely profound and stepping into her position after the previous Senator resigned was a godsend.

“Good work Senator Crane, I trust you and your team will handle that. The next order of business is the state of affairs in Sector 12. According to Dolorian Security Agents, the water was turned off once they had exceeded the amount they had been allocated. However, this was in part due to the fire that ravaged their homes. In the event of emergencies and the lack of the fire department it has been issued that we allow a Sector to temporarily exceed the amount give to them each month. However,

even when presented with an emergency and several resisting residents, the excess water was not given and for the most part the whole of Sector 12 was burned...can someone explain this scenario to me?" His eyes narrowed as he looked towards the representatives of Sector 12.

"Head Senator LeMarcus," One of the older Senators from Sector 12 stood up. His name was Bradley Amatura and his piercing blue eyes seemed to cause fear to those around him, "I can assure you that I did what I could to get this issue resolved. While I cannot speak for why the water was not turned on to allow extra access, I can say that the fire apartment was busy dealing with a minor fire on the edge of town. I think we can both say who was responsible for calling them to a more minor detail..." His eyes shot towards one of the other Senators.

"Of all the ridiculous statements..." Senator Garmon glared at the accusing pair of eyes. "I called the department in the minute that fire became a threat to our city. Surely Head Senator LeMarcus realizes I was only putting them in the correct place from the intelligence I had at the time. Certainly if I had known there was going to be a fire in that area I would have obviously allowed the department to go there...since our Sector easily has enough water to put out the flames on our own." He sounded convincing.

"Enough from both of you!" LeMarcus shouted as murmurs began around the room. "From what I can see is that the timing was inconvenient. Why wasn't the water turned on? That is the real issue that needs to be addressed!" As he did Senator Garmon fell quiet.

"From what I understand, our Sector was not given more water because the thief Fyra Marang caused a scene that distracted the guards. Thus their efforts were focused on capturing her for breaking into De Vasco Incorporated with the Douze Brigade. Though it seems to baffle me that after they had their efforts not on the thief they could not have just turned the water on..." Senator Amatura looked disgusted as he finished his statement.

"Alright, well for now we need to drop this since there is a lot of coincidental timing and I will personally put a team from DSA in charge of getting to the bottom of

the issue. Now for our final order of business, The Business Tax Reform...Senator Davis?" He looked towards the man with the curly brown hair.

"Thank you Head Senator LeMarcus. As you all know last meeting Senator De Vasco and myself proposed a new addendum to our constitution to change the business tax. With our recent decline for income in Dolor, we are very hopeful this change will help bring revenue and stabilize our budget. The proposed change is to increase the annual tax each business currently has so that each year they will have to pay a higher fee," Davis finished his proposal by handing out a packet. "In this packet, you will find the proposed change we are suggesting." After a second of looking over, Senator Yegor's face went paler than normal.

"This proposal will destroy smaller businesses..." He squeaked.

"I agree with Senator Yegor," Another Senator from Sector Five stood up looking irate. "This fee is way too large for most businesses to handle!"

"Then where do you suggest we get the money from? Taxing the citizens more?" Senator Davis shot back with a harsh tongue. This quieted the attacking Senators as Davis smiled, composing himself.

"Unless someone sees a better alternative to this issue, I see no more reason for discussion...do you Head Senator?" He said looking back at the elderly gentleman. Though he couldn't deny the increase was steep, Senator Davis had a point; they were already overtaxing the citizens by an exponentially large sum. This would potentially drive personal taxes down if this were to be passed.

"Does anyone have any more relevant discussion?" LeMarcus looked around for anyone to say anything to make this not a plausible outcome for the city. "Seeing no more discussion we will..."

"Head Senator, I may have something relevant to this..." Senator Crane then looked towards him; in her hand she held a packet labeled confidential on it. The whole room fell silent as she opened the packet and began to summarize its contents.

"I have here a record of previous taxes on businesses from the last few months. I also have records of the amount of money the government received...and it seems to be significantly less..." She shuffled through her papers.

“What does this do with the current reform on the table?” LeMarcus grew skeptical not seeing the relevance.

“If you would allow me to finish, I promise you this will become relevant...” She said throwing looks at Senator Davis and Senator De Vasco.

“Please continue...” Head Senator LeMarcus raised an eyebrow.

“The third document I have is a transfer of money into De Vasco Incorporated that seems to match the amount of money missing in the government... Though it is coincidental, the final piece of evidence I have...” She looked up about to deliver the final blow. “Is a picture of Senator Davis giving Senator De Vasco a check, which to our eyes is hard to read...” Several of the other Senators began talking amongst themselves and gave looks of malice towards the two Senators being accused.

“However, amongst careful examination under a microscope by several scientists in Dolorian Labs, the check reads the amount that is missing from two of the last tax pulls...and also lists the account of which the money was supposed to go into...Oh and it doesn’t help that the account has record of this check’s number being deposited,” She grinned as there was indisputable evidence now. “I believe that for some time now, the two Senators have been involved in embezzlement of tax payer’s money, which is what has led us to this financial crisis within the city. What makes this story more believable to me is that Senator Davis is now asking for a second increase in the taxing of all businesses which I believe he will try to take as well. If you ask me these two Senators aren’t any worse than the Douze Brigade...don’t you Head Senator?” She winked.

“Is this true?!” LeMarcus now stood up, infuriated as he looked at the guards in the room to prevent the pair from escaping.

“We have yet to see this evidence...I call for a trial!” Senator Davis now was grasping for straws.

“Fine then! A trial it is. I will collect the data and information from Senator Crane herself and begin a trial with the Council to determine if the evidence is true. Until then this meeting is temporarily dismissed and the reform is to be tabled. While I am busy conducting this trial I am appointing Senator Crane to fill in and carry on my duties. Does anyone have objection to this?” Though he was sure several of the

Senators would pull a seniority card over her, no one seemed to have the guts to actually follow through with an objection given the performance she had just given then.

“Good, meeting adjourned until further notice,” He then nodded to the guards who carried off Senator Davis and Senator De Vasco to await their trial. Once the remaining Senators had left the room, he left to speak to Senator Crane.

“Do you mind handing that to me?” He said holding out his hand for the packet of confidential evidence she held in her hands.

“Not at all, thank you for permitting me to speak...” She humbly acknowledged the Head Senator.

“You remind me a lot of myself...someone who isn’t willing to take things for granted and always looking for ways to better this city. This is why I chose you to fill in for me.” He gave her a look of gratitude.

“I appreciate your sentiments!” Senator Crane beamed at the compliment. “So is there anything I should specifically do or need to know about to fill in for you?”

“Not really, but while I am busy conducting the trials, be sure to put off any meetings I may have with anyone until I can be back to make official decisions myself. Make sure anything I have going continues running smoothly...and see if you can dig up anything else on the embezzlement. I will need all the evidence I can get, though this will surely be sufficient if true.” He smiled to her. With one final handshake the pair nodded to each other.

“I promise to do my best...” She said as they both let go.

“I know you will...” He nodded and walked off to begin the trial, knowing everything would be handled correctly in the hands of Senator Crane.

Chapter 7-The Plan

Fyra and the kid eventually ended up in front of an abandoned warehouse as they clambered inside tired from having run for several hours. Both were drenched and shivering as Fyra quickly began to gather some of the collapsed wood. The boy leaned against the wall, panting. Fyra checked the surroundings on the building as she covered the open areas and barricaded the doors. At least for tonight, they would have to rest and regain some of the energy they had lost today. Once she was satisfied with how the room was arranged, Fyra took the firewood back over towards the kid's position and set it down.

"So, I suppose I've been thrown in with your lot..." He shivered as he attempted to make small talk with her. Fyra gave him a skeptical look.

"What do you mean by 'your lot?'" she scoffed as she set up the firewood in a teepee fashion before using her fire magic to start a small flame.

"Your...Brigade, modern day Robin Hoods...isn't that what it is?" The other replied trying to lightly tread on the icy topic.

"Something like that..." She stopped producing fire as a small flame caught on the dry wood. It was almost too old and dry though, she would have to go find some more within the hour. "Guess you are, though I never asked you to."

"Well it was that or go to jail and I didn't feel like doing that..." He folded his arms.

"I'm sure your 'father' would have gladly gotten you out..." Fyra rolled her eyes as she then reached into a bag she had picked up at the café and pulled out a couple of bran muffins. "Here, eat something..." She tossed one to him as she sat near the fire to warm up.

"Did you steal this too?" The boy bit into the food.

"Is this how you treat all people who give you food?" Fyra gave the kid a glare. Though she had initially been grateful for his help, he was starting to annoy her. "What happened to earlier when you offered to help?"

"What else would you tell someone who had a knife to your throat? Please slash it open?" He gave her a look. "I suppose what I said was a bit rude. Though it's clear neither of us are thrilled about the situation so tensions are bound to be high."

“I guess you are right,” She shrugged as he completely avoided apologizing and gave an excuse. “Anyways, what is your name?”

“Ah, well you may or may not have heard of me, I’m a bit famous,” he beamed as he looked at her. “Reques Thio Da Vyne Altaire the Third.”

“Altaire...altaire...that name rings a bell,” She pondered as she thought for a second as she snapped her fingers, Reques seemed thrilled to be recognized. “Got it! Like Altaire Kitchenware?” She exclaimed as Reques huffed.

“Not it at all...” he sighed and went back to nibbling on his muffin. “Like the Altaire Calling Clan...”

“Never heard of it...though that brings up a question,” Fyra looked at Reques. “Since you are a Caller, how many of your calls have you obtained?” She knew from her days in school that Callers had to go on a journey to collect all of the different Calls left behind by an ancient race known as the Eldests.

“Just my initial one...” He looked somewhat down again, having not been recognized and been called out on the lack of Calls he had.

“Oh okay, so you are just out of the apprentice stage. Why do you have to collect them anyways? I never really understood the point of a pilgrimage,” She tried to look genuinely interested.

“It’s not something that I feel I need to explain to you. By the way your magic output is too high when you attempt to concentrate it. I suppose it’s pretty good for someone of your class standing...” He said.

Though he had probably meant this as a compliment, Fyra became enraged as she stood up. “Okay that’s it you ass! If you have something to say about where I come from say it to my face instead of joking about it,” She balled her fists.

“What are you going to do? Punch me? Whether you like it or not we are stuck together momentarily...I’m a fugitive like you...” He finished his muffin as he pulled his legs against his chest.

“You are nothing like me. The only reason you are here is because I actually pitied you for standing up for me. Guess that was a huge mistake...” She folded her arms. “When you start deciding to actually be nice let me know, I’m going to go sleep

on the other side of the room.” She walked away from the now dying fire, her blood boiling in anger at his words.

“What is the plan now?” Reques said looking over at her.

“Well, tomorrow I’m planning on contacting a friend at Jade’s Bar; he should be able to get me tickets to another moon until this whole thing blows over...” She began to make a pile of old couch cushions to sleep on from a rugged and extremely long couch located in the corner of the abandoned building. “If you feel you can deal with a ‘lowly commoner’ you are welcome to join.” Reques caught the hint of sarcasm at the end of her phrase.

“Well seeing as now I’m seen as a member of this ‘Douze Brigade,’” He said putting emphasis on the last part obviously annoyed with the situation. “I don’t really see how I can’t go with you.”

“I never said you had to come...” Fyra lay down. Secretly she was thinking this young man’s Calling abilities could come in handy in the future.

“Well you really leave me with no choice...” Reques put out the fire as he copied Fyra with the remaining couch cushions. “I miss my bed...” he said feeling the hardness of the floor below him.

“I’m sure you do, and your fancy maids, your fancy school, your fancy cars...”

“Shut up, will you? God you are so annoying...” He said laying on the other side of the room.

“Alright, well it seems like we are not going to enjoy each other. Let’s just call a temporary truce until we can get out of here and figure this shit out...” Fyra closed her eyes as she tried not to think about everything.

“Fine...” Reques agreed reluctantly.

“Fine...” Fyra replied as she began to drift off to sleep, a tear running down her cheek as thoughts of Johnny’s smile ran rampant on the edge of her dreams.

Chapter 8-Arrival

For what seemed like hours, Andy sat alone in the gunner room looking out into space. Thousands of stars lit up the universe as he took in the sights. It wasn't the first time he had been up here, but each time seemed like a completely new experience. No two stars or planets ever seemed the same to him, never twice in the same position. The last time he had been to space was over ten years ago to visit his human mother on the moon-city of Aristes. He vaguely remembered what she sounded and looked like. It hadn't been long after his last visit that she had passed away from a weak heart. It made this trip in space different because this time, he wasn't going to see his mother, or visit other planets for diplomatic reasons; he was going to help the Rogans save the universe from destruction.

"Andy!" A voice shouted as the hatch opened nearby. As he watched another Rogan Officer enter, he began to move out of the way.

"Hey, is my post up?" He wondered if he was needed elsewhere. Usually the gunner stayed at the helm for most of the journey.

"Yeah, you are needed on deck. There, General Rouske will give you further instructions..." The officer sat himself into the empty seat.

"Thank you sir," Andy gave the man a bow and a quick chest beat as he left the helm. It was a way to thank one another for something when a bow was followed by a chest beat. If there was no chest beat it usually meant you were acknowledging something done for you but not fully appreciative of it. There were other customs that the Rogan's had. For example, when one Rogan went to greet a stranger, it was generally custom under normal circumstances to wrap their tail around their own leg, and only remove it if a friendship develops. If by the end of a conversation both Rogans still had their tails wrapped around their legs, it generally meant they never wanted to talk to each other again.

Andy made his way down the halls of the Arexus looking at all of the details of the ship. Since its repairs, the spacecraft had been running better than ever. It was astounding how well the Rogan mechanics were able to construct and position certain wires using small vines from the forest in order to establish faster and more effective fuel transmissions. This gave the vessel faster flying time and less energy waste. That

was one thing Andy had noticed; he wasn't particularly pleased with how much waste human's produced. When he had visited Aristes the last time, he noticed how smoky the air was and how much the land felt dead, unlike the living, breathing forests of U'Roga. Though he had been taught this was the way of expansion, he often thought of this as a personal destruction to one's habitat. Most Rogans shared similar beliefs from their visits to the human worlds.

He passed through the many corridors that lined the ship as he slowly made his way towards the bridge. Once inside the main control room, he saw General Rouske sitting on a chair giving commands to several of the other specialists running communications and general operating.

"Ah! Andy, Rogan of the hour. I have a proposition for you," He said as he turned his chair to face the Halfling.

"What can I do for you?" Andy gave a brief salute which turned into a bow and was finally followed with a brief chest beat.

"We are going to be going towards Ungdar. Intel says it seems to be a likely place this doomsday device is. When we are within a certain distance of the object, the Angel's Frown will become silent according to the legend. Once this happens we will most likely land near a populated area. As you know because of recent Rogan Pirate attacks, that our relationship with Humans is...shaky to say the least," He paused for a moment to find the right word. Everything he said was tinged with truth. Andy had heard of the pirates before. They were a group of Rogans whose ability to repair and increase the capabilities of ships had turned them into greedy thieves. The group now plagued the galaxy by pillaging and shooting down transport vessels. "So when we arrive, humans are likely going to be hesitant to interact and believe a Rogan...however we believe that a Halfling such as yourself will be more likely to convey our message to the Humans in an appropriate manner...would you be our liaison once we find this location?"

"It would be my honor as a Rogan," Andy quickly beat his chest once to indicate he was accepting the responsibility.

"Excellent, then from this point forward you will be known as the Arexus' Human Liaison. For now, I need you to rest and gather your energy back up. We should

be in the Durlengo System within the next eighteen hours and we need you feeling rested and up to the task of negotiations, that is all.”

With the end of his briefing, Andy headed outside. Most of the warriors would sleep in the bunker located towards the base of Arexus. The other able bodied crew would stay in the upper suites. There was some practicality for this, but what it boiled down to is that the crew that could actually operate the ship needed more comfortable quarters so they could get as much sleep as possible.

He reached the end of the hall and turned right as he neared the elevator, which would take him to the lower level of the ship. As he felt the mechanical box lurch, the ground beneath him lowered. It was awkward for him to get used to the feeling of machines moving him since he hadn't needed to for so long. Though the feeling was unsettling, he figured most humans would probably find the feel of riding a Horcalope just as strange. Being a Halfling gave Andy insight to both the Rogan and Human culture which had really caused his mind to be open when trying to see how each would react to a situation.

Andy then felt the elevator lurch again as it slowed to a stop. He regained his balance as he then watched the doors split apart. Heading out with a slight stumble, Andy passed by the boiler room, the storage room, and several cleaning rooms as he neared the bunker. He could smell the familiar pungent odor of the other Rogan warriors. Entering the room, he heard everyone chattering. When several thousand soldiers crammed into a single room, it felt like being in the marketplace back at Tar Tar'an. He had to be careful not to step on any tails or interrupt any conversations as he made his way to his bags and sword. After carefully making his way towards the back of the room he got to his cot. He lay down as he removed his belongings from the cot, letting the wonderful state of sleep invade his mind.

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Alarms echoed throughout the corridors, searing through Andy's ears. He shot up in his bed and looked around at other Rogans awakening in confusion. He quickly jumped up before anyone else had a chance and ran into the hallway towards the stairwell. It would be quicker to run up the stairs then stand on the shaky elevator. His heart raced as his feet carried him up step by step. *What could be going on that was*

causing the alarm to go off? He tried not to over think it as he finally reached the top of the steps. Pushing the door open he walked as fast as he could towards the control room. As he walked he was pushed several times by rushing Rogans running back and forth. He figured nothing was meant by it as everyone seemed on edge.

He eventually found his way to the control room and as he walked in he saw General Rouske pacing back and forth.

“What is going on?!” He shouted as he quickly pounded his chest.

“Andy, the Angel’s Frown deactivated...that means we are landing...”

“Where are we landing?” He asked out of curiosity.

“Lorica...” The General gave him a glance back.

Lorica? Had they already traveled that far? Andy quickly saw one of the time keepers on the ship and realized he had slept for quite some time. As he then made his way to the front of the ship, he quickly got on the intercom.

“Everyone, calm down. Be prepared for a landing on the moon Lorica. The item we have been sent to destroy is here! That’s all!” He said as he turned off the com.

“Good job Human Liaison, a promotion is definitely in order for you when we return,” General Rouske nodded to him with a chest pound. “For now, I want you to land us. The pilot is still nowhere to be found.”

“M-me sir?!” Andy said with a bit of shock on his face as he sat in the seat.

“Yes, if I remember right you once flew a ship at the age of 10 and landed it perfectly in Aristes...this should be nothing right soldier?” He grinned.

“Uh...sure...” Andy chuckled nervously as he then grabbed the handles. It had been somewhat of a fluke the last time he had landed the ship and caused severe damaged to the hull. He didn’t doubt, however, that he could land the ship as he knew what he had done wrong last time...and was glad to have a chance to redeem himself. Gripping the wheel tightly he prepared to enter the atmosphere of the moon.

Andy concentrated as he steered the ship towards the moon. From space the moon was strangely beautiful; red rock lined the land creating a dazzling swirling effect. As they continued going closer towards the moon, a city came into view. It was huge, not as huge as Aristes, but larger than he had expected for a recently developed city. Though he did not know much about the human race inhabiting the moons of

Ungdar, what he had learned from his brief time on Aristes had taught him about the expansion to increase their space available for the population; Lorica being the pinnacle of this expansion.

The ship then lurched as it entered Lorica's atmosphere. Andy had to push in an opposite motion to keep it from going crazy. The door then opened behind him as General Rouske re-entered the room.

"How is she holding?!" He yelled as he grabbed the handle near Andy.

"Fantastic, just have to level her out a bit!" Andy grit his teeth as he pulled up on the wheel. They were going too fast and probably would take some damage to the hull. He was painfully reminded of his last attempt to land a vessel and did what he could to correct this. Pulling as hard as he could, Andy finally felt the lurch up as they neared the surface, passing through the atmosphere finally. They were still going down way too fast.

"General, get yourself buckled in, I don't foresee this being a smooth landing..." He said as he strained to continue to pull up. As he did he remembered seeing a lever wiggle as he did before 10 years ago...and he remembered that lever was the key, but did not think to pull it last time. Without hesitation he pulled the lever as he then felt the ship level out, just a few dozen feet from the surface of Lorica. He could feel the boosters on the base of the ship activate as everyone lurched back. After a couple more rocky jerks, Andy easily pushed the lever in and the ship dropped easily onto a rocky plateau. Their location was just a few minutes outside of the city he had marveled from space. This...was where the device was...somewhere...just inside of that city.

Chapter 9-Bars & Rumors

The environment was smoky and dark as Reques felt his hand pass the door to the bar. He had never been inside of a bar before and it was strange to him to feel the atmosphere that so many of his relatives raved about. This seemed like a rundown version of a restaurant except there was more alcohol and smoke. Reques was definitely not impressed. Before he could begin to protest being there, he remembered the entire reason they were there in the first place...

“So does the almighty, commoner thief have a plan?” Reques had questioned the moment they were completely cleaned up.

“You really know how to piss me off don’t you runt? As usual, I actually do have a plan. There is an old friend who owes me a favor. We can find him at Jade’s Bar, the one I mentioned to you last night. I believe he can get us out of this city for the time being until things roll over.” Reques fumed at the thought of being called a runt. He was not that tiny...

“Oh what? You can dish it out to the ‘commoner’ but you can’t take a tiny joke?” She cackled at the thought, taking off towards the bar.

Reques could do nothing but scowl as he followed along, biting his tongue from making a retort.

It had been this idea that had kept the young man from leaving at the very sight of the unkempt bar. He followed Fyra who had entered just seconds before him and was headed to the far side. As he stopped for a second, he saw someone eating some decent food as he wandered over to the counter and ordered a snack. He had a little bit of cash on him and he was sure Fyra wouldn’t mind some time to be with her friend...and away from him. She was so stubborn. He had no idea how someone could be so hard headed. It was like nothing else mattered but the cause she fought for...was she trying to get back at something from her past?

He decided not to read too much into her actions as he grabbed the glass of water he was handed and downed it like a desert swallowing rain drops. He continued to wait for his food as he overheard a conversation going on behind him.

“...you know the Rogans? Those green, beastlike people...yeah them! They landed outside the city just a few hours ago! It’s all over the news!”

Reques couldn't help but overhear the conversation as he saw two elderly gentlemen drinking beers behind him. Rogans? Wasn't that the newer race from another solar system? This intrigued Reques as he listened in.

"I hear they are trying to ask to enter the city for some sort of doomsday object or something. The Government doesn't really like the idea, though, seeing as no formal documents have been processed to let them in. It's pretty complicated..."

"You know," The other gentleman spoke up. "This reminds me of a story... It was a story my mother used to tell. I don't remember it all, but it involved them Elders. You know how they were supposed to be these creatures with no ability to take a side, sort of like a judge. Well. uncharacteristically one day, they saw that humans had what they lacked and became fearful that this would upset the balance of nature. Therefore they created a device that could restart the very balance of life so that no species could become too advanced. However, in creating it they realized they had become unbiased. To counter this, the Eldests put a spell on the object with powerful Anima to allow five humans, with key characteristics, to save the world. Do you think that is what the Rogans are after?"

"Hard to say, mate. It sounds way too farfetched to be a reason to drag someone here. Plus with all those stories about the Pirate Rogans, maybe this group is just looking to steal our money," He scoffed taking another swig. The two buddies began to joke about something unrelated.

"Five key characteristics..." Reques repeated softly as he began to ponder this thought. He had heard this somewhere before though his mind could not place the exact source or phrasing. He shook it aside as food soon came out to him. It was a large sandwich filled with Carupa meat, and several different vegetables. Reques hungrily tore at the sandwich trying to savor every single flavor. It could be awhile, knowing Fyra, before he was able to eat a decent meal again. As he was tantalized by the flavors that ran through his mouth, he suddenly found a new appreciation for the bar. Despite the smoky atmosphere and the shady characters, the food was divine, probably one of the better meals he had experienced in his lifetime. Maybe he had been too hasty in his judgment...

“Ok boy,” That cynical voice appeared behind him. He turned around facing the woman with an inkling of anger on his brow. “I just finished up with my friend and he will have our tickets ready for us within the hour. We need to head towards the spaceport where we will pick them up under different identities...” She handed him a passport. Reques took a look inside and immediately wrinkled his brow as he saw that his name was Cretin Abanaster. He knew exactly what the first name meant and it made him want to punch Fyra even more. Biting through his anger he did what he could to nod his head and quickly finish up his sandwich. The pair of them left the bar and headed into the street.

“Fyra...” Reques stopped no sooner than the moment they had left.

“What is it?” She halted, placing her hand on her hip with annoyance written all over her face.

“Have you ever heard of the Caller’s Divination?” He now remembered the story that had linked him to the conversation in the bar.

“No, why should I?” Fyra folded her arms while tapping the ground with her toes.

“It’s a legend all Callers read upon the start of their initiation. It talks about how once a Caller has obtained all of their Calls they are revered as Saints. Remember when you asked what the point of a Caller was? I’ve wondered that myself for awhile, but never really had an answer until that conversation came up in the bar.”

“Can this wait?” She impatiently looked at the time above the bar.

“I’m not sure it can,” he was now deep in thought. “During my initiation I promised to ‘one day journey to gather the Calls left behind by the Eldests, to be strong and grow to master my abilities, and to become the Key of Knowledge for future generations...”

“Is that supposed to mean something?” Fyra rolled her eyes as she turned around. “If that is all we need to go...” She began to walk off.

“But in the bar, I heard about a story involving a device that needs five Keys in order to destroy...” Reques said, the coincidence seeming less and less strange with each word.

“For all you know, it was just bar talk, drunkards, dreamers...” Fyra glanced back. “And a key could be anything ranging from a locket key to a keystone. All this is pure coincidence. You are using your adolescent brain to piece together something that isn’t there.” Reques then fumed out the ears.

“So, Miss All Knowing, what does it mean then? Because if this was coincidence, I’m pretty sure I wouldn’t feel as strongly about it as I do...”

“At this point, it means nothing. You are so vapid! You do things impulsively, you judge people without knowing them, and you make hasty assumptions to statements without thinking them through.”

“As opposed to you? You know nothing about me! Yet you preach to me as if you know everything! But you are just as blind as a child!” Both of them now were yelling at each other. Tempers ran high as they fiercely got in each other’s face.

As they did, one woman across the street looked up from her newspaper to see the squabble. With a quick glance back down to a picture she dropped her paper and pointed. “It’s the thief!” She yelled as several officers looked in their direction.

“...shit shit shit...” Fyra muttered. Their cover had been blown as she began to run. It took Reques a couple of moments to process what had just happened as the officers began to run towards him. As if a domino was tipped, the thoughts in Reques mind began to fall in place as he raced after Fyra.

Chapter 10-Arranged Meeting

In the time since arriving on Lorica, a lot of humans with fancy equipment had approached the Rogans. Andy had seen machines and equipment of all sorts, but was unsure of what most of their actual functions were. Some of them were familiar, such as the instrument that increased the volume of the voice, while others confused him with their flashing red lights and strange antennae. Many of the Rogans had been asked questions by these people, such as what the ship was made of, if there was any recent developments of governmental relations, and if any wars had broken out on U'Roga. It was very intimidating and most Rogans were confused by the attention.

“Andy, can you reason with these people and tell them we need an audience with the leader of this moon?” General Rouske said nervously as several of the Rogans were becoming annoyed.

Andy gave him a nod as he walked up to a woman whose yellow hair was pulled back tightly into a bun. She wore glasses and didn't seem as pushy as the other humans. “Hello, my name is Andy. We are from U'Roga,” He extended his hand towards the woman who looked bewildered. Andy knew some of the customs of the human race from the brief time he had been able to spend with his mother. The other Rogans watched in awe as the woman, pleasantly surprised, smiled and shook it back.

“It is an honor, I am Regina Wilder...is there something I can help you with?” She said obviously unsure where to go from there. As she said this all of the other frantic people stopped and focused their strange machines towards this conversation. Rogans and Humans alike were taken aback by the formality of the conversation occurring.

“Miss Wilder, I need to speak to whoever is in charge of this moon. There is a matter of grave urgency that requires a briefing regarding...something we have and something we believe you have. I am not at liberty to discuss this in the open, is there any way you can...obtain a meeting between myself and the appropriate correspondent?” Andy carefully chose his words as Regina looked back at him.

“If I do this, will you give me an interview about your planet?” She sweetly smiled.

“If that is all I need to do to obtain this meeting, then certainly,” Andy scratched his head.

“Fantastic! Brad, get Head Senator LeMarcus on the line!” Regina yelled to another human as he disappeared and pulled out some sort of phone. “It will be just one moment, will you wait for me?”

“Of course,” Andy nodded as she then headed over to join Brad.

“You should be careful what you tell that woman...” General Rouske appeared beside Andy. He looked at the General and nodded. “Take this with you...” he said handing him a small device.

“What is it?” He asked with a puzzled look.

“It’s a communication machine I found on the ship that will allow you to keep in contact with me should something rotten come up...” He hinted towards foul play.

“Got it...thank you General,” Andy beat his chest as the General walked away. Momentarily after, Regina came back with a giant smile on her face.

“Good news, we were able to set up a meeting between you and the Head Senator of the city!” She beamed enjoying the fact that she was being presented with a once in a lifetime opportunity.

“Fantastic,” Andy replied as she motioned for him to follow. As he stepped into the vehicle, he took one last look back at the Rogans and the ship. For some reason there was a twinge in his stomach, but he disregarded it as he stepped into the van in front of him.

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The van eventually arrived inside of the city. Andy was vaguely reminded of Aristes as they drove through the busy streets that lined Dolor. He had learned since entering the car that Dolor had been the development project for Aristes that he had heard about. He also learned a plethora of new terms. For the strange machines he saw earlier, they were called recording cameras which would take images and send them to screens called televisions. His planet had some of the basic technologies such as the speaker system inside of the ship, or the microphone that the village elder used, but for the most part, Rogans didn’t know a lot of these terms. Andy knew some from his time in Aristes, such as what a van was and how streets worked, but the knowledge he had

learned just from this drive would be crucial information that he could take back with him to U'Roga.

“So Andy...” Regina said as she held out a piece of paper and a pen. “Would you answer just a few questions for me? Since I won't be able to go into your meeting with Head Senator LeMarcus I wanted to get to know you a little bit and about the Rogans in general; they aren't well known here you know.” She winked.

“Sure, go ahead, but be warned if I am unable to answer a question for safety reasons please understand...” He hesitated somewhat with his response.

“Of course, I will never push you to answer a question you are uncomfortable with.”

“Alright,” Andy sighed a bit of relief.

“First, tell me about U'Roga. What kind of a place is it?”

“U'Roga is a giant planet covered in forests. It is warm and full of life. There are a lot of plants and monsters that also live on the planet. I'm not entirely sure what all you want to know about it though...” He chuckled nervously.

“Don't worry about it! I just want to know anything you are able to share. Could you tell me more about the Rogans? How many inhabitants are there on U'Roga?” She wrote down notes while Andy talked.

“Well according to what I know about Rogan history, over one hundred thousand years ago, a human spaceship crash landed on U'Roga with no hope of being rescued. The survivors made a settlement on the planet and fended for themselves. Overtime and after drinking the water on the planet, they eventually adapted and evolved into a new species called Rogans. We have grown into two separate tribes and between them there are over 1 million Rogans on U'Roga. It is unknown if other populations exist elsewhere.”

“That is more than I was hoping for! Okay, so why are there two tribes?”

“A long time ago, we gave our blessings to the Spirit God Mana for providing us with everything. Over one hundred years ago, one Rogan, named Kh'luthka hypothesized based on documents discovered around that time, that Mana had not been the ones to give us beastlike qualities, rather that it was something in the environment. This was a controversial topic that split our race in half. One half went with Kh'luthka

to the north side of the planet while the other half stayed behind on the southern end. It wasn't until our contact with humans thirty years ago that Kh'luthka's claim was verified. However, even with the factual data, the Southern Tribe is still 100% solid that Mana exists and because of this, our two tribes have never been able to come together."

"Amazing...ok now teach us a custom that Rogans have that you haven't seen in human culture," She put down her paper and pen.

"You aren't going to write anything down?" Andy gave a confused look.

"I want to learn something about your culture. Not everything can be learned in writing..." She smiled. Andy knew then and there that he liked this reporter. She seemed to actually care about who she was interviewing and not just getting another story.

"Alright, well, this is a two part process. First, when you wish to acknowledge that someone is talking to you, you bow to them," He bowed in his seat. "Once you come back up you have two options. You can either do nothing to indicate you don't appreciate what the person said, or you can beat your chest like this to indicate a compliment." He beat his chest.

"So...like this?" Regina attempted to repeat the motions taught to her. She didn't have it to the degree that would be considered acceptable, but Andy chuckled as he nodded. The fact that she was attempting made him want to accept her acknowledgement.

"That is great! Alright, we are nearing Dolor Government Headquarters, once there I will escort you to the desk where you will wait to meet with Head Senator LeMarcus. Any questions?" She asked as they now pulled up in front of a large, chrome building.

Andy nodded his head. Once the van had come to a complete stop, Andy followed Regina out of the vehicle and towards the building. The environment on this planet had been one of the first things he noticed when he arrived. Though the temperature was not any hotter than a given summer day on U'Roga, the humidity levels were lower. It felt a lot drier to be on this planet than even Aristes. Andy figured this probably was due in part to the fact that Lorica was rockier.

Andy shook the dry heat off of his shoulders as he then entered the building behind Regina who walked up to the front desk. She quickly then got the attention of the young male attendant behind the desk.

“Hello, we are here for the meeting between LeMarcus and the Rogans.”

“I’m sorry, whoever told you LeMarcus was available was incorrect, though his newly appointed assistant Senator Crane would most likely be able to fill in for that. Is this acceptable?”

“How is he not available?!”

“The new proposed tax reform that was approved by the Senate is being reconsidered for having directly violated the Dolorian Constitution. He has been in an emergency meeting for the past 24 hours because of this.”

“Alright, I see,” Regina sighed heavily as she looked at Andy. “Would a meeting with his assistant suffice?”

“Is she acting as the leader?”

“Essentially, until the trial is over...yes.”

“That is acceptable...”

“Alright,” She turned back to the man. “That’s fine.”

“Great, go ahead and take a seat over on those chairs and a representative will escort you to her office.”

“Thank you...” Regina then took Andy to the chairs and had him sit down. “I’m going get some lunch. Is there anything I can get you?”

“No, but thank you so much for your hospitality,” Andy nodded to her as he took a seat and waited patiently.

“Alright, good luck!” She smiled as she then waved to him while walking out the doors. Andy had been generally impressed by his encounter with the young woman. Most people on Aristes had been somewhat closed off to him when he had visited his mother the last time. Something similar to a general discomfort from humans to Rogans was apparent every time he had observed their interactions. Even just today, the camera person for Regina had been hesitant to shake his hand when they first met. He decided it had nothing to do with him or the Rogans by any means and let it settle in his mind as a

strange unfamiliarity between the two races. It was pleasant to see someone not care for a change...and as this thought pondered in his head, he waited to have his audience.

###

“H...hello?” A voice floated above Andy as he opened his eyes. Looking up, he saw a young girl giving him a strange look. Had he fallen asleep? He stretched and yawned as he propelled his body forward and lazily stood up.

“Sorry about that, is the Senator ready for me?” He rubbed his eyes and attempted to wake himself up.

“Yeah, I will take you up now if you are ready...”

“I am...” He said as the girl curtsied briefly and led him towards the nearby elevator. His stomach lurched at the thought of it, but he fought back his stomach and walked onto the machine. As it started to go up, he stumbled and grabbed the handle. He knew he would never get used to this contraption. They arrived at the tenth floor sometime later as they exited the mobile device. The girl led him to a double red door and stood outside.

“When you are ready, Senator Crane is on the other side.” Andy nodded his head as he walked up to the door and with relative ease he pushed it open. Sitting at a wooden desk towards the back of the room, was a woman with a black bun and professional grey suit. Her somewhat slanted eyes seemed to hide some sort of secret, though Andy couldn’t tell if it was innocent or not.

“Welcome Rogan, what brings you to our city of Dolor?” She stood to greet him. Andy walked over and shook her hand, but it felt somewhat insincere. This was one thing Andy did not like about this culture. While a handshake was intended to be good, it was riddled with mixed intentions. The Rogan bow, on the other hand, gave clear intentions...everytime.

“It’s a complicated story involving what we believe to be an object in your city that could be used as a doomsday device.”

“Oh? And what makes you think it is here?”

“We have a corresponding object and according to the limited instructions we have, the object we have was supposed to stop sounding an alarm once we came within range of the device.”

“I see, well I can assure you we do not have anything in this city that would pose a threat to anyone...”

“Could we be allowed to search the city then? Since there is nothing to hide?”

“I would have to get the proper authorization from Head Senator LeMarcus, but in all honesty, he is dealing with a major issue right now.”

“Something as urgent as a device that could destroy the universe?”

“If you have some form of proof or legitimacy to the claim I could easily issue a warrant...do you have proof?”

“W...well not exactly but we do have an ancient text and the stone we brought with us...”

“Where does the text come from?”

“I’m not exactly sure, but we believe it is from the Eldests...”

“You believe this? Then gather me some proof, otherwise you will have to wait for a shaky answer from LeMarcus himself...if that is all I will have to ask you to leave. There are more pressing issues at hand for me which I *know* are real because I have proof...” She said coldly, making sure to put emphasis on the right words.

“Is there nothing else you can, or are willing to do for me?”

“My hands are tied by our governing document and my limited resources...”

“Alright...so you need proof then Senator Crane?”

“That should be sufficient for me...provided you can back up the claim of a ‘doomsday device’ without heresay.”

“Thank you for your time then,” Andy stood up and bowed to her as he then left, making sure not to beat his chest on the way out.

Once the door closed, Eva placed a hand on her chin...she would have to do a bit of investigating, and keep tabs on the Rogan’s activity.

Awhile later, Andy was back in the van, fuming as he sat down and angrily buckled himself in.

“I’m guessing it didn’t go well...” Regina frowned.

“Not at all, and now I need to report back to my General that we have work to do, he won’t be pleased,” Andy sighed and looked out the window. He was not looking forward to telling Rouske the bad news.

Chapter 11-On The Run

Fyra sped off towards the direction of the spaceport. She hoped that even with this minor distraction by the local law enforcement that they could still catch their flight. The nuisance followed close behind her. Part of her wanted to let him be captured by the officers so she could get away easier, however, now that he had been stupid and associated himself with her organization she knew that was not an option. Another loss to their group name would be humiliating and devastating. Plus, he knew where she was going and he would probably spill the beans under interrogation.

With these potential setbacks in mind she continued forward with the speed she had before. It would only be a good five or six miles before they were there. They could easily get there and still be within the time limit. That is, if the runt could keep up with her.

“Fyra! I know a shortcut!” He yelled out behind her. Well that was a first, a helpful tip from the pipsqueak.

“Lead the way!” She responded falling slightly behind his pace as he headed downstairs to what appeared to be an abandoned subway. There were scattered, rusted newspapers everywhere as they headed down into the remnants of the tracks below.

“This way!” He shouted as they took off into the darkened tunnel ahead of them. When the light seemed to leave the underground pathway, Reques slowed down, probably because it was hard to see. Fyra realizing this picked up her pace.

“On your left!!!” Fyra howled as she got closer to him and passed him as he ducked at the last possible second. She held out her arm as a fireball generated from her fingertips, giving them easy lighting as they ran through the passageway. Every now and then while they ran, Fyra had to quickly avoid stepping on the rodents and other smaller organisms that resided here. It definitely had been awhile since this tunnel had been used.

“Where now?!” Fyra stopped at a fork in the middle of the pathway. Reques walked up to it as he looked.

“This dialect...it’s...Eldest...” He made out the vague letters. “Right...town square...Left...fairgrounds...”

“You actually know how to read this stuff?” Fyra squinted looking at the symbols, but unable to interpret what they meant.

“Yeah, I learned this in school. Since eventually I have to gather all of the Calls, most of the Calling texts are in Ancient Eldest,” He turned left. The Town Square was in the opposite direction of the Spaceport. Fyra suddenly felt stupid for not really knowing anything about Callers. This made her even more upset at Reques for essentially rubbing this fact in her face.

Fyra then smirked as Reques again slowed down while she ran in front; at least she was better than him on this aspect. Her flame burned bright as the pair continued on down the tunnel. Though Fyra knew about the old transportation systems that had been built in Dolor from the old days, she had never seen the actual subway station. It had been closed long before she had arrived.

“The exit should be coming up soon...then it will only be a short jog to the spaceport,” Reques huffed as they neared the exit. Fyra quickly pulled out her device and checked on the time. She was pleasantly surprised to see that their little detour had shortened their overall time by at least fifteen minutes. *Not bad kid...* she thought to herself as now light filled the end of the tunnel. Letting go of the fireball she continued ahead, clambering up onto the platform once it appeared on her left hand side. With a brief second, she turned around and offered assistance to Reques as he struggled to get up.

“T-thanks...” Reques was obviously taken aback by this for some reason. She scoffed as she headed up the stairs towards the fairgrounds. *I can be nice...* she fumed as she was almost insulted by his shock. After this, she knew they probably would never speak or talk to each other again, and for that she was secretly thankful. Since they had met up he had done nothing except piss her off. They both pushed the stained glass doors at the top of the stairs as they once again breathed in fresh air.

“I see the spaceport...” Fyra pushed back her earlier thought. “Not bad kid...” She grinned as they took off towards the port. It wasn’t too far now with the pace they were keeping...

No sooner had the thought passed through her head they turned the corner and ahead of them was the spaceport...and several dozen guards and security vehicles planted in front of the building.

“How the hell...” Fyra stopped. Her eyes lit up in fear as she wondered if her old friend had sold her out...he had acted differently than she remembered him. As a former member of the group, he had left for personal reasons. If he had sold her out it was not out of malice...just out of payment. She knew the guy all too well.

“Is this...a...set up?” Reques hid behind a dumpster across the street from the building Fyra had chosen.

“It seems so...guess I have fewer friends than I’d like to think...” her tone shifted as she now formulated a plan in her head. She would have to play this very carefully...and time was definitely not on their side. She did what she could not to let the stress get to her as she took a look around at her surroundings.

“Follow me...” She looked up as she pointed to the fire ladder on the building in front of her. Reques nodded as he crawled over towards her to avoid being sighted. She then hoisted him up to the ladder as he climbed. As soon as he was far enough up the ladder, she used the nearby dumpster to act like a boost and propelled herself high enough to grab the bottom rung. It was colder than she was expecting it to be and in shock she almost let go. She quickly planted her feet on the wall to counter balance the shock and with all of her strength she pushed herself up the ladder. Once the two had reached the top, Fyra ducked and headed to the outside edge of the roof.

“Ok here is the plan, we wait until they clear a small path to the spaceport, and then we jump as far as we can using our anima to land safely. From there we sprint as fast as we can and hope no one catches us...” She said. It was risky, but she didn’t see a way around it.

“Are you insane?!” Reques whispered harshly.

“Give me a better plan and I will go with it...” She snapped back.

As she did, Reques lowered his head and nodded forward. He knew this was their best chance to get to the spaceport on time.

After a couple minutes of waiting, Fyra watched as the guards dispersed enough that she was confident they could make it. She held up her fingers to indicate a

countdown. Once she arrived at her last finger she held up her other hand as Reques held his. She mouthed the word zero, and with no further hesitation she leapt forward. Reques did the same as they both screamed in terror.

Fyra could see the familiar Call appear in front of Reques as he easily landed on the ground before her, going in a full force sprint. Fyra used her flames to act like a jetpack of sorts as it helped soften her fall. She was right on Reques' heels as she also landed. Several of the officers yelled as they ran at the pair, holding their guns up ready to fire. Luckily, Fyra had prepped for this as she blasted them with fireballs. The guards reeled in pain as they raced forward, the end now in sight. As they neared the opening to the port, Fyra watched in horror as Reques took an incorrect step and lost his balance as he fell forward. Frey, still having had been Called, immediately came to his aide and stood around, shifting objects towards some of the soldiers.

Fyra stopped a second or two after she realized what happened and had her hand on the door. She saw around her as dozens of soldiers began to swarm around. If she did not take off now the ship would leave without her...but if she left...Reques would...most likely go to jail...and her group's name would be tarnished...With one final glance she looked at Reques as his eyes pleaded with her to help him

“Shit...” She muttered to herself as she fired several fireballs at the soldiers...this was going to be a fight for their lives.

Chapter 12-Mutual Agreement

Andy's mind wandered from the mission and to his meeting with Senator Crane. Though normally he would have seen the rejection as a form of diplomatic reason, something about the way her eyes had pierced right through him gave him the chills. He couldn't help but think that there was another reason for the Rogans not to be allowed to enter the city. But he could not seem to piece the puzzle together and the longer he thought about it the more frustrated he became. If she would have just tried to give them access into the city, they could find this mysterious object and then leave. There would be no more awkward photo shooting, no more interviews, no more meetings...it would be in the city's favor to allow them to do a quick sweep.

"Everything okay, Andy?" Regina looked worriedly towards the Rogan.

"The meeting left me with more questions than answers..." Andy said as he continued to think about things.

"Anything you are able to talk about?" She curiously tried to look at him.

"Unfortunately, no..." He murmured as he noticed something towards the north side of the street they were driving on. There appeared to be a fight in front of a large building. Several men in uniform were shooting at a teenager and a woman. Normally he would have thought the other two didn't stand a chance, however as he watched more closely both were using Anima in order to defend themselves.

Even with the added help of their anima, Andy could see several flying vehicles and vans with the Dolorian Emblem, a giant cursive D with a sketch of Lorica on it, drive by. For some reason this compelled Andy. How could a whole army think it was fair to be shooting at children and women?

"Can you let me out here?" Andy looked at Regina.

"Umm, I was actually supposed to escort you out of the city...as per request from Senator Crane..." She nervously replied.

"I promise once I take care of this to leave...worse comes to worse you can say the interview turned deadly and I held you at swordpoint..." He slowly took out his blade.

"Are you sure? There isn't anything else I can do for you?" She asked with honesty in her eyes.

“You are special person Miss Regina; please do not ever let that change with whoever you are to meet in the future. That is my one request...” He gave her a smile as she held up a hand to stop the van. With a lurch, the van came to a stop as it pulled off to the side. Andy gave the woman a grateful nod as he jumped out of the van. With one last look he watched as Regina shut the door and the van took off. He knew he would never forget the kindness that she had shown him.

Andy ran down the street as several of the humans pointed fingers at him and gave him weird looks. He figured having never seen a Rogan before, especially one carrying a sword, was probably unnerving to most humans. He ignored them for the most part as his feet continued to carry him. He had always been prone to wanting to help the less fortunate and at this moment he sensed he was needed.

He pushed his way through a forming crowd and watched in slow motion while a soldier pulled up his gun from behind the boy to fire. With no time to waste he held out his sword just outside of the formed crowd and fired a lightning bolt from the tip of its blade. Luckily just as the man’s finger reached the trigger the bolt struck him. The gun fell out of his hand as he reeled back howling while the electricity coursed through his body. Andy took a breath of relief as he finally pushed his way through the crowd and ran to join the other two.

“Who the hell are you?” The woman asked as she blasted a fireball towards a nearby soldier.

“The name’s And’theith...though you can call me Andy...” He grunted as he sparred off against another soldier with a sword. Whether he liked it or not, his twinge of niceness had now gotten him involved. With an upward slash he pushed the soldier back. It worked as the soldier attempted to parry the blow, but was knocked back by Andy’s force. Though he was a Halfling he was still stronger than the average human and with a few thrusts he knew he would easily be able to get this man to lose his balance.

“Why are you helping us?” The younger man held up his hand as a ball of ice shattered against the face of a nearby soldier.

“Something about a bunch of soldiers attacking a young man and a woman doesn’t seem right to me...” He shouted as he then gave another forward thrust and

heard a shot deflect off of his blade. He turned to the right to see a shaky soldier trying to shoot. He sent another charge of electricity through his blade, swinging the sword so several of the charges shot into the soldier's body. It worked as he heard the man grunt and fall to the ground with a thud. Turning back around, he immediately parried a blow from the other soldier he was fighting.

“Got some sort of plan you two?!” He shouted back as several more soldiers spilled onto the street from a van that pulled up.

“WORKING ON IT!” The woman shouted back as she leapt onto the back of a flying vehicle and blasted the driver with a flame attack. Andy then watched as she attempted to commandeer the hovercraft but was struggling to understand the controls.

Andy heard the soldier with the sword grunt and his feet shuffled. Andy threw his blade out once again to counter the blow and then thrust forward to catch the attacking soldier off guard. He then put down his blade as he sent a small bolt from the clouds above. It instantly paralyzed the man as Andy took a second to regain his composure. Using so much Anima was causing him to lose energy... He felt the cool barrel of a gun sit on the back of his head in his moment of weakness and cursed.

“Drop the weapon and surrender...” The soldier said just loud enough for him to hear. *What the hell did he get himself into? If he had just stayed in the van he would have been fine...* these thoughts wouldn't do him any good right now and he knew that as he lowered his weapon. As he was about to drop it he heard a thud as the barrel fell from the back of his head.

“Get on Mr. Green!” he heard the woman call from behind him. He turned around and saw the young man blasting some more ice balls at soldiers while the woman was now successfully piloting the device. The woman held her hand out looking grateful towards Andy. He nodded, taking her surprisingly strong grasp as he made his way onto the vehicle. Wasting no more time, the woman sped off once Andy had secured himself. The young man held his arm out as a spirit, which looked like a goat, went inside of his body. This act was very fascinating to the Rogan as the trio continued off, and out of harm's way.

Once the soldiers faded into the distance, Fyra landed the vehicle outside of Sector 2. There she walked over to a nearby shack and opened it with a key she pulled out of her pack.

“Safe house...” She nodded looking at the confusion of the other two. They nodded as the trio headed inside.

Though dust and cobwebs lined the interior of the building, it had a homely feel about it. Andy made his way to a nearby chair and sat down, still recovering from having used up so much Anima.

“Fyra...why the hell didn’t you keep running?!” The young man then yelled once they were all inside.

“And watch your pathetic face basically beg me for help? I don’t think so Reques...” Fyra snapped back as she set her pack down on a nearby table, heading for the kitchen to see if the building still had running water.

“I didn’t need some commoner’s petty Anima in order to fend off those soldiers...I am a Caller after all,” He sneered and leaned against the wall.

“Oh yeah, you really had a handle on that situation didn’t you Mr. high and mighty?” Fyra rolled her eyes as the fossit produced a small stream of cool water. The feeling sent a smile that briefly replaced her annoyed look.

“I’ll have you know that I don’t need help!” He snapped back practically growling.

“Well fine then, I’ll just let them blow your brains out the next time!” Her smile disappeared as Andy watched her curl her fists. Something had obviously sparked some sort of argument between the two of them prior to the intense battle, and while it wasn’t his personal problem, the three of them were now together whether they liked it or not.

“Why are you being chased?” Andy stepped into the conversation hoping to at least alleviate some of the tension.

“Why don’t you ask the thief over here...” Reques removed himself to explore the rest of the safe house. Andy looked towards Fyra once he left the room... *A thief?* He wondered as he looked at the woman...she didn’t appear to be a typical thief that he would have imagined. On U’Roga most who got involved with thievery looked ragged

and often had no morals. This woman obviously had cared enough not to let soldiers kill an innocent young man and took care of herself...this baffled Andy.

“Yesterday around this time my group and I were foiled in a plot to steal money from a business that was embezzling it from unjust taxes. I was captured and thrown in jail subsequently. Ever since then I’ve been trying to escape the city. While attempting to escape, I took Reques as my hostage, but due to a misunderstanding they think he is part of my organization now...which, as laughable as it sounds, is how he got involved in this. We had a rendezvous at the spaceport to pick up tickets to get out of here...but it was an ambush and we were unsuccessful. So until we can figure out a new back up plan, we are stuck here...” She leaned against the nearby counter.

“I see...” He nodded getting the gist of the situation.

“And yourself? What brings you here?” Fyra kept her distance as she briefly glanced at the man.

“Well, on our planet we have an object called the Angel’s Frown which was brought with a ship that crashed on our planet years ago. This item, according to an ancient journal left with it, is supposed to be directly linked to an object which will cause chaos and destruction for our universe. We used the Angel’s Frown, which awoke the other day, and tracked the item down to this moon. However, upon requesting access to this city, where it most likely is, we were denied,” his voice trailed off.

“Why?” Fyra gave him a puzzled look.

“It honestly baffles me still, but we were turned away because we had no evidence to this claim, even with the Angel’s Frown and the journal. I was on my way back to the ship...when I found you,” He looked up.

“That...is a fascinating tale, sounds like a Government conspiracy...” A grin spread across her face. For killing her friends and taking money from the less fortunate, a chance to get back at the Government with an exposure of conspiracy made her giddy.

“Fascinating, yes...but until then we have to get something to back it up,” Reques came down from the upstairs portion of the safe house and looked at them.

“What do you mean evidence?” Fyra skeptically looked at the young man.

“Well, since the Angel’s Frown and the journal were not sufficient enough, we may need to go gather some. Like it or not, we are all in the same boat...You and I need

to clear our names Fyra, and Andy needs evidence if there is really some sort of chaotic device. What links both of these together?" He questioned as he got to the bottom of the stairs and found his familiar position against the wall.

"...what?" Andy raised his eyebrow as he looked at the kid.

"The Calls..." Reques sighed, not liking the answer he was giving.

"What?!" Fyra balled her fists again. "Why are your Calls so important huh?!"

"Did you hear the rumor in the bar about the five keys? There has to be some sort of connection to that and the Caller's Divination..."

"Not that again..." Fyra rolled her eyes walking away.

"The five keys?" Andy's eyes widened. "You mean the five keys of superiority: Knowledge, Bravery, Strength, Justice, and Loyalty?" He recited the most famous line from the journal.

"Yeah...something like that. If I can fulfill my pilgrimage to gather all of the Calls from around the moons of Ungdar, then I will become the Key of Knowledge...at least, according to the Divination. Until I heard the other story, I didn't exactly know what that meant. But, if your tale really is true, we are linked by a common quest..."

"...to create the Key of Knowledge..." Andy finally put the pieces together seeing the overall picture.

"I still think this whole Call thing is farfetched, but since we can't seem to find another way to prove the story about the doomsday device, I don't see another alternative. Even with this plan though, we don't have any way to get to the other moons," Fyra began trying to go through the possibilities.

"Who said you were coming?" Reques glared at her.

"Excuse me?" Fyra's nostrils flared and her eyes narrowed.

"As far as I can see, this plan only involves me and Andy...I don't see a need for you to tag along..." A sly grin spread across his face.

"B-but...this involves the Government and you know how I feel about them..." She said fighting for a way to get involved at something she was passionate about.

"But you can't Call and you don't have a reason to go after this device other than personal revenge...give me one specific reason why you matter to this plan..." He

confidently said. As Fyra looked like she had taken a blow to the gut she bowed her head ready to admit she didn't have a point...

"Though this doesn't seem like my fight, I feel like I have something relevant to this discussion," Andy then stood up as his tail flicked back and forth. "I watched the pair of you fight today and you complement each other very well. You both only escaped because each of you had something the other didn't. Would it be fair to say that this isn't the only time, since meeting that you two have worked well together?"

Reques started to protest the statement as his mind wandered to the subway tunnels which...without Fyra he would not have been able to get through without her flame...or his ability to read Eldest.

"And would it also be fair to say that although, yes, revenge may not play a key role to this operation it can be used to add strength to any mission? Out of the three of us, she will have the largest drive to push us towards our goal...therefore, she may be more useful than you or me. Because without motivation...we are just wandering souls hoping to accomplish the impossible..." He looked at both of them, both coming to the realization they all needed each other...

"He's..." Reques looked at Fyra.

"...right," Fyra looked back.

"Then it's settled. We go on a pilgrimage to gather the Calls and see if that brings us closer to finding that weapon which could show the Dolorian Government's corruption?" Andy summed up the situation. As he did the other two looked at him, with firm resolve deep in their eyes. "Good...now you two get ready to go, I have a call to make..." He walked upstairs. He was not looking forward to the conversation with General Rouske...especially because he hadn't merited any physical results and had probably caused the Rogans trouble. Once he was secure in a room upstairs, he picked up the machine he was given earlier.

"Hello? General?" He asked after the call had been received.

"Andy what the hell is going on?! Your name is everywhere in the city and you are being called a Rogan Pirate."

"It's complicated, but to sum it all up, the government is not going to help us until we have evidence..."

“What kind of evidence?”

“I’m not sure but the Senator I talked to was hiding something...though I believe I may be able to obtain evidence...do you trust me?”

“Of course I do! You are a Rogan through and through, no matter what anyone else says. You will never abandon us as pride runs deep in your blood. What is your plan?”

“Do you remember the journals we found with the Angel’s Frown?”

“Go on...”

“Well, in the journals they mention five Keys...if we can obtain one of the Keys that may be the physical evidence we need to show the legend is true...but we need something from you first.”

“What would that be?”

“The Le’Vatis...”

“And a pilot I assume?”

“You read my mind sir.”

“How long do you think this will take?”

“As long as it takes to gather the items to create the Key...”

“Is there no other way to provide evidence?”

“Not that I can tell...”

“So be it, I will have U’hatharic pilot it...he will be there momentarily.”

“Thank you General...”

“You had better be right...” The phone clicked, nothing more needed to be said. Andy nodded as he put away his own receiver. He headed downstairs as the other two were finishing gathering up items needed.

“We have a ship...” He said. Relief washed over the others’ faces as they realized things were going to work out. Their new mission was officially underway...

Chapter 13-Malkon

“Hold on, you got us a ship? How did you manage that?” Fyra shook her head and gave him a skeptical look.

“The Rogan ship we came in has another space vessel located inside it. It is called Le’Vatis and should have enough space and supplies inside to get us to the other moons in the Durlengo System.” He nodded.

“Is...is it safe?” Reques questioned with a bit of uncertainty.

“It’s the safest of all our ships, including the Arexus,” Andy nodded with a confident grin. “Which is why it will serve us well in our travels.”

“Well, you have me convinced...” Fyra nodded as she pulled together the last of her belongings. “How long do we need to wait for this ship to arrive?”

“Since I just got off the phone with my General, it’ll probably take a good five minutes or so.” He leaned against the wall. “Until they arrive we should probably form some sort of plan as to how we are going to get to each moon.”

“Well, seeing as we aren’t really liked here at the current point in time we should probably avoid Lorica. Better to let things roll over...” Reques thoughtfully stated

“Same goes for Aristes...more than likely everyone there already know what has happened here,” Fyra added contemplating the best place for them to visit.

“This leaves us with Malkon, Winndel, and Trychondria...of which Trychondria is going to be the most dangerous. We should probably leave it for last...” Reques noted as he sifted through the available options.

“Both Malkon and Winndel have dangerous gasses that we will have to make sure we are careful to avoid, and of the two, Malkon is closer,” Fyra remembered some of the things she learned back in school.

“Malkon, then?” Andy said as the two agreed. No sooner had they reached a decision, a rumble came down from above their heads and shifted outside of the door. The trio gave each other a nod as they headed outside. Landing just on the ground in front of them was a beautiful, green vessel which looked like a miniature version of the ships in spaceports. Fyra could not believe her eyes as she looked genuinely impressed.

“Nice work, Rogan...” She gave a thumbs up and walked towards it. She continued forward as she went to admire the ship. For a few seconds she studied the craftsmanship. Several of the paint marks looked older than the main coat, though only someone with an eye for art would be able to tell. Though she didn’t know a lot about the race, she knew that any technology they had they used from other ships or debris that landed on U’Roga. It was very apparent in everything that represented the beautifully decorated ship.

“Are we ready to go?” Andy gave her a head nod as the nearby hatch opened. Reques quickly scrambled inside as Fyra looked back. She knew it was nearly time to go, but leaving the place she had learned to accept as a home was harder than she imagined. As she stood there wanting not to go, she felt a hand on her shoulder and looked up to see Andy there.

“It must be hard leaving this place...” He looked at her. “Regardless, we just got confirmation the Dolorian Government has sent a ship to intercept and arrest us...we can’t wait around any longer...”

“I...” She hesitated for a moment. it was not like her to waiver, but this was unlike any decision she had been faced with. For another moment she lingered and almost turned back, but with a look to her right the television the faint sounds of sirens floated to her ears, interrupting her thoughts. It was in that instant she knew that she could not remain here any longer...constantly on the run. For the moment, she would have to fight her battles from afar...helping that pipsqueak collect his Calls...

“Let’s go...” She sighed thinking about how awful it would be to have to help the runt collect his Calls. She knew if he got all of them he would be revered as a saint, much like most Callers who completed their journey were. He probably would rub it in her face. However, there was the potential to expose the Government as corrupt. Though none of her old crew was there to support her endeavor, Fyra began to feel as though she could take on the world.

Fyra and Andy made their way inside the ship and sat down. Another Rogan sat in the drivers’ seat. Fyra had never taken time to study the Rogans, but the difference between the pilot and Andy was astonishing. Andy looked more like a human than their pilot.

“Nice to meet you, Ma’am,” The Rogan smiled at her. By the tone of his voice, she realized he was a younger Rogan, probably an adolescent. “The name is U’hatharic, but you can call me Hath!” He grinned and pushed some buttons. The ship began to rumble. Reques, Fyra, and Andy quickly strapped themselves in, as the ship shifted and began to rise into the air. Hath pulled forward, piloting the ship.

“You have...done this before right Hath?!” Reques felt rather queasy at the take off.

“Yes, but not with a military ship right behind me,” Hath’s expression turned serious as it became apparent that another ship was approaching from just behind a nearby building. “HANG ON!” Hath yelled and pushed another button.

The ship lurched forward as Fyra held on for dear life. The pursuing ship was purple with the Dolorian Emblem painted on top. As Le’Vatis raced forward, the opposing ship fired several shots, of which only a couple made contact. While a size difference was apparent, Fyra began to see that Le’Vatis was much faster. It wasn’t long before the pursuing vessel pulled away.

Fyra saw the darkness of space approaching. As it neared the outer layer of Lorica’s atmosphere, the ship seemed to burst into an orange and red array of flames. As it did, Hath touched a button and a bubblelike envelope formed around the outside of the ship. It dispelled the flames while the ship now shot past several other layers of atmosphere.

“Hold onto something! The last layer is a bitch...” Hath grit his teeth as he pushed a final button and a booster was activated. This launched the ship forward as it now entered the final layer. Fyra held on now as her stomach felt like it would be ripped out of her back. The pressure was intense as they broke through the cusp of the layer and pushed through like icing from a pastry bag. As they did the bubble around the ship burst and as if through jell-o, the ship floated into the black void.

“Everyone okay?” Hath looked back as everyone sat up in their seats.

Reques appeared as if he would hurl.

Fyra soon got her bearings as she looked outside. The mere look of space amazed her as she stared around like a child in a candy store. “I can’t believe how big it is...” She looked in amazement. Space had always been fascinating to her.

“First time in space?” Hath chuckled as Reques looked out another window...as amazed, if not more, than Fyra was. Fyra saw the boy nod to Hath for a second.

“I remember my first time...” He began to ramble on about various things involving his first trip to space which ended apparently in some sort of tragedy...Fyra really didn't pay attention and every once in awhile agreed with him for no reason.

“How big is the universe?” She heard Reques ask to the two Rogans.

“As far as we know...and of what you humans know...infinite,” Andy recalled a conversation he once had with his mother...asking similar questions.

“How is that possible? There has to be some sort of limit...” Fyra skeptically looked back. Though she couldn't deny that the universe was large, but infinite? She knew better...there had to be an ending somewhere.

“If there is, we have yet to discover it...” Hath continued to pilot the vessel as it floated amongst the anti matter and sparse hydrogen molecules that made up space.

After awhile, Fyra got bored of looking outside and went to explore the inside of Le'Vatis. She found that despite the small looking exterior, there were several large rooms inside. There was a kitchen stocked with supplies, at least five different bedrooms that looked like suites, and a giant training room in the lower quadrants of the ship.

As she attempted to head back towards the cockpit of the ship from, she saw Andy in the kitchen preparing food.

“Hey there...” She walked over smelling something delicious and saw stew boiling on the oven.

“Why if it isn't Miss Fyra...what brings you here?” Andy stopped momentarily.

“I was just exploring...so...what kind of place is U'Roga?” She hoped not to sound awkward.

“Well it is a planet in the Furth System, neighboring this one,” He went back to chopping up some vegetables. “What do you want to know about it? More of the Rogan part of it, or the jungle part of it?”

“Just the basic layout of the planet I suppose...” She was unsure of what it even looked like.

“Well for the most part it is covered in thick forests with several large rivers running through them. It is fairly humid, kind of like Lorica but wetter,” He thought of ways he could relate the planet to something Fyra was familiar with.

“Are you all...beastlike?” She finally got to the question she had intended on asking.

“What do you mean?” He said looking at her with a raised eyebrow.

“Well, I’ve heard you are very primitive and live like beasts...I was just curious what of this is true...”

“Is that what you’ve heard?” He sighed, obviously not appreciating the comment.

“Well...yes?” She suddenly felt very uncomfortable.

“I will have you know we are nothing like beasts! Now if you will excuse me I want to finish making supper for everyone...” He huffed and turned away.

Fyra scampered off as he did...had she said something wrong? Was it really that far of a stretch to think that because they resembled beasts they acted like them? She pondered on this for awhile and returned to the cockpit where she found Reques and Hath talking about anima. Hath didn’t really seem all that interested though...

“And when I hold my staff out and make a full circle, I can call upon a spirit to help me fight!” Reques beamed as he excitedly talked about himself...like usual.

“That...is fascinating...” Hath continued to pilot the ship.

“Oh, Fyra! There you are. I have something I need to talk to you about...” Reques exclaimed as he looked in her direction.

“Umm, alright...” She raised her eyebrow and sat down.

“So, during battle, do you find yourself getting tired at all?” He looked at her. She had no idea what he was trying to hint at. “What do you mean?”

“You know, when you use up a bunch of energy from your fire magic...”

“Occasionally, yes...what is your point?” She was growing frustrated of these questions and wanted him to just tell her what was on his mind.

“Well, if you hadn’t noticed, I get tired less frequently and have more stamina in battle...” He looked at her.

She was about to talk again as he continued his thought process.

“I can help your Anima use be less taxing for you as a weapon...” He nodded finally getting at what he meant to.

“How?” She looked astonished.

“Well if we are going to go to the Eldest Sanctuaries, there will be hard trials for me to overcome. So I thought it would be advantageous of me to teach you and Andy how to increase your stamina...to protect me if I become vulnerable during our journey...”

“Oh...so this is mainly for you then...” Fyra sighed; this was not untypical for Reques to say. Though she did have to admit becoming stronger in her anima would make her an overall stronger thief... “You know what? Your offer is tempting. I think it sounds like a good plan...”

“I’m glad you agree. After dinner shall we practice?” He stretched.

“Sounds good to me...I’ll see if Andy would be up for doing this also...” She proceeded to leave the cockpit as she made her way to get ready for dinner, leaving Hath to suffer through more Anima discussion again.

###

Several hours later, Andy, Fyra, and Reques all stood in the training room. The stew had been delicious and she was unsure whether or not they should be training after eating.

“Okay, well, I will train with Fyra while Frey trains with Andy...we both are fully aware of your capabilities and should be able to efficiently have you work on your stamina...do not think we will go easy on you...” He summoned Frey who went to the other side of the room to spar with Andy.

“You ready Fyra?” He held out his staff.

“Quite ready...” She replied and pulled out her knives.

“No weapons...” he smiled dropping his staff. She gave him a weird look as she put down both of her knives. Was he really going to try and fight her with no weapons? Though she knew this was a chance for her to increase her magic, she hadn’t counted on the Caller to try and do this weaponless.

“You can make the first move...magic attacks only...” He added at the end. She knew this was going to be said at some point...

Taking advantage of the situation, Fyra focused her attack and sent a fireball towards Reques. He dodged the attack and conjured a sheet of ice that was thrown in her direction. Fyra tried to avoid the sheet but realized it would still hit her. She held out her fingers as flames slithered out, melting the ice sheet as water splashed her face. She shook her head and then continued with another fireball that she knew he would be unable to avoid.

Reques' arm was lightly grazed by the fireball and winced as he then tapped the floor, while a cold stream of ice began to form that immediately attached to her feet. Fyra felt glued to the floor as she struggled for a few seconds. Reques then began to walk over to her with a cool grin on his face. Fyra tried to get out of her imprisonment but with no luck. Seeing no alternative she bent down and began to heat the ice away from her legs. As Reques picked up the pace, Fyra used more and more of her flames as the ice slowly melted away. *Come on...come on...* she desperately told herself as Reques was now pretty much on top of her with his hand outstretched, an ice slab forming.

Fyra gave one final burst, burning herself slightly as the ice melted enough for her to break free and propel herself backwards. As she did, Reques let the ice slab go, barely missing her as she jumped back.

"Not bad thief..." Reques looked up. "Hope the landing goes smoothly for you." Fyra gave him a confused look as she landed on the ground and stumbled. She felt a loss of balance she couldn't feel before the attack. She did what she could to gather her bearings and noticed Andy, sprawled out on the ground while Frey edged him on. Before she had another chance to react, Reques had readied another attack and was throwing several ice balls at her.

"Letting the weariness get to your head prohibits you from progressing as an anima user..." Reques coldly stated while he continued to throw attacks towards Fyra, who was trying to counter them with fireballs.

"If you try to rest after this, not only will you leave yourself vulnerable, you will be unable to continue to push the anima reserves in your body. Once you use these reserves, they will grow and you will be able to use them in the future without the strain...however, if you push yourself too far in this battle, you will put your body at

risk...so now that you have hit your exhaustion point..." He noted as she struggled to stand. "...push past it." He let an attack of ice fall from above as Fyra fell to her knees.

Just before the ice hit Fyra felt a surge of energy burst through and create a shield of sorts around her. She gasped as the shield absorbed all of the attack and stood up as her newly found strength propelled her forward, blasting Reques with a fire column and then punching him to the ground. As she did, the extra reserve ended and she felt her weakened body fall to the ground, her brow completely drenched in sweat. After laying on the ground for awhile trying to catch her breath, Reques stood over her and offered a hand.

"You are now a stronger anima user...we will probably want to do this each time we go to another planet to keep building your stamina..." He offered her a hand helping her to her feet. She wearily leaned against him as he helped her to a chair.

"Do you feel the extra reserve of energy?" He made sure to look directly into her eyes while talking.

She gave him a nod. Though her body still felt weak, it also somehow felt more open and stronger.

"Good, you have unlocked an extra reserve in your body, this will ultimately make you stronger as a magic user, but beware, your recover period will be longer. Got it?"

"Y...yes..." Fyra panted as she continued to sit. She saw Andy sitting next to her in the same state she was in.

Reques called Frey back into his body and looked at the pair of them. "By my calculations you both should have a few hours to sleep before we arrive, I'll help you to your rooms since you both look exhausted...though, since you haven't been doing this sort of training your whole life, I wouldn't expect you both to be naturals off the bat," He helped them up and walked them to their rooms. Fyra felt weak as she let herself fall on her bed...within seconds she was already dreaming...

###

"Hey guys!" A voice boomed over the intercom system. Fyra felt her eyes flutter and sat up in her bed. She had slept in her clothes and they were now wrinkled, she imagined she didn't smell very good either. As she made her way to the cockpit, she

noticed Andy rubbing his eyes as he left his room. He gave her a nod as they walked towards the front of the ship.

“We are almost there!!!” Reques excitedly exclaimed as they pushed the door open. There, in front of the main window was a moon. It was mostly sandy with several deep trenches. This...this was Malkon.

“Strap yourselves in! It is going to be a bumpy landing,” Hath began to initiate the landing sequence. Andy and Fyra took their seats and put on their belts. No one knew what was waiting for them on the sandy surface of Malkon, but it meant the official start to their Pilgrimage...

Chapter 14-The Missing Statue

Andy stepped out onto the surface of Malkon taking note of the weather which seemed to be significantly hotter than Lorica. As he looked around the rest of the spaceport, he noticed a giant protective wrapping outside of a glass ceiling that seemed to stretch on for miles around. The landing had been a lot smoother than Hath had anticipated. He had been aided by the port with a traction beam of sorts.

“Why is there a barrier around this moon?” He asked the others walking beside him.

“The composition of this moon contains high levels of carbon dioxide which are poisonous to humans...It’s what makes this planet’s surface temperature warmer than most...” Reques listed like an open dictionary. Andy nodded as they went inside the port. Within a few minutes they had exited the tiny docking bay and were on the streets. Andy noticed a sign welcoming them to Zirconais. He figured this was the name of the small town which only seemed to have several streets and a couple dozen buildings.

“Let’s head for the pub...I think the sign at the port pointed to one being over this way,” Fyra noted and took a left.

“How sure are you?” Reques doubted her ability to navigate.

“Pretty sure, I’m fairly good at reading maps and the map was definitely pointing South towards the bar...” She said continuing on.

“Is she always this stubborn?” Andy looked at Reques after falling back.

“More stubborn usually...the fact that she actually looked at a map astounds me...” He looked to the Rogan.

Andy could tell the resentment he had encountered between the two on Lorica was still holding strong. “We should probably continue on and trust her...” Andy walked forward knowing that Reques would have to follow... He heard Reques grumble as the group continued on.

When it was apparent that Fyra wasn’t sure that the bar was in the location she had initially suspected, the group wandered for awhile.

Andy soon stumbled upon it about half a mile from where they had ended up.

“Well it was in this direction...” Fyra nervously chuckled as she headed inside. Andy shrugged a bit letting her stubbornness go as he followed her inside. Once there

Reques immediately went to the counter to purchase some food; that younger human had a voracious appetite and it was apparent in how much he had eaten of the stew the night before. Andy followed Fyra who wandered over towards the bartender.

“Excuse me...” She asked and sat down in front of him.

“What can I get ya?” The large man wiped his hands with a towel.

“I was curious if you could tell me how to get to the Earth Sanctuary from here...”

“Well normally you would be able to go to Erikson’s down the main street, but he hasn’t been open for a couple days...just sitting over there sulking...” He pointed at a rather scrawny man chugging a beer.

“Thank you...I will go try my luck,” Fyra winked at him and headed over towards the man. Andy watched as the bartender chuckled and then took a double take at him. If there had been more people there, he was sure the bartender would not have been the only one.

“Never seen anyone like you before...are you human?” He had a weird look in his eye.

“Not exactly, you ever hear of a Rogan?” Andy stood up to leave.

“Actually, I have...never seen one in person though,” He looked at Andy for a few more minutes as he studied him. “I would be careful if you plan to go to Winndel though...”

“Why is that? And what makes you think I am going there?”

“Well if you are going to the Earth Sanctuary, then you must have a Caller with you. Therefore, you must be going on a Pilgrimage. Eventually this will take you to Winndel. The reason I tell you to be careful is that most people there don’t like Rogans and for the most part they like to pick fights. I am sure you are strong, but if you want to protect the other two you are with, I’d suggest lying low...”

“Thank you for the advice...” Andy gave him a small tip. He stood up and walked towards Fyra. She seemed to be trying to talk to the man unsuccessfully.

“...but we need to get to the Earth Sanctuary...we have to in order to obtain the Call there...for the pilgrimage...”

“You are just like all the others...using our Sanctuary in order to get what you need and then leave. We don’t matter at all to you, do we?” The man ran his finger along the top rim of the beer glass.

“You are frustrating...” Fyra scoffed as she turned. “Andy, you think you can talk some sense into this guy?”

The Rogan looked at her for a second and shrugged, unsure what else he could do...“Excuse me, sir,” He traded places with Fyra as he looked at the man. “What is your name?”

“Jorg-(hic) Jorgen Erikson...” The drunk eyes looked back at him.

“Is there something that is bothering you?”

“(hic) well jus’ da ot-(hic) her day, my preshus arti-(hic) fact wuz stoled...” He began to blubber as he continued to drink some of his beer. Though he was hard to make out, Andy got the gist of what he was saying.

“Is this why you have been unwilling to help travelers lately?”

“Uh huh...” the man hiccupped once again, setting the glass down.

“If we were to get this statue back for you, would you help us get to the Earth Sanctuary?”

“You...(hic) you wud do tha’ for me?”

“Of course, we aren’t the kind of people who would come and ask for something...without giving back in return. Do you remember the last time you saw this statue? Also, what does it look like?”

“When I was (hic) comin’ home da other day from da market an’ der was dis guy...(hic) he help’d me git sum food an’ den af-(hic) ter he wuz gone an’ I git home, da statue wuz missing...(hic) Da statue is gold an’ it looks like a cat.”

“Is there anything else you remember about this man or the exact location when you remember it missing?”

“N-(hic) no siree...”

“Alright, try and sober up a bit and go to your house, we will see what we can find out for you okay?”

“Okay...”

Andy looked back towards Fyra who gave him a nod. The pair of them gave a motion to Reques who quickly made his way over, eating the last piece of lettuce from his plate.

“So, what’s the plan?” Reques looked to them.

“Well, if we want to go to the Earth Sanctuary, we need to do a little investigative work in order to find a missing gold cat statue,” Andy gave him the briefing as they left the smoke-filled bar.

“Well...I have an idea if no one else does...” Fyra looked as if she was deep in thought.

“Like your other plan to get us to the bar?” Reques rolled his eyes.

“Hey, we eventually got there because of me didn’t we?!” She balled her fists.

“Even though I’m the one who actually found the bar?” Andy chuckled, finding Fyra’s failing attempt to show her leadership prowess rather amusing.

“Whatever...but this plan I swear it’s a good one...” She pleaded for them to listen.

“What do you think? Should we hear her out?” Andy looked at Reques.

“...tsk...why not...” He grumbled at Fyra and folded his arms.

Fyra’s eyes lit up as she then began to describe the plan she had.

Sometime later, Andy found himself in the middle of the local market. There were actually more people here than he would have imagined for how small the town was. He went over to a nearby stand that was selling apples. He vaguely remembered Fyra telling him they would need some apples. As he went to purchase the items, he reached in his wallet for some change.

“Hey there!” A voice said to the right of him. He turned to see a young, blonde man who couldn’t have been that much older than Reques.

“Can I help you?” Andy looked at him curiously.

“Yeah, I was trying to purchase some medicine for my mother and I’m just a few cents short...” He nervously touched his fingers together in habit.

“How much do you need?” Andy reached into his money pouch.

“Just a few quarters...” the blonde looked grateful as he held out his hands.

“There you go...” Andy shuffled through and gave him some change.

“Thank you so much!” The kid smiled as he took the coins and ran off.

Andy chuckled as he paid for the apples and headed back towards the area where Reques and Fyra had been just moments earlier. Turning the corner he saw Reques standing there.

“I got the apples...where did Fyra go?” He approached the young man.

“No idea, I turn around for a second, and when I look back she is gone...so I figured I would just stay here since she told me this was our post...” He told his brief story.

“And you did a good job at that...” Fyra stepped out from behind a building and wandered over to the other two.

“Where have you been?” Reques growled.

“Finding our thief of course...” She grinned as she pointed to Andy. “I’m going to need some money to finish our plan though...”

“Sure thing I’ll just...what the...?” Andy reached for his pouch and realized it wasn’t there.

“Not too observant are you?” Fyra giggled as he looked for it.

“What do you know about it?” Andy looked completely off guard.

“When was the last time you remember having it?”

“Well after I gave a few coins to the kid I went to purchase apples...”

“After that?”

“I...I don’t remember...” Andy had a wave of realization, now knowing he had been robbed.

“That is exactly the sort of mentality a thief will want you to have once your goods have been taken from you,” Fyra looked at him. “To be honest, these thieves are a little craftier than I would have given them credit for...”

“...wait them?” Reques said in disbelief.

“Yeah...there is the blonde kid Andy helped, but also the owner of that store seems to be in on it as well...” She looked deep in thought once again.

“Wait the store owner? He seemed normal though...” Andy was speechless.

“It’s one thing to be the person being stolen from...and being the person observing the theft take place...” She met his glance. “There is a reason I had you go

out and make an obvious purchase with that pouch...any petty thief would jump on a chance to steal. I was unsure exactly how the cat statue was stolen, but from the way the drunkard described his vague memory of the theft I figured it was pretty obvious where it happened. Where the thieves got smart is that it's not just the urchin, but it's also the owner of the apple store. After you paid for the apples and turned around, the owner snatched the pouch. He did it in a way you would not notice as you walked off. Which is what I observed from the roof of the building across the street..." She finished her story while the other two looked speechless. "I then followed the store owner as he went inside his shop. From what I gathered, the urchin met him there and took the pouch. The owner mentioned something about a store room as the kid took off. I would have followed him, but then the owner mentioned something about the pub..." She let the other two piece together the remainder of the mystery themselves.

"So then...we should pay the bar a visit..." Reques pulled out his staff.

"Yes, I do believe another trip there is in order..." Andy nodded towards the other two as they ventured back towards the bar.

Upon re-entering the establishment, Andy immediately went to the counter while Reques and Fyra searched around for the kid.

"Did a blonde child come by a few moments ago?"

"Uhh...yeah actually, he usually goes to the back for scraps, its hard growing up in this small community without parents...why do you ask?" The bartender wiped out another glass as he gave a suspicious look to the Rogan.

"We have reason to believe that he may be involved in several thefts...do you have a storeroom here?"

"Theft?!" The bartender fumed as he looked at Andy. "I will ring that kid's neck!" He stormed off to the back room.

Andy followed him while Reques and Fyra stopped what they were doing and proceeded to join.

As they went into the backroom, the owner turned right and saw an open door. "Son of a bitch..." He said to himself heading for it.

As the group entered what Andy presumed to be the storeroom, they watched the familiar blonde boy look up at them with fear in his eyes.

“Randall! What the hell are you doing?” The bartender folded his arms glaring at him.

“I...Mickey...” He scampered off into a corner of the room.

“Are you stealing again?!” He yelled and walked over to the kid. “Who helped you do this?!” He took note of the giant supply of items in the room that did not look like food or drink.

“N...no one! I did it on my own...” He lied as he tried to get himself out of trouble.

“What did you steal?!”

“Just...little things here and there...I was going to sell them so I could stop being in your debt...”

“Then you didn’t learn your lesson did you?!” He turned to the others. “I’m really sorry about all of this...”

“It’s quite alright, if we just take our items we will be on our way, we will leave it up to you to return the rest...” Fyra said as she picked up the money pouch.

Reques saw the cat statue as he picked it up.

“You bet, and I will make sure Randall here learns his lesson...you can be sure of that,” He gave them a grateful nod as the trio then took off. Andy noticed that Jorgen was still in the bar as they left, but holding his head, and looking a lot less jolly.

“I believe this is yours...” Reques put the statue on the table.

“Wherever did you find it?!” Jorgen seemed to forget about his headache for a moment as he looked at them gratefully, picked his statue up, and held it like a found child.

“We used bait to lure the thief out. It was just a matter of tracking him down to where he was keeping the objects...” Fyra nodded.

“Thank you so much...however can I repay you?” The man said, seeming nothing like the drunkard he had been just a few hours prior.

“Well, we heard through the grape vine that you have the means to get us to the Earth Sanctuary...” Andy gave the man a smile.

“Ah yes, come with me!” He stood up and after staggering a moment or two, he regained his balance and began to leave. The group followed him and as they did, Andy

recognized the owner of the apple store making his way towards the bar. His eyes lit up for just a second as he recognized the Rogan.

Fyra then grinned and walked up to the man, holding out the money pouch as she got within inches of his face. “Careful who you steal from next time...you are off the hook, but the minute you steal again...you and your stand will suffer big time...” She winked and giggled as the group continued to follow Jorgen. The owner cursed somewhat at having been foiled as he headed off in another direction.

“Fyra, what is the difference between you and him?” Andy questioned the moment the group had reconvened, following Jorgen.

“That man steals for the sake of stealing...I steal for a cause...” She said, her tone becoming bitter from having been compared to the petty thief. Andy made sure to shut his mouth as they continued on.

Sometime later, the group reached Jorgen’s house.

“So, out of curiosity, how are we supposed to get to the Earth Sanctuary, when, outside of this town, the atmosphere is unbearable?” Fyra questioned as they wandered inside his place.

“Well I own a rental shop which lends out oxygen tanks. This should help you get to the Sanctuary in one piece. Should you encounter any beasts along the way, the oxygen tanks won’t slow you down from your attacks...much...” He handed them each a small can with a tiny harness. After strapping them on, Jorgen showed them how to put them on so they would easily be able to access them once they left the city gate. Once they were done, Fyra handed him money as rental payment and the trio took off.

“Be safe!” He waved to them as they neared the gate. With a quick wave back, the trio nodded to one another as they each put their masks on, left the bubble, and ventured out to help Reques obtain his second Call.

Chapter 15-Earth Sanctuary

The surface of Malkon was fairly hot as the trio trudged along in the desert. The oxygen masks were holding up great as they made their way towards the Earth Sanctuary. Their firm resolve in obtaining the spirit kept them from wanting to turn back. The one thing that did not appeal to Reques about these masks was the lack of communication with one another. The journey, therefore, was extremely boring and silent.

They walked along a rugged, sand-covered path for awhile until a large triangle shaped building appeared in the distance. Reques watched as Fyra pointed towards the building and the others gave her a head nod of acknowledgement. As they walked, a massive sandstorm brewed and whipped bits and pieces of sand and rock around their bodies. Reques held his hands up until the storm eventually subsided. When he looked again, both Fyra and Andy were gone. The thought scared him as he began to wander around looking. The building still stood in the distance as Reques continued to search, but for miles and miles around there was nothing...

As he continued to search, he noticed some shifting movements in the sand and pulled out his staff. He took a step back as the figures in the sand jumped out. They looked like large rats with bandit swords as they popped up and lunged at Reques. With a couple quick steps, Reques swung his staff and hit them into the sand with little effort. He then jumped backwards and smacked down another rat bandit as it shot up from where he had previously been standing. Though not as good of a warrior as Fyra or Andy, Reques had trained enough in school to handle his own fights. He Called Frey who appeared and began to shift the sands. With relative ease, the Rat Bandits squealed as they were thrown from the sand. They landed on the surface as Reques sent several ice shards flying through the air.

Two of the bandits screeched and flailed until they died from impalement. The other two dodged the attack and then dashed to either side, readying a pinscher attack. Reques tried to have Frey stop them, but was too late as one of the Bandits knocked his staff away, while the other slashed the cord to his oxygen tank. Reques reeled and kept himself from breathing as he fell backwards. He tried to scramble away, but the other two bandits were already back up and ready to slash his throat as they inched towards

him. As he grew weak from a lack of oxygen, Frey faded and was powerless to help him. *Will I...die like this?* Reques pondered this as the two beasts were now upon him...even if somehow they left him alone, he would have to breathe eventually. He prepared for his final breath as one bandit then brought his sword up to slash down. As it did, a fireball blasted the hand and the bandit reeled in pain. The other one turned to face its assailant, but as it did a green figure dashed forward, and knocked him down.

As Reques faded in and out of consciousness not able to hold his breath any longer, he watched several flames erupt as both bandits howled in defeat...he watched as Fyra appeared above him and tried to talk to him...but it was useless as his eyes crossed and faded into darkness.

Reques coughed and sputtered as he awoke sometime later. He looked around to see that he was lying next to the entrance of the pyramid structure. Around him he looked as a similar barrier to that of Zirconais surrounded the area. Nighttime had fallen over the moon as he noticed a campfire just around the corner. As he staggered across the sand and to the campfire, he saw two familiar figures stand up.

“So, the boy lives...” Andy smiled happy to see him alive.

“What...what happened?” Reques held his head as he felt dizzy and sat down near the fire; the other two joined him feeling the warmth.

“We fell into an underground cavern when the storm hit, it took us awhile to get up. When we did we found you about to be slaughtered and came to your rescue. Though I do suppose it would have been bad if you had suffocated. Andy carried you the rest of the way to the structure, exchanging the oxygen mask between you and him so you wouldn’t die...then we waited here and hoped you were ok...” Fyra looked at the glow of the fire.

“You? Hoped that I was ok? Are you getting soft?” Reques chuckled as Fyra blushed.

“Don’t get your hopes up kid...if you die, then this whole journey, and my plan for revenge, goes to shit...” She scoffed and looked away, hiding the fact that she obviously had been worried.

Reques rolled his eyes as he took some of the meat that Andy had put over the fire and chewed on it. He found it to be quite delightful and realized this was his first outdoor meal.

“Reques, once we are done we are going to sleep so we are not going into the sanctuary blind...is that ok with you?” Andy gave him a reassuring look.

“That’s fine, we all need to be rested with the day we have had...what are we going to do about the oxygen mask? We won’t survive a journey back if we only have two tanks...” His eyes wandered to the tank that was lying on the ground near where he had woken from.

“Well I’m guessing that Jorgen had anticipated this happening since there seems to be a supplies shack near the entrance of this place...it had some food and extra oxygen tanks,” Fyra took a bite of meat as she looked up at the night sky.

“I see, and we are safe here?” Reques asked semi-rhetorically.

“Well as far as I can tell, the concentration inside the barrier is composed mostly of oxygen and most beasts on this planet live on carbon dioxide...therefore, they would not survive inside of this barrier,” Andy slowly lay down. The warmth of this planet was nice and Reques soon lay himself down as well, while Fyra put out the fire.

“So we should be able to sleep for awhile...with no interruptions...is that what I hear you saying?” Reques sighed as he could feel genuine sleep hovering above his head.

“That seems to be the case...if there were beasts in here they would be inside the sanctuary...but it seems like it is sealed shut with Eldest writing...” Fyra yawned as she lay down on the other side of the now concealed campfire.

“Sleep well...” Andy said to the other two.

“Until tomorrow,” Reques agreed as he drifted off to sleep.

###

The next morning, Reques was the last one to wake up and walked towards the entrance of the Sanctuary. Sleepily, he began to look at the words on the door and read them to himself...too easy...he thought as he heard Andy calling for him.

“Over here!” He shouted as Fyra now stood beside him. Once Andy had come over, he grabbed the hilt of his sword.

“Ready?” Andy asked both Fyra and Reques who nodded. Andy then looked to Reques to begin the unsealing of the sanctuary.

Reques faced the door as he held out his staff. He began chanting the dialect on the door while bringing the staff up and spinning it around his head. He brought it down to his right side, still spinning it while he finished the sentence. Darting his eyes now to the door, he flung his staff forward and the top of it hit a stone. It stayed there for a second while the entire entrance glowed light brown. It slowly then began to slide open. Reques picked up his staff and headed inside. Andy and Fyra soon followed him inside the Sanctuary.

“There is a map up ahead on that stone pedestal...” Fyra commented as Reques’ eyes focused ahead at the object in front of them. They walked forward and looked at the maplike diagram on the pedestal. It showed that the Sanctuary was all contained in one floor and had three different rooms inside, one of which would contain a Call. All of the rooms were connected by one path which started to the left of where they currently stood.

Reques led the way as he memorized the layout of the entire building. The first room would be coming up just on his right. The musty smell of the inside made Reques queasy. It probably hadn’t been used for years...was he really the first person to make a Pilgrimage in recent times? With the hype of Calls in school, he was shocked that this temple hadn’t been visited in so long...something about this smelled fishy to him.

As they arrived at the first room, Reques took a couple steps inside as several torches lit up, startling him. Andy quickly jumped in front of him, with his sword raised while Fyra stood behind him holding her knives out. Reques readied his staff in case it was needed. As they stood there prepping for anything, a voice boomed out.

TO THE CALLER IN THE ROOM AND HIS COMPANIONS, YOUR WEAPONS WILL NOT WORK ON THE MONSTER ABOUT TO APPEAR IN FRONT OF YOU...RELY ON YOUR ANIMA...ONLY THOSE WHOSE ANIMA ARE STRONG WILL BE ABLE TO PROVE THEMSELVES WORTHY TO MOVE ON... the voice stopped as a burst of light entered the room. Andy staggered back. The light then formed into the figure of a giant, reptilian creature appeared. Andy had to prop himself against a wall as

blindness continued to cloud his vision. Fyra and Reques looked at each other and nodded as the glowing reptile dashed at them, throwing its claws in the air swiping.

Reques tried to call Frey, but when he did he felt a twinge. *Sorry little one...I am forbidden to aid you in this trial...* he continued to lie inside of Reques. Reques sighed as he and Fyra split to both sides of the room, Fyra easily cast a fireball at the monster while she dashed adjacent to the right wall in the room. Reques watched as this pierced the spirit and it hissed, turning now to run at her. As it did, Reques tossed an ice shard at it, distracting the spirit beast further. The beast then swiped at Fyra after momentarily being stunned. Fyra reeled back and hit her head against the wall, holding it in pain while trying to scamper away.

With no time to hesitate, Reques stood on top of a fallen stone and focused his energy into several ice slabs as they shot forward, easily impacting the spirit. Hissing again, the spirit now turned towards Reques and headed for him. Just as Reques was about to throw another ice shard at it, a bolt of lightning pierced the reptile's side. Reques looked over as he saw Andy stand up, still rubbing his eyes as he focused another bolt attack.

"Now, Reques!" He shouted, firing a second bolt into the beast. Reques nodded as he took another ice shard and thrust it into the skull of the spirit, causing it to burst into tiny balls of light which dispersed. Reques landed on his feet and watched while the lights now led towards the next room. He looked at Andy who seemed to be fine now and Fyra who stood up and took a deep breath.

"Are you both okay?" He asked. Once he got a confirmation by head nod from both of his companions he walked towards the next room. Andy and Fyra also joined the lad as the pathway continued to illuminate with fire Anima, creating a path. At the end of the hallway, they approached a room which seemed to have an endless pit below them, and a small platform on the other side with an open doorway.

"How are we supposed to get over there..." Reques said out loud as he pondered this conundrum.

LITTLE ONE...the voice spoke again as if on cue...NOW THAT YOU HAVE PROVED YOU CAN WIELD ANIMA, YOU MUST NOW MANIPULATE IT. ABOVE YOU HANGS A VAT OF WATER, YOU MUST USE THIS IN ORDER TO CREATE A

PATHWAY TO THE OTHER SIDE, STRONG ENOUGH TO SUPPORT YOU AND YOUR COMPANIONS. BEFORE TRYING TO GENERATE ICE LIKE NORMAL, THIS ROOM HAS A CHARM TO SUPPRESS YOUR PERSONAL ENERGY RESERVES. THEREFORE, THE VAT OF WATER IS THE ONLY SOURCE YOU WILL BE ABLE TO DRAW FROM...PROVE YOUR WORTH AS A CALLER AND MANIPULATE YOUR SURROUNDINGS.

“How the heck do you manipulate your surroundings?” Fyra stood there confused.

“It takes practice...you can draw energy from other sources such as a river...or a forest fire...or from a source of light...I don’t have a lot of training in this area though...” He said nervously as he stood there, trying to call on the extra reserves of energy in his body that were not responding due to the charm. He took a breath as he stretched out his hands to what he imagined was the water inside of the vat dangling from the ceiling. As he focused the water in the vat slowly came out and froze on the side. This acted as an extra weight as the vat then tipped over and water tumbled from the vat. Reques then let go of the vat and focused on the water, freezing it the best he could to create two square slabs, thick enough to hold feet.

“A...alright...” he said straining as this form of manipulation was taking a lot out of him. “The pair of you will need to get onto these platforms and I will transport you to the other side. Be careful though, I can’t guarantee how stable this will be and the slabs will be a little slippery. Sweat poured from his face as he focused the steps. After a few minutes, Reques helped both of his companions across as he brought the platforms over to now help himself across.

He hesitated slightly, his body becoming exhausted. Eventually, he stepped onto the slab and was shaking as he could already feel the slightly slippery surface. Once he had planted himself enough on them he began to move them forward. His knees felt weak as the platforms slowly continued over the dark abyss below. He could feel his right foot slip a bit as he tried to bring the platforms together a bit. As he continued to feel his body weaken, he was kicking himself mentally for not having trained harder in this area.

About halfway across, he felt his left leg slip and felt himself fall backwards. Quickly thinking, he brought a platform near his hands. It was cold, but as he held on for dear life. Fyra gasped as he fell, but breathed a sigh of relief as he managed not to fall. Reques concentrated harder as he made some of the ice form around his hands so even if he was too cold he wouldn't let go. One more burst of his energy and he moved the platform to the other side of the room, making sure to push it as fast as he could. He couldn't even feel his hands anymore by the time he had reached the edge. As he was about ready to pull the platform up, he gasped as he had reached the end of his concentration...his body had nothing left. The platform slowly began to fall and crack as Reques could now feel his hands slipping.

He heard a crunching sound as a green arm punched through the ice and grabbed his wrist. The ice that had formerly been his platform shattered and fell into the pit below him as he felt himself being pulled up. His limp body was easily pulled on top of the platform.

"That...was too close..." The Rogan said making sure Reques was still doing well.

"Thanks," Reques chuckled as Fyra warmed his hands up with a warm glow. Once he could finally feel them again he pushed himself up.

"Alright, let's get this Call and get the hell out of here..." He said shocking himself with the impolite word he had just used. Fyra seemed a little taken aback by this as well but shook it off as they headed into the open doorway. Following the hallway, they soon came to the final room, a giant chamber which seemed to have a shrine towards the back.

YOU HAVE PROVED THAT YOU CAN RELY ON YOUR ANIMA ABILITIES, AND THAT YOU CAN MANIPULATE THEM, BUT ARE YOUR ABILITIES STRONG ENOUGH TO OVERCOME YOURSELF? The voice boomed above them as they entered.

"What is that supposed to..." Reques started to say as he then felt a yanking inside him. Before he had time to react, Frey was Called out of his body. As this happened, he felt his extra anima reserves unlock again. He could hear Andy and Fyra sigh as he figured theirs must have also unlocked. As Reques watched helplessly, Frey

screamed as light particles poured into his body. Frey's fingers extended somewhat as his hooves grew larger. He watched in horror as Frey's facial expression went from fear to that of pure rage, his teeth grew into fangs, his body grew large and more muscular, and the sides of his face sprouted with hair. As soon as the transformation was complete, Frey did not look like the helpful goat like spirit he once was. Instead he looked like a giant ogre with claws.

I AM BROLEN, CALL OF THE EARTH, BORN OF YOUR INNER STRENGTH. YOU MUST CHALLENGE ME AND DEFEAT ME IF YOU WISH TO CALL ME, The beast howled as it spread its claws. Reques drew his rod, prepared to fight this spirit. As he did, both Fyra and Andy appeared on either side with their weapons ready to go. They each nodded to one another as they faced off with Brolen.

“Hold on a second...” Andy said before the fight started. “I thought Frey was your earth related spirit...”

“Though Frey can use bits of the earth as his weapon...his actual element is gravity...he can technically pick objects...” Reques briefly explained as he then looked back towards Brolen.

AHHHHH! Brolen yelled as he charged forward.

“Here he comes!” Andy shouted thrusting his sword at the beast as he made a small cut across its chest. Brolen reeled back and swiped at Andy who narrowly avoided the hit. Fyra leapt from above and sliced downwards, piercing the Call's shoulder.

He reeled back and then arched his back while exerting power. Several rocks formed above Fyra and struck her in the face as they knocked her to the ground. She yelped as they bashed her side. Brolen attempted to swipe at her again but as he did, a block of ice knocked his hand away.

Reques stood there as he faced off with the spirit. “Come and get me...I'm the one you want...” He held up his staff and began to pace around the room in the opposite motion with the spirit. Brolen howled in laughter as he started to pace in the opposite motion.

YOU THINK YOU EVEN HAVE A SLIGHT CHANCE AGAINST ME?! FREY WAS SO WEAK...I'M SURE IT IS A RESEMBLANCE OF ITS CALLER!!! He laughed

louder as Reques' blood boiled. He knew the call was just trying to edge him on, and it was working. If he wanted to win this fight he would have to keep his cool. He managed to compose himself as he held out his hand. An ice shard promptly formed. With a scream he thrust it forward. It shattered as Brolen swiped it away and charged at him. Reques swung his staff and knocked the hand away as he blasted an ice ball into the spirit's chest.

DAMN YOU! Brolen coughed as it used its other hand to swipe Reques away. The Caller coughed as his back hit the wall. He strained as he summoned another ice ball just to try and push the spirit away. It worked momentarily as the beast shook the attack off and rushed at him.

WEAK...TOO WEAK FOR ME! Brolen brought his arm back, and howled in pain as a sword pierced his back. Andy quickly thrust once more as he sliced another part of the spirits' back. Brolen, in a blind rage spun around quickly, knocking Andy off and against the shrine. As he went to take another step forward, his feet couldn't move.

"An oldie...but a goodie..." Reques chuckled through heavy panting. Brolen couldn't move as it struggled against the trap. "FYRA NOW!" Reques shouted seeing that Brolen was now trying to move some of the earth around him. Fyra leapt from above and sliced both of her knives deep into the spirit. With one last howl, the beast dispelled into a million light particles. The particles eventually reconfigured into both Brolen and Frey who appeared in front of Reques.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM THIS SANCTUARY? Brolen looked at the Caller while Fyra and Andy slowly stood up and watched.

"What do you mean?" Reques' eyebrows narrowed.

EACH SANCTUARY YOU VISIT IS DESIGNED TO TEST YOU. THIS ONE TESTS YOU ON STRENGTH. TELL ME, BASED ON YOUR TRIALS, WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED? Brolen looked at him, waiting.

"What...I learned..." Reques pondered this for a few minutes. He eventually looked up at the Call. "Though I am not the strongest person, nor the smartest, what I learned is...you are nothing without companions..." He looked at Fyra and Andy who stood there. "I could have easily passed the first two tasks by myself...but when fighting you, if I didn't have them...I wouldn't have been able to obtain you..." He

thought about this for a second and smiled, confident with a new answer. “True strength is not what you possess, but comes from the bonds you form with others...”

I, BROLEN, ACCEPT THAT ANSWER. DO YOU ACCEPT ME AS YOUR CALL? The spirit bowed to Reques.

“I accept...” Reques replied. Brolen slowly dissolved into Reques as a newfound strength washed over him. Frey also smiled and joined back up with his master, pleased with the performance he had just witnessed. Once the spectacle was over, Reques looked to Andy and Fyra. Though he was still unsure of Andy, the whole Rogan thing being foreign to him, and though he still wanted to strangle Fyra immensely, he knew deep down that he could not have done this without both of them...and for that he was grateful. A pool of light then appeared that encompassed the shrine.

YOU HAVE PASSED YOUR FIRST TEST...TOUCH THE SHRINE WHEN YOU WISH TO RETURN TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD. JUST SO YOU KNOW, IN THE FUTURE YOU WILL ALL BE ABLE TO OBTAIN STRONGER WEAPONS AT CERTAIN SANCTUARIES.

Reques nodded and motioned for the others to come over as they joined him near the shrine. One by one they each touched the shrine, and just like the voice said, they were transported out of the Earth Sanctuary.

Chapter 16-Rogan Stalemate

“What do you mean we still can’t see the Head Senator?” General Rouske growled at an officer as he read the statement issued to him.

“Look Rogan, I’m just following orders, okay?” The soldier said.

“We have been here for two days now and all I get is, ‘he isn’t available, he isn’t available,’” Rouske felt his temper flare up.

“Well, he isn’t! There is something that happened a few days ago and it requires his immediate attention. And unless you have proper documentation I cannot let you into the city,” He seemed frightened of the Rogan.

“Tsk...well then, I have a new request, go to whoever is in charge and tell them that I want to send a new representative to have a meeting...”

“And let another one of your soldiers join runaway prisoners? I don’t think so...you are lucky I don’t arrest your entire ship for treason...you are ‘Rogue’-ans afterall...” The soldier sneered.

Rouske wanted nothing more than to punch this man silly, but he had a point. With Andy having joined up with those outlaws, it would make a meeting with the Senators harder for the Rogans. As General Rouske nodded he looked at the soldier. “If trust is the issue you have with me, could you potentially bring someone here?” He tried to think of another alternative.

“Well...I don’t see why that couldn’t at least be suggested...that hasn’t been turned down. I will relay this back to headquarters...until then we are watching you...” The officer gave him one final look as he began to walk off.

Rouske grinned at his last minute thought; maybe there was some logic to this human negotiating concept. He felt satisfied, as if he had accomplished something worthwhile. This could be an idea he could take back to Tar Tar’an.

“Andy...I know you cannot hear me, but for your sake I hope you made the right choice...” He whispered out loud and noticed several of the reporters murmuring amongst themselves. As they did, several of them excitedly piled back into their vehicles and drove back towards the city. This puzzled and confused him profusely as he shook his head. Maybe he understood less about human interactions than his latest encounter would have made him suspect.

###

Senator De Vasco walked towards his kitchen. He had been confined to house arrest until his trial ended. After all of the things that had happened earlier in the day, he would not be shocked if they locked him in jail for the rest of his life. Stupidity had led him to taking all of that money. He foolishly thought that trying to work with Davis in order to propose a higher tax...would make him richer. Being under house arrest had made him realize how much he had changed. It had started with his private bank. The whole deal was a scam created to mishandle the tax money, and the greed had gone to his head. According to the deal, Davis would get the position of Senator and use his title to help create higher tax increases for the entirety of Dolor making both men richer. It was dirty, and he knew he couldn't go back now. He hoped they wouldn't be too hard on him if he agreed to give some of the money back.

De Vasco made his way over to the fridge. There wasn't much he could do at this point except try to calm his nerves. He opened the fridge and saw a gallon of milk sitting on the middle shelf. *A little milk might do me some good.* He slowly reached for the container. As he did, he saw droplets of blood spatter against the white gallon. *What the ...* he started to feel a pounding from his chest.

Looking down in dismay, he saw the blade of a scythe protruding from his chest as pain began to finally set in. It was a cold pain which froze the very core of his body. He turned around to see his assailant and as he did, there behind him stood a man. This man frightened him as he could now feel the cold start to seep into his heart and mind. The assassin stood in front of De Vasco with pink, jagged hair resting on top of a silver, emotionless mask. De Vasco tried to muster a scream, but any energy he had left was seeping away with the bloody water now dripping from the wound.

"Farewell..." The pink haired man pulled out the scythe. De Vasco only had time to blink as the other man quickly shifted his arm. Pain was brief as De Vasco felt the fingers pierce his jaw...by the time they had reached his brain, he could not feel anymore...

The assassin watched as the body fell limply to the floor. His work here was done and this single event would start the chain reaction that his master desired. As he turned to leave, he saw a girl who looked about ten or so standing in pajamas. Her blue

eyes were wide as her blond pigtails shined in the sunlight overhead. She began to cry as the man then walked past her. She trembled as he then uttered two words to her.

“Nothing personal...” He walked towards the window where he quickly jumped out, leaving the whimpering girl to stand over her father’s dead body.

Chapter 17-Rough Encounter

Andy sat back in his seat as the ship left Malkon's atmosphere. After the group had left the Sanctuary, they returned to Zirconais. From there they stopped by the bar to find that everything was in order and Randall was working to pay off his debt by cleaning tables. Once they had made sure their business was done they went back to the spaceport and took off.

The trip felt rushed, though Andy appreciated everything they gained from it. Though he knew that tensions were still high between members of the group, the realization that Reques shared, at the sanctuary, somehow made them closer. It wasn't completely set in stone as none of their issues with each other had been addressed yet, but Andy knew it was an important stepping stone for them.

"How much farther until Winndel?" Andy sat next to Hath. The two of them never were close before. However, having another Rogan's company helped them create an instant bond.

"Not too much farther...though, we may run into some problems. There seems to be an asteroid belt that separates us from our destination. I was trying to avoid it by circumnavigating it, but if I keep do that we will waste time I do not believe we have..." He pointed out the belt just off to their left.

"I'm going to go confer with the others, give us a heads up when we make our move," Andy stood up as he made his way towards the back of the ship. He wandered for awhile, taking time to admire space from the windows on his way to the back of the ship. That seemed to be something the group had in common, their fascination with space. Every time he thought about it, he realized the three of them were slightly more compatible than he initially thought.

As he found his way to the kitchen, he noticed that Fyra was humming a tune as she made herself a salad of sorts. Andy chuckled to himself quietly as he watched. He never imagined this woman as someone who enjoyed being in the kitchen or making food, especially not since she was a thief. Fyra was different from regular thieves though...her theft seemed to have motivation and reason.

"Fyra," He called as she stopped what she was doing and looked at him. "Be prepared, at some point in the near future we will be going through an asteroid belt..."

“Thanks...” She went back to her cooking, obviously distracted.

As Andy shook his head in a jolly fashion and began to leave, she began to hum a tune that was strangely familiar to him. He was about to inquire about the melody, but figured it would be odd to just up and ask a question like that. Letting the thought go, he continued on, seeing if he could spot Reques somewhere.

Towards the back of the ship, he noticed the young man’s door open and was about to go inside, but as he did a frantic Hath spoke over the intercom.

“Everyone! I need you in the cock pit immediately!” He yelled causing Reques to jump out of his room.

Andy gave him a nod as the pair of them ran back towards the front of the ship. As they arrived, Andy noticed that Fyra had already beaten them there.

“What is going on?” Andy questioned Hath.

“I’m not sure how else to say this...but there is a ship I do not recognize following us...” His voice trailed as the telecommunicator turned on.

“Surrender your ship to Valdez Carinski or suffer the consequences!” A Rogan appeared on the screen. His body was covered in black and white paint as several other Rogans appeared behind him in the same manner.

“Is there a third option?” Fyra questioned as she looked to Andy. In a hushed tone, she told him to get to the gunner.

Andy nodded while the crew stalled momentarily as he headed to the hatch, located near the bridge of the ship. He climbed up and jumped into the gunner as he took his seat. This gunner was smaller than the one on the Arexus, which made sense seeing as Le’Vatis was generally used for escaping rather than fighting.

“Andy! Carinski is preparing to fire at us. Keep us protected while I escape into the asteroid belt,” Hath’s voice was shaking as if he was nervous.

“That is suicide! It’s the heaviest part of the belt!” Andy remembered the map that he looked at earlier.

“What other choice do we have? We may be a little faster than the other ship, but we cannot take the damage it can give our hull! I would rather take my chances with the asteroids...got another plan?”

“No...that’s fine, I’m going to start engaging the enemy!” Andy shook his head. There was no other alternative. He pulled the safety break backwards as he focused the guns on the ship. Before he could get in a shot, the other ship fired several missiles. Andy took a breath as he fired several laser shots in return. As he hoped, his shots hit the missiles before they could get within feet of Le’Vatis.

“Hold on!” Hath shouted as Andy felt the ship lurch forward. As it did, the pirate ship began to fire as it pursued the vessel. Andy could feel his hands clamming up as he fired back. Several of his shots countered the attack, but for the most part, the shots broke through and hit Le’Vatis.

“Andy! I need more cover! If I go into this belt with too much damage there is no way I will be able to navigate to the other side!”

“WORKING ON IT!” Andy furiously shouted back as he held the trigger down and fired the laser shots in a line at the pirate ship. They connected for the most part and he could see several explosions.

“Nice!” Reques shouted over the intercom.

“Thanks, that should keep them at bay for awhile!” Andy shouted back. He felt the ship shake as he heard a slight crunching noise. This threw him forward slightly in the seat and bumped the gunner.

“Sorry bud, you are going to have to do what you can to hold on! We just entered the belt!”

“I gathered that...” Andy hissed back as he sat in his seat and focused even harder. The gunner was easy enough to maneuver, but with the bumpy ride they were having, Andy knew that would add some difficulty. After a few more shots, the ship disappeared behind a giant asteroid that floated into view. This baffled the Rogan as he searched hard...*where did they go?*

He continued to look for several minutes in an eerie silence. Looking for anything out of the ordinary, he noticed the asteroids were getting larger the farther they entered the belt. He could hear some of them colliding and the noise was overwhelming. After wincing slightly and seeing another two giant asteroids collide, he saw a gleam of silver and pointed his gunner in that direction. His reflexes were slow as several enemy shots were fired. They hit Le’Vatis directly.

“Hath! How much farther?!” Andy shouted returning the fire. A couple of the shots met their target as the enemy ship seemed to veer off to the left a bit. However, with all of the asteroids in the way, Andy was finding it harder and harder to make contact.

“Not too much farther buddy...once we are past the belt though, we won't have much cover from their attacks...”

“I'm on it!” Andy saw an opportunity. He fired his guns towards a giant asteroid that was moving away from the pirate ship. This caused the asteroid to change course as it hit the ship dead on. Because the asteroid was not moving fast enough, the ship would survive the attack, but Andy figured this would at least be enough to buy them some time. Andy got more than he had hoped for. The pirate ship began to retreat back into the belt.

“We just got confirmation; the other ship is backing off. Good going Andy! We are home free once we get past this last bit...shit...” Hath grew quiet.

“What is going on?!” Andy tried to focus his gunner to see what the issue was. His jaw dropped as he saw the largest asteroid they had encountered so far, and it was right in their path.

“We have trouble...” Hath could barely speak.

“I have an idea! There is no way you are going to avoid that thing...trust me!” Andy fired several dozen rapid shots into the floating titan. Once he had created a decent enough pit he fired four missiles Le'Vatis as they created an even deeper pit. This alone wouldn't be enough though.

“Fyra get up here NOW!” Andy stressed as he prepped the gunner and then stepped out of the seat. As she clambered up she hopped into the seat.

“I need you to fire as many rounds as you can into that thing, as you do I need you to focus your fire anima into the bullets...is this possible?” He urgently looked at her.

“Easy...” She began to focus her anima into the gunner.

“Hath! I want you to turn the shields on and pilot directly through the center of the asteroid, where the gunshots are hitting...can you do that?”

“No guarantees...but what other choice do we have...” Hath sighed and headed straight for the asteroid.

Fyra only took a couple moments longer as the gunner glowed and flame laser shots poured out. As they impacted the asteroid, the rock inside began to melt into magma. Fyra continued to fire as the ship now entered the already existing pit.

“Faster!” Andy shouted as Fyra poured everything she had into the shots.

“Easier said than done!” She shouted back at him with a glare as she fired what she could. Le’Vatis now entered the magma as the barrier around the ship kept it from melting. The plan was working so far. As they burrowed further into the floating boulder, Andy could tell Fyra was reaching her limit.

“How much farther to the end?!” He shouted into the telecommunicator.

“Not too far...Andy I’m shocked you came up with this on the fly...” Hath sounded impressed as the ship pushed forward.

It was quite a spectacle; Andy was amazed at all of the magma now pressing against the barrier. The reds and oranges were creating a unique lighting effect that made him feel like he was on another planet.

“The barrier is failing!” Hath shouted, breaking this momentary solitude.

“Reques, can you add to the barrier through the output below the control panel?!” Andy shouted.

“I think so! I’ll see what I can do!” Reques scampered to the output and began to focus his energy into it.

“This should work for now...Andy we just need a little more time...” Hath’s voice now had a slight tone of hope.

Andy watched as Fyra hit her limit.

“I...I have to push...” She gasped as sweat poured down her brow. As she did, her body became encased in a red glow. Fyra emitted a furious groan, as she poured a fire blast into the gunner which sent a beam of fire to the asteroid creating an open gap through the middle. The glow that encased her body then ceased once the beam had been fired and she limply fell to the floor unconscious. *This wasn’t enough...* Andy knew the hole was still too small and he jumped back into the gunner. He fired as much as he could and chipped away at the end of the magma tunnel...*not enough...*

“Hold on! This is going to get bumpy!” Hath strained as he then enabled the boosters. Andy grabbed Fyra and held her unconscious body tight as the ship rocketed forward. With a bit of a pause, it shoved through the weakened end of the asteroid and burst into the safety of space.

“...W...we did it...” Hath chuckled nervously as Reques and Andy cheered.

Fyra coughed and sputtered as she came to and looked up at Andy.

“You did amazing...” He smiled at her as she sat up and looked back towards the asteroid. It now had a gaping hole in the middle as it floated into the belt, while they floated away from it. Andy was impressed and bewildered at how Fyra had summoned as much power. It made him wonder if there was more to her than he initially had thought.

“Thank you crew...I’m sure you used up a lot of strength doing that, go ahead and rest, it should be another day before we reach Winndel,” Hath said as he turned off the telecommunicator. The ship had used up a lot of energy in the last encounter and needed to be saved as much as possible if they were going to arrive safely.

Andy gave Fyra a nod as the pair of them left the gunner and headed towards their rooms. Once there, Andy took a second to process what had just happened, his sudden display of leadership shocked him. He had never been someone who could come up with a plan on the fly. Was it possible this journey was teaching him more about himself? He hoped this was the case as he headed into his bed and felt himself drift away.

Chapter 18-Winndel

“Rise and shine sleepyheads! We are here!” Hath exclaimed.

Reques groggily sat up in bed. Light poured into his window from the outside world as he sat up. He had exhausted his energy from keeping up the barrier the night previous and though his strength had returned, he hadn't slept as well as he would have wanted. Therefore, he naturally felt a little grumpy.

He made his way to the cockpit and saw that he was the last one to arrive. As he looked out the window to take a view of the planet, an intense red glow.

“What is this planet made up of?” He looked towards the others not remembering any of this in his textbook.

“There are high concentrations of gases within the atmosphere of this planet. Because this moon lies within the radiation belt of Ungdar, the gasses are in an excited state which makes the moon seem to glow,” Hath said getting intel through the monitors on the control panel.

“Fascinating...” He curiously looked at the surroundings. “How did we land then?” His curiosity changed to skepticism as he looked at the Rogan.

“Well, truth be told, we ran out of power just as we entered the gravity pull of the moon. I was sure we would be burned alive in the radiation belt, but then the spaceport contacted us and drew us in with a tractor beam. This beam protected us from the gasses in some sort of Animaic casing and pulled us into what I believe is a protective glass dome, though I do not know the specifics of how it works,” He marveled at the technology of the moon that he could not fully comprehend. The trio took a moment to let this sink in as they nodded to each other.

“We shouldn't delay any longer...” Fyra headed for the docking bay to exit the ship.

“Thank you for getting us here,” Andy gratefully said to Hath, who in return bowed and beat his chest once.

“You too bud, without your gunmanship we would not have survived the Rogan Pirate Ship or the asteroid,” He gave Andy a smile.

Andy bowed and pounded his chest as he then took off.

Reques found this interaction quite peculiar as he left; it almost seemed animalistic. In all honesty, most of the things the Rogans did, besides their use of ships, seemed to be primitive in nature to how humans did things. It wasn't bad, but was not as advanced as humans were.

Reques felt somewhat superior as his grumpy mood lifted and he followed his two comrades into the spaceport. As they passed through the port, Reques looked around to see a lot of advanced technology. Everything looked futuristic and he was unsure whether or not he could even process what he was seeing.

As they left the port, he noticed a sign that read "Annula, population 3,000." He figured this was the name of the town they were approaching. As they walked in, Reques noticed something peculiar...no one was in the streets. The entire place looked deserted. In fact, the spaceport also seemed barren. Though he knew Winndel was the least populated of the five moons, he hadn't expected there to literally be no one around.

"Eerie..." He shuddered, the others silently agreed. They continued down the street as Reques now noticed a couple of people staring from their windows. They looked petrified as they watched the group walk along the road. Reques hesitantly began to slow down. As he did, the sound of growling sent chills down his spine.

"Something isn't right..." Andy pulled out his sword as he motioned for Fyra and Reques to follow him. Once they were behind a dumpster, several beasts appeared. They looked like giant wolves with flames for manes. As they sniffed around hungrily, Fyra made a few hand motions. This drew the group's attention to a nearby warehouse that looked as if it had been abandoned. They ducked inside while the flame wolves continued on sniffing around.

"This must have been what has everyone frightened..." Fyra whispered as she watched out of the glassless window. Reques took out his staff and called Brolen to his side.

"Hey, could you take a look around for us?" He said in a hushed tone. Brolen nodded as he climbed out of the window and left. For what seemed like minutes in silence, the group waited for the spirit to return. With a quick leap, he hopped back inside.

*THERE HAS GOT TO BE AROUND TWENTY OF THE MONSTERS
CRAWLING THE STREETS...I THINK SOMETHING HAPPENED TO THE GATE
THAT I SAW AT THE EDGE OF TOWN...* He looked at the group who nodded to him.

“Malfunction maybe...” Andy pondered this for a second.

“If we can fix the gate, then no more can come in...” Fyra looked up.

“That would also mean fighting twenty beasts...” Reques played devil’s advocate to show that Fyra had overlooked the angle.

“So what? Then we just fight them...” She scoffed annoyed with his answer.

“Fight twenty all at once? That’s insane...if we are going to be smart about this, we are going to need to take them out in small doses.” Reques began to formulate a plan in his head.

“Fine, what do you have in mind?” Fyra folded her arms and leaned against the wall.

“Well...first we send out Brolen to lure the beasts to this room, once here, they will have to bottleneck to get into this room. At that point Fyra, you will go out the window and run to the gate. It will be your job to seal it shut since you should be able to work the machinery better than Andy or myself...guess you get to come in handy finally...” He rolled his eyes. “In the meantime, Andy and I can handle whatever comes in here and Fyra can get the stragglers...”

“Not too bad for coming up with it on the spot...” Andy shrugged. He certainly didn’t have any better suggestions. Fyra seemed a little cocky at having had her talents praised.

“Hah! I could fix that door in my sleep.”

“Well, that seems to be *something* you are be good for...” Reques chuckled at his attempt to make a joke.

“Can it wise guy...” He watched Fyra’s forehead tense as she obviously was hiding the urge to smack him.

“Is there any more discussion?” Andy tried to break up the tension. Both scoffed and shook their heads. “Alright then, everyone get in place!”

Once they were all satisfied with the placement, Reques commanded Brolen to go out. Reques was nervous because of the size of the fire wolves. He knew his ice

would be able to slow them down, but the size of their fangs had him questioning whether he was fit to do this. With no more time to hesitate, he heard a howl as Brolen pounded on the door. Reques stood in front as Andy grabbed the handle and pulled it open. Brolen quickly leapt into the room as three of the wolves piled into the door. As predicted, they seemed to get in each other's way as Reques cast three ice shards and pierced them. Andy jumped from behind, and with quick slashes from his blade, he sliced their heads off. Reques could hear more of the beasts approaching as Fyra jumped out the window and headed away, he wished her the best of luck as two more wolves appeared.

Reques didn't hesitate to toss two ice balls in quick succession as Brolen raised an Axe he created with his anima. He sliced the beasts with relative ease as Andy jumped out into the street. Reques dashed after him, wondering why the Rogan couldn't have just waited inside for the remaining fifteen to arrive. He watched, as he entered the alley, while Andy leapt and dug his blade, killing one of them upon impact. With a quick slash, he caught another as it jumped to bite his arm. Reques saw a third wolf bound from a rooftop above and sent an ice shard into its side. It yelped and fell to the ground where Andy quickly finished it off.

"I haven't had this great of practice in awhile...keeps my blade and mind fresh," He laughed as he whipped around and cut into another beast. Reques again found this sight to be very primitive...it was odd to him that someone relished the thought of bloodshed and fighting. He felt a presence behind him as Brolen appeared and cut into another wolf.

WATCH YOUR BACK! The spirit covered his master.

"Thanks!" He replied and continued forward after Andy. They stealth fully edged along the buildings as they approached the main street. They could see five wolves wandering about.

"Andy, use your Anima to throw them off guard, I'll keep them in place while they are confused, and then Brolen can finish them off..." Reques nodded toward the Rogan who in return nodded back.

Andy held his hand out as familiar clouds formed overhead and thunder made the beasts yelp.

Reques sent a stream of ice towards the wolves to hold them in place while Brolen readied his axe and then slaughtered the beasts with several flicks and twists. The sight caused Reques to reel back. He had never been prone to violence unless it was self-defense. The way this attack had been carried out it seemed almost like an execution rather than preventing retaliation. Reques let the thought go as he knew this was for the good of Annula.

Fyra appeared to their right with a giant grin.

“Easy...the gate is fully functional again, and I only ran into four of those suckers...” She laughed heartily. Before anyone had a moment to respond to this her stance became hostile as she threw both of her knives. Andy and Reques ducked as they heard two yelps. They turned to see two more wolves sprawled out on the ground, the knives sticking out of their heads. Their jaws dropped slightly as Fyra walked past them and yanked her weapons out of their skulls.

“Pretty good for a thief, huh?” She winked at Reques who fumed at the remark.

To make sure another screw up didn't happen, Reques sent Brolen to scout the area for further wolves. As he left, several of the people slowly came out of their houses and murmured to one another. Eventually, an elderly woman walked up to them.

“Did...you get rid of all the beasts?” She weakly said in a hopeful tone.

“We are getting confirmation now, but most of them should be cleared out and your town gate is fixed...” Andy gave her a smile as she looked at him and backed off.

“But...you are a beast...” She said with confusion as she backed away, scared. Reques was taken aback by this statement as he looked to his comrade. Though he acknowledged that Andy was not fully human, he was baffled at the fact she had compared him to a beast. Through his travels so far with the Rogan he had come to find this being was much more intelligent than a beast and had humanlike qualities. *Had he always thought this way though?* The thought buzzed in his mind when he remembered a brief time in elementary school where children used to pick on a Rogan student and called him a scummy beast...maybe before this journey he hadn't really been much different than this woman.

“Correction, he is a Rogan and just killed over twenty beasts to protect your town...what kind of beast would do that?” Reques stood up as Andy’s ears drooped and he looked like he was going to cry.

“So...you are friends with this beast then?” She raised an eyebrow as several other citizens then came behind her.

“Again, if you would listen, you would know he is not a beast...” Reques felt his words were falling on deaf ears.

“We have no idea if he will turn around and sell us out to those monsters...” One of the men behind the old women said as several other citizens echoed his statements.

“I’m going to go back to the ship you guys...I do not feel welcome here...do you think you can handle this Sanctuary on your own?” Andy began to back up.

“Go ahead...you have no reason to be scared, but we understand. If you or Hath get harassed while at the spaceport, let us know...” Fyra tossed him her receiver and put her headpiece in as she nodded.

Reques gave him a sorry look. “I tried to reason with them...” He looked to his companion who was now turning around.

“It isn’t your fault that some beings in this world are too blinded by differences to see a good person...” There was a twinge of sadness in his voice.

After he had left, Fyra and Reques walked by the now forming crowd as they headed for the gate. Brolen returned shortly to report the city was beast free. This helped lighten the tense mood as they continued forward. This Sanctuary would be hard without the help of the Rogan, though Fyra and Reques knew there was no other alternative.

Reaching the gate, they took one last look at the town. As advanced as the town was the scene had made the inhabitants feel more primitive than any Rogan.

“Let’s go...” Fyra broke the mood as she put her hand on the panel. As it identified her as a human, the gate opened and the pair headed through.

Chapter 19-Underground Caverns

The entirety of the Underground Caverns was dark and damp. There was no pathway as any that had existed rolled into the small pool of water. Fyra did what she could to avoid stepping in the water, but after a few feet, she realized this would be impossible. She reluctantly trudged through the underground puddle to make her way to the other side. She could hear Reques sloshing around behind her as he followed.

She had been extremely stunned at the hostility shown to Andy by the citizens of Annula. The sight itself though, wasn't shocking, as she knew for the most part because of their unfamiliarity; people were hesitant to want to interact with Rogans in general. News stories often covered the Rogan Pirates, or the savage, wild nature of U'Roga. These images and stories instilled fear within humans who were already unfamiliar with how Rogan culture worked, grew into a silent hatred, born of the unknown.

"What do you think awaits us at this Sanctuary?" Reques broke the awkward silence.

"You are asking the wrong person..." Fyra shrugged as she continued.

"Do you think we will get along fine without Andy?"

"Who knows..."

"I wonder if Brolen will transform like Frey did...do you think—"

"Ok are you just going to keep asking me pointless questions?" She interrupted.

"Sheesh...just trying to talk to you..." He folded his arms and continued behind her.

"Well we weren't exactly friends before this journey started, and seeing as you are an annoying brat, I'm not really sure how that is ever going to change..." She huffed and continued on. She wasn't actually sure why she was always so to him. He had really come in handy over the last few days of their journey and had probably been more help than she was. In the larger picture, he would inevitably play a larger role than she did. But when she thought about the aftermath of this journey, how he would just go back to his wealth and his easy life, she remembered something...she loathed those who dangled their coins in front of the less fortunate.

She also remembered that he didn't think to highly of her status. Every time he called her a thief and demeaned her class standing, it sent her blood boiling. Every time

they talked now, it would remind her of the times when he pissed her off and it caused her to not want to listen. They continued over the stalactites, which obstructed their path and hopped over various rock formations that had built up in the water. This task proved to be harder than it looked and took a toll on their physical bodies.

“Son of a bitch...” Fyra panted as she leaned against the wall, small lanterns above her lit the path. It was apparent that although they were both used to physical activities, that for some reason they were being weighed down...

“Maybe it’s the water...” Reques sat down on a formation of rocks near her. She looked at her pants and was shocked to see just how soaked they were, water had even gotten inside of her boots...and when she went to lift her leg she was shocked at how much strain it had.

“Yeah that has to be it...” She agreed. She felt frustrated as she eventually pushed herself up and continued walking. The weight was starting to make her calves sore as Reques stopped.

“I have an idea...” He looked at her.

“Well, you tend to have decent ideas...” She stopped and looked at him.

“Since we are having a hard time walking, how about we stop and you use heat to evaporate the water that has built up...then I freeze the water in this cavern and we use the wall to slide to the end...” He looked at her.

“Not bad kid...” She chuckled and stood on a nearby dry spot while she began to use heat to warm her dampened clothes. After a few minutes, she and Reques were both dry as she looked at him. “Your turn...”

He nodded and then proceeded to let his anima flow as the path ahead of them froze.

Fyra pushed herself off the wall as she slid to one side of the wall, catching herself with her hands. Once she was sure it was safe, she motioned for Reques to follow. The pair alternated between skating across and checking for any thin ice patches. This seemed to help them go faster and eventually they reached the end of the long cavern.

The pathway opened up to a large room with a platform held up by a stone column that sunk into a pit of lava far down. This created intense heat, which bathed over Fyra and Reques.

“Talk about going from the freezer to the frying pan...” Fyra wiped her brow as it instantly filled with sweat. The intensity was building as she left the cave.

“Seriously...” Reques stopping to catch his breath after just a second.

Fyra continued on. “Come on...we need to keep moving...” She panted as she began to walk across the narrow passage. As she did she suddenly felt faint from the heat and kneeled down.

Reques helped her up as the pair went over the bridge. Every move forward seemed harder than the last as they continued on; sheer determination being their only driving force at this point.

Once Fyra felt like she couldn't go on anymore, she pushed a couple steps farther...straining to continue on. After one more step, she was instantly cooled...She stood up and looked around at her surroundings. She noticed a thin film of protection Anima and shook her head...

Reques soon came to the same realization as he stood up next to her. They faced the door to the Sanctuary together. “My turn...” Reques walked forward.

Though Fyra knew the pair of them had their differences, somehow they worked well together and only got to this point because of each other's strength. As the door to the Sanctuary opened, Fyra watched as Reques nodded to her and headed inside. Her revelation on this topic propelled her forward...and also prevented her from giving the kid a snarky remark.

Chapter 20-Fire Sanctuary

The layout of the initial room was similar to the previous Sanctuary. Inside the doors was a small room with a pedestal in front. Reques walked up to it and read the layout. There were two separate tunnels that ran on either side, eventually connecting to a room at the end. The tunnel on the right read “Caller” in ancient Eldest. The one on the left was labeled companions...this intrigued Reques as he looked at Fyra.

“The map is saying we need to split up in order to get to the final room...”

“Sounds like a trap,” Fyra pondered this.

“Even if it is, it’s the only way we can obtain the Call...” He looked towards the tunnel on the right.

“Then, good luck shrimp...” Fyra walked over to the left tunnel. With one last glance at one another, the pair nodded and headed inside.

The tunnel Reques went through was pitch black. He was about to call back to Fyra, but then the door shut. He cursed as he stumbled through the tunnel, tripping over some of the stones on the floor and falling a couple of times. The only thing he knew for sure was to move forward...

After a few more minutes of stumbling around, he saw a light towards the end of the tunnel. His heart raced as he continued to find his way out of the passage. He continued forward until he finally reached the light, which was the opening of a room with a shrine in it, similar to the inner sanctum of the previous Sanctuary.

This time there seemed to not be any tests, nothing overly hard that he had been put through, which worried him. Before he had time to react, the similar yanking feeling tugged at his gut and he felt Brolen leave his body. The spirit screamed as it reeled backward into particles of light and reformed. Reques caught his breath as he watched the particles transform the ogre-esque spirit into a beautiful human woman with firey red hair. Her piercing, yellow eyes seemed to shatter the light particles as they dispersed. Once the dust had settled, a one-piece orange suit covered the upper half of her body, and a stream of flames danced around the lower half, much like a dress.

Pleasure to meet you Caller, the name is Jazmyne. If you wish to use me, you must defeat me...are you prepared? Even without the help of your comrades? Her eyes narrowed as her head tilted forward, indicating she was ready for battle.

“Where is Fyra?!” Reques was confused.

She will not be joining you for this battle. She has been defeated by the maze and will be unable to continue...

As she said this, Reques looked devastated, but clenched his fists. Fyra would have wanted him to go on and expose whatever it was she thought the government was doing...even without her he needed this call.

“Yes...I accept your challenge!” Reques brought out his staff.

Let the fight begin! The spirit roared as flames encompassed the wall and began to heat up the room. Reques gasped as this happened but didn’t allow himself to be overly distracted by it as he called Frey to help him in this endeavor.

Frey immediately began to throw loose stone blocks in the room and fling them at the spirit. Jazmyne launched herself forward, used a flame whip of sorts, and batted the rocks away. She reached out as a red spear appeared out of the air. Her flame whips wrapped around the spear and she flung it at Reques.

He dodged the attack as he used his staff to deflect the spear. As he did, he felt his chest get warm as he fell backwards. Frey immediately jumped in and picked up the spear, using gravity to fling it forward. It pierced the whips, causing them to break apart for a few seconds.

Reques stood up as Frey defended him for a moment and prepared an ice shard. In the room full of intense flames, however, he was finding it difficult to process the idea of ice. Once he finally got past the heat, he formed the shard in his hand and flung it forward. Since the whips had disappeared, the shard easily pierced Jazmyne’s chest.

ARGH! She yelled as she reeled back, pulling the shard out as it melted to the ground. Frey used this opportunity to try and fling more loose stones at her as her whips reappeared and picked up the spear as if it were an extra hand. It then spun the spear around fast like a windmill as it deflected the rocks being tossed in its direction. Jazmyne then flung her flame stream forward and pierced the spear through Frey who disappeared into particles of light. Reques felt the fainted spirit re-enter his body as he cursed under his breath.

Jazmyne grinned as she then began to come forward. *Not so easy without your companions is it? You think you have all of the answers don’t you? ...Tell me, how do*

you think you will be able to defeat me when all you can focus on is what you see around you?

Reques attempted to summon more ice balls or ice shards, but as the fire spirit had clearly stated, he had a hard time even just trying to focus on the concept of ice. He felt defeated as he tried to think of some way to overcome this spirit, but with the spinning spear drawing closer he knew his options had run out.

It's an illusion Reques! A familiar voice cried in his head as he looked around.

“Fyra?! Where are you?!” He yelled.

“The heat is driving you mad...” Jazmyne howled in laughter as she got close.

Trust me, there is a pool of water...just fall back...Reques trust me...if you don't you are dead... The voice said again. Reques knew if he fell back and there was nothing, Jazmyne would easily kill him with a swift blow. He wanted to think of another way to obtain the spirit, but then he remembered one of her taunts... *You think you have all of the answers don't you?* He was doing this right now; maybe he just had to trust the voice in his head, even if it wasn't actually Fyra.

He pondered the thought for one more second as he then smiled and fell backwards. He was out of options and had no choice but to trust the faceless voice. His body flailed back while he fell, the spinning spear passed over his body. Flames encased his whole body as he closed his eyes. He expected a burning sensation or some sort of excruciating pain, but there was nothing. He just felt the rush of falling backwards.

A tingling, cold sensation hit his spine as he heard the familiar splashing of water. With one last glance before he hit the water, he saw Jazmyne's face contort into a scowl. The cool, wet fluid washed over his whole body as he felt the bottom soon after. He quickly scrambled to his feet as he stared Jazmyne down.

Because Jazmyne's body was primarily composed of fire and her attacks were fire based, she would be powerless to follow the Caller into this pond. With a second to debate the dilemma internally, Jazmyne threw a fireball at him. He quickly countered the attack by forming an ice column in front of himself. The Fire Princess winced her eyebrow as the column easily broke the attack and ice shards came shooting at her. She narrowly avoided getting hit as then boy threw three more ice shards at her.

Reques heard Jazmyne grunt as she was lightly grazed by a shard. He threw several ice balls at her. He knew if he was going to gain any sort of advantage in this battle it would have to be while she was off guard. His gamble paid off as they all struck her in the gut and she fell to the ground, the wind knocked out of her. With a quick leap, he jumped onto a platform of ice newly formed on the pond and then jumped at Jazmyne. She narrowly avoided the hit as she rolled to the ground and attempted to throw a fire ball at him.

Reques easily reeled back and retaliated by throwing an ice shard at her arm, pinning it to the wall. Jazmyne screamed as he then ran forward with newfound energy from the pond and pierced her chest with another shard, pushing it through her. With one final gasp, she vanished in millions of small particles. The particles then scattered and reformed the two Calls, Brolen and Jazmyne. Reques collected his breath as he then confronted the spirits.

What has this sanctuary taught you? Jazmyne looked straight into Reques' eyes as she spoke to him mentally.

“What I have learned here...is that I must trust those who have chosen to accompany me even if it seems insane or I can't see them. Without them I am blind to what is around me...” Reques pondered the battle as he formed it into what his newfound realization was. Without Fyra guiding him, he would have succumbed to the Fire Princess Call.

Then you have learned from this trial is true loyalty...do not ever doubt your companions they will be as faithful to you as long as you all share trust between one another. I am Jazmyne, born of the loyalty you have within yourself. Will you accept me as your Call? She gave him a curtsy.

He nodded to Jazmyne as both her and Brolen dissolved into particles. He stretched out his arms as both Calls were absorbed into his body. No sooner had the spectacle ended, Fyra appeared in the corner of the room.

“That bitch forced me into the corner and trapped me behind an invisible wall. I'd have said something earlier, but for some reason you couldn't hear me until I mentioned the pool of water...” She scowled as she shook her body and walked towards him. Reques chuckled, knowing it was probably frustrating for her to be powerless.

“Thanks for your help...” He looked grateful to her. For the first time this entire journey, he was actually thankful to have the thief with him.

“Well it would be pointless to have traveled all this way and then have you die before I can take down the Government,” Fyra rolled her eyes as she continued on.

Reques could have sworn a tiny smile was cracking the outer edges of the frown as she walked past. Maybe he had misjudged her...

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Eventually the companions made their way back into the city, Reques stopped dead in his tracks. Near one of the stores they had passed on the way to the Fire Sanctuary, he could make out a crowd of angry people...and a familiar green face in the middle of the mob. He immediately ran over to the scene with Fyra close on his heels.

“Rotten scum!”

“Filthy beast man!”

“Get the fuck out of OUR town!”

“Go back to your backwater planet!”

There were many slurs and hurtful taunts thrown around while the pair made their way through the thick conglomeration. Once Reques finally found an opening to their nearby pilot, he watched as a man walked up and knocked a bag of supplies out of his hands. He then watched as another man then punched him in the gut while a third readied a large, blunt object to strike him with while he was on the ground.

“JAZMYNE!” Reques thrust his staff out, unable to watch the scene anymore. The Fire Princess immediately came and knocked the men back.

“The hell are you doing boy?!” The first man scowled as he was thrown back. He jumped back up looking ready for more.

“Standing up for my friend...” He snarled as he stood in front of Hath. While he stood with Jazmyne looking for a fight, Fyra knelt next to their pilot who was on the verge of tears as she began to help him gather his belongings.

“Why did you come into town... you know how they feel about Rogans...” Reques could hear bits of the conversation behind him as he continued to glare at the man now approaching them.

“We needed...supplies...and you weren’t around...I thought maybe if I tried to be discreet and wear a cape...but then it fell off when I accidentally bumped into a child...” he sniffled.

That was enough for Reques. “All this man wanted to do was buy shit, why the hell would you strike him defenseless?!” He angrily pierced his gaze towards the oncoming man and his companions.

“How the fuck do you even call him a man?! He is lowlife scum attempting to take over our race!”

“Where did you get an insane idea like that?”

“They all do it! They are in the Aristanian Government forcing treaties and then stealing from our ships! We see and hear about it all the time!”

“And you blindly accept what you are told without asking them personally about it?!”

“Why ask?! You can fucking see it in their eyes! Always plotting something with those beady, yellow looks! No more talking! You are obviously brainwashed!”

“Fyra...run...” Reques whispered, just loud enough for her to hear. He looked at Jazmyne once his comrades began to run.

“Can you handle this?”

Of course sire. Make sure your friends are safe... She nodded as she blasted a column of fire in the direction of the oncoming mob. Shrieks could be heard as Reques scampered off towards the spaceport. It didn’t take long for him to catch up with his companions. Once they had safely gotten him through the spaceport with the supplies, Reques beckoned for his Call to return while he boarded the ship. The images of other humans beating up a defenseless Rogan were now burned into his memory...

Chapter 21-Dolorian Civil War

It had been a few days since Senator De Vasco's assassination. An investigation had been conducted. Though it was apparent from his daughter's testimony and from evidence that it was murder, no one was sure who it was...any results conducted had come up inconclusive. Eva Crane glanced at everything sitting in front of her. She casually scooted it aside as she stood up. She had more important matters at hand than a dead criminal, Head Senator LeMarcus would be able to handle this. She pulled a file out of her nearby cabinet and began to sift through the papers. Now that Davis and De Vasco were out of the picture, she knew there would be only a small amount of opposition to her proposal, though she still had a few loose ends to tie up before it would be perfect.

Her list of things to do today included lunch with Senator Vora at noon, research for her proposal from one to four, a meeting at four thirty...the usual. It wasn't that Crane thought her job was mundane; her mind was merely occupied with other thoughts that were not work related. She often found herself contemplating the future and what would get her to her ultimate goal. It was this one goal that she knew would open up every door, the one goal that motivated her to deal with all of this entry level work. She began pacing to look at the articles and documents in the file, one graph in particular intrigued her. On it, a small green arrow was rising...

All of a sudden three loud knocks were heard on her door. "Come in..." She said partly still lost in thought.

"Senator Crane! There has been an incident! You are needed immediately in the infirmary!" A rushed voice panicked. She set her file down, strode over to the door, and opened it. One of her aide's stood there with a sense of urgency.

"If anyone calls tell them I am in a meeting and will return shortly..." She gave a nod to the wide-eyed girl. Her aide gave a thumbs up and went into the Senator's office. The girl really was quite bright for her age, though Eva could never remember her name. Yua...Yanu...Yana...something like that. It wasn't really that important...in the near future it hopefully wouldn't matter. She picked up her pace once the proposal and this unimportant tangent faded out of her mind.

As she arrived in the infirmary, there were several doctors frantically entering and leaving the room. The mood in the building was overwhelming. People were darting left and right, shouting about a multitude of things. Eva had to sidestep in order to avoid one doctor in particular. As she did, a man with a mask and a clipboard approached.

“Senator Crane?” He gave her a look that meant business.

“What’s the situation?” She tapped her fingers against her hip.

“It’s Head Senator LeMarcus...he...he’s in critical condition,” The doctor sighed.

“What...what happened?” Senator Crane was a little shocked as she stammered.

“His body was dropped off at the front of the building by a white van. It then drove off...according to Senator Vora. We need you to verify the body...it hasn’t been confirmed...”

“Hasn’t been confirmed?” Her eyebrow raised. “Wouldn’t you know what LeMarcus looks like?”

“We...believe it’s LeMarcus and will definitely do some blood tests to make sure...but the face is so mangled...”

“Oh god...” she let out a small gasp. The whole situation had her on her toes. “Take me to him...” She wavered a bit before following the doctor inside. As they wandered inside, the smell of rubbing alcohol and sanitizer filled her nose. It wrinkled a bit as she made her way over to the table. Once she had a clear view of the body she bit the tip of her finger lightly. It was just as the doctor had said. There was definitely a body in front of her, wearing clothes similar to what the Head Senator would wear. A button up plaid shirt, black slacks, and high socks that covered a pair of shiny black shoes. However, just like the doctor had also said, the face was fairly mangled.

“I’m going to need to look at the body closer,” She looked at the dim light and repositioned it with no resistance from anyone else in the room. There was an unmistakable sign that she knew about which would help her identify the body. She lifted up his right pant leg and proceeded to roll down his sock. It was a distinct birthmark that would be identifiable by any of his respected officers, of which she was

one. As the small piece of fabric continued to slide down with little resistance, her eyes lit up.

“It’s...LeMarcus...” She noted as she let go, convinced of what she saw. No sooner had she identified the body, it began to shake. Loud beeps echoed throughout the room as doctors scurried over to the body. Eva found herself pushed out of the room by frantic shouts and waving hands. She stood outside as she saw a familiar face hurrying towards her.

“Senator Crane! Senator Yegor is on the line! He is wondering where you are and why you aren’t at the meeting along with Senator Vora!”

“Tell him there is some important business involving Head Senator LeMarcus and I am attending to it. As for Senator Vora, I believe she is in shock and sitting in the infirmary...” She vaguely remembered seeing her when she first entered the Infirmary.

“Very good Senator, I will go take care of it.”

There was no response to be had as with the flick of a hand, Crane dismissed her aide. She continued to pace back and forth for several minutes. All she could do was wait anxiously to hear what the result was.

“Senator Crane...”

She was startled by the voice that pierced her moment of solitude. “Yes?”

“I have...news...I...” while he spoke, Eva nodded and then headed away. There was nothing more she could do here except to go address the rest of the Senators. As she prepped her notes to call an emergency meeting one thought slowly crept over the rest, she was now one step closer to her goal.

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“In other news today, Head Senator LeMarcus was pronounced dead after an apparent kidnapping. We go now to Regina with more details. Regina?”

“Hello John, as said by my associate, the body of Head Senator LeMarcus is currently being prepped for a public funeral. He was pronounced dead well over an hour ago. Though the details are hazy on this situation, we know that LeMarcus was reported missing last night when he didn’t return home after working at the Government Building. His body was later discovered in front of the building several hours ago in bad

condition and was pronounced dead soon after. We all grieve the loss of a man who truly represented all of Dolor.”

“Regina, what steps are now taking place to replace LeMarcus?”

“Well John, an emergency meeting was called for all of the Senators. They are currently discussing what to do with this situation and the recent deaths of Senator Davis and Senator De Vasco. We hope to receive news on this momentarily. This is Regina standing by at Dolorian Government Building with our unfolding story. Back to you John!”

“Another dead Senator, eh?” One of the older male patrons at the bar, slightly intoxicated, looked at no one in particular, putting money down for another beer. The news crew on the television then transitioned to another news story as the majority of the patrons mostly became uninterested.

“Seems that way,” The bartender picked up the money as he filled a glass with the familiar yellowish-brown liquid.

“I’m telling you it’s the end of the world,” The man covered his mouth to stifle a hiccup.

“Sure, old man.”

“I’m serious! It’s all predicted by the Eldests!”

“You mean the beings that lived ages ago? The extinct ones right?”

“Yeah! They predicted the end of the world and it’s coming I tell you!”

“Alright old man, whatever you say,” The bartender chuckled and handed him his beer.

“This just in!” The reporter on the screen suddenly piped up as everyone’s attention went back to the television.

“We now have an official statement from Senator Eva Crane.”

“Thank you Regina,” Senator Crane cleared her throat. “As many of you are probably already aware, Head Senator LeMarcus has passed away. The entire Senate wants to give our condolences to the victim’s family and friends. According to Dolorian Constitution, in the event that a Head Senator dies, those up for discussion to fill the position are named from a written will. From these names, Senate is required to discuss the names listed and decide the person to fill the job until the next election. There were

several people named to fill the position from LeMarcus' own words. The Senate voted and elected me to be your next Head Senator. I will take pride in helping lead this glorious city of Dolor in the direction that former Head Senator LeMarcus envisioned. As my first official act as the newly appointed Head Senator, I propose to re-evaluate the tax reform proposed by the late Senator Davis. Though it was determined that this reform was "unconstitutional," I personally feel under new direction that it will thrive. I have the Senate's support in this matter and we will continue on with the matter at hand..."

"They are still considering that damn reform?!" The bartender stopped as he heard the words come out of the Head Senator's mouth. "That'll destroy me!"

"I feel the same way, man!" A younger man put down his drink and stood up. "If this happens that damn supermarket will overrun my family's grocery store easy! We can't afford to compete with their prices!"

"We need to do something about this!" Several of the other people in the bar chimed in as they stood up, all with a common drive.

"Then grab some signs and weapons, if the government won't listen to us, then we will make them see that we can't be fucked with any longer!" The bartender grabbed his nearby shotgun and raised it, while everyone in the bar cheered. Those damn upper class pricks would pay.

Chapter 22-Aristes

There was an awkward silence as Hath piloted Le’Vatis towards the city-moon Aristes. Fyra wanted to say something, but was unsure what exactly. The violence they had witnessed in Winndel was horrific. She was unsure when it had happened, but from watching Andy and Hath interact, she had somehow become acquainted with a piece of Rogan culture. Sure, at first she had been skeptical of Rogans, but they weren’t much different than any Human she knew. They fought side by side as comrades, driven by the goal to obtain Reques’ Calls. There had been alternative motives, but Fyra knew this brought them together. Spending time with the green beings had shown her that not all Rogans were pirates and barbaric. Had she once been as hateful as the Winndelites?

She put a finger to her mouth as she pondered this thought. It wasn’t as if she would have outwardly harmed or hurt a Rogan, though she did know that she once was afraid of them. Was this fear what drove Winndelites crazy when Hath appeared? She stood up and walked to the back of Le’Vatis. It wasn’t doing her any good sitting in a room with Hath and Reques, being silent, and pondering thoughts that depressed her. She instead decided to funnel her energy into cooking. A good meal would probably take away the awful experience.

As she made her way into the kitchen, she heard grunting. Intrigued she wandered towards the training room. The smell of sweat filled her nose as her expression soured. She shook her head and looked inside to see Andy furiously attacking the large steel column that sat in the back corner. His sword glowed with crackling lighting as he continued his relentless assault against the inanimate object. Fyra wanted to say something, but it was obvious the Rogan was upset about the recent events and talking probably would get her nowhere.

Unable to watch this depressing scene any longer, she turned and left, heading back for the kitchen. It didn’t take Fyra long to decide what she wanted, her hunger was directed to a very specific recipe her mother had taught her. Cooking had always been a calming activity for her to do and would calm her down regardless of what situation she was in. As she began to cut carrots and several potatoes, she hummed an old tune she had learned as a child.

“In a world of blue and gold,

the answer never seems as bold,
my last lullaby I leave for you,
remains forever yours be true,
should you find the last days at hand,
remember the five keys of Eldest brand:
Bravery, Strength, Knowledge, Justice, and Loyalty.
With these even the meekest will overcome any folly.”

As she softly sang the melody, Fyra continued to prepare her mother’s stew recipe. It had been awhile since she had prepped this meal, or thought about her family. She hadn’t exactly left on the best of terms.

“What are you singing?” Fyra turned around to see Andy looking at her, as if he had just seen a ghost.

“Just a tune...why?” She looked at him.

“I just...I’ve never met anyone who has ever known that melody...except...”

“Except who?”

“It’s not important. I’m sorry I bothered you,” He spun around and walked the other direction. Fyra raised her eyebrow as he left. She reached out a hand as if to stop him, but shook her head. Part of her didn’t want to know what he was going to say.

It was awhile longer before Hath made his usual announcement that they would soon be arriving at Aristes. Fyra had been dreading this moment when they would need to finally come back to her original home moon. The place she had wanted to avoid for so long, was now less than an hour away. She was hesitant, but knew if they didn’t proceed on, there would be no way for her to accomplish her goal.

Chapter 23-Loose Ends

“What do you mean we can’t enter?” Reques asked for the hundredth time. Andy watched as the guard stood his ground.

“We have over three dozen Callers inside at this time. You will need to wait until there is more room to continue your pilgrimage.”

“How the hell do you even have that many Callers?” Reques raised an eyebrow.

“A lot of families with Calling lineage live here. Don’t you know that?”

“Guess I hadn’t realized how many there were...then why haven’t we encountered any other Callers elsewhere?”

“Most give up after this sanctuary. They realize the journey will be too hard and stop.”

As Reques continued to converse with the guard in the hopes of persuasion, Andy found himself completely in awe of the city. Even having had visited this place as a child, he was still surprised any moon could exist that was completely encompassed by nothing but buildings and people. The technology humans harnessed as a race was overwhelming.

“Let’s go,” Reques’ voice quickly cut through his thoughts. Andy and Fyra gave each other a nod before following behind the caller.

“What’s the plan?” Andy gave him a quizzical look.

“To try back later. Until then I have somewhere I want to visit alone.”

“I have somewhere I need to go as well, preferably alone,” Fyra chimed in as she took off abruptly. It confused Andy that she would just take off and not explain, though he also had an understanding at this point that since it didn’t directly affect him he would not ask.

“What are you going to do until then Andy?” Reques looked at him once Fyra was out of sight.

“As odd as it sounds, I have somewhere to visit also.”

“Well alright then, you still have that communication device that Hath gave us correct?”

“Of course.”

“I’ll give you and Fyra a call once I’ve finished my business.”

Andy nodded as he waved to Reques who wandered off another direction. Three comrades with hidden intents in Aristes, Andy chuckled to himself as if it were an inside joke. To him it was amusing that the three of them still had secrets given everything they had experienced together. It was also nice that they considered him and Hath friends, given how cruel other people had been towards them. He remembered how uneasy they all were when they had first been together. He couldn't even get Reques and Fyra to have a civil conversation with one another, now they considered each other comrades. He also remembered how much distrust and discomfort they had with him being a Rogan. Now they interacted with him as if he was one of their own. It was a special bond they had developed over the three moons they had visited thus far.

But it was a forced trust. It was temporary. Once they had gathered the Calls and figured out what was going on with the Dolorian Government, their group would part ways. The idea that this camaraderie was temporary sat in the back of his mind. Andy sighed heavily as he headed away from his current spot towards the familiar street in the distance.

Andy eventually found his way in front of a familiar coffee shop. He could still feel his hand being held by his mother as they passed in front of this shop. It was weird to think that she was dead. He could still hear the warm tone in her voice whenever he would ask questions about Aristes and the technology that was on this moon. A smile crept across his face as he recalled how she would always pat his shoulder when responding to him. But then he also remembered another time, a reason why he didn't enjoy coming home. The thought buried itself into his consciousness as he wrinkled his nose and moved on.

As he wandered down the familiar streets of his extended childhood, he secretly wished his mother was still around. He could use her help more than ever. Being a Halfling was confusing. He was never fully a Rogan or fully a Human. No culture would ever truly accept him. It was a constant struggle just to find his place. The only things he had left in this universe were his sister and ailing grandparents.

He neared the cemetery, hoping for just one glimpse at his mother's grave. There was no other reason for him to be here. Aristes was no longer the second home he once thought it was. Seeing her grave...one more time would hopefully give him a little

courage to find his place in the universe. As he approached the cemetery, however, someone else stood in front of the tombstone. Someone familiar. It forced him to duck behind one of the other grave markers and listen.

“Hey mom, if you can hear me I’m doing what you told me to. I’m making a difference in this universe. Sorry I can’t do it from Aristes, but Dad drove me away. How did you ever settle for a useless ass like that? I will never understand,” He heard Fyra chuckle as she sighed. “Seriously though, I just thought you should know your little girl is making something of her life...even if it is being a thief. At least this way I’m fighting for a cause. Not exactly what you had in mind when you asked me to ‘make a difference,’ but it’s better than sitting around and letting people suffer. Don’t you agree?”

Andy’s eyes widened as he listened in. Did she just call Eirina...*mom*? What was this about her *dad being an ass*? Andy was bewildered. Eirina was his mother. He now recalled...a small girl with a yellow bow in her hair and short brown hair the last time he had visited. Was this...really...

“Well regardless of what you have to say on the matter, I’m actually happy doing what I’m doing. I feel like I’m making a difference mom. Thank you for giving me the drive to take the chance. I’m going to go back now. I have something I need to do. Bye...” She turned around as Andy stood up. She stopped in her tracks as they looked at one another for a few moments. “Andy! What...what are you doing here?” She blinked in disbelief.

“I was about to ask you the same thing.” He folded his arms.

“I thought I made it clear I needed some time to be alone,” Fyra raised an eyebrow and put her hand on her hip.

“Trust me, I had no intentions of running into you here,” Andy chuckled.

“Then...what are you doing here?” Fyra folded her arms.

“Visiting my mother’s grave.”

“Your mother is buried here?”

“Yeah, I’m only half Rogan.”

“Oh, well...which grave is hers?”

“You haven’t figured it out yet?”

“Figured...what out?” She gave him a quizzical look. “What are you talking about Andy? I...” She looked distant as if deep in thought.

“I think...we may have the same mother.”

“No, that...”

“Fyra, my mother’s name is Eirina Helena Marang. We’ve...never known each other’s last names, but I’m assuming that is yours...”

“Andy...how...”

“I’m not sure, but I think we need to talk about this further at another time...” He could feel his device ringing and promptly answered it. “Hey Reques...yeah...we can?...good!...alright I will be there soon. By the way don’t call Fyra, I ran into her and I’ll let her know myself. See ya.”

Andy shut the phone, about to tell Fyra, but by the way she nodded her head she already knew what he was about to tell her.

“I agree. Let’s continue this discussion another time,” She walked past him as he then momentarily grabbed her hand. She was startled and twisted, finding herself looking into his eyes.

“I want you to know that this may change things between us, but we have a goal and we can’t let it interfere.”

“I know that. Now let’s go before that spoiled brat gets the wrong impression,” a smile crept across her face as he let go. The pair nodded to one another as they headed back towards the Sanctuary.

Chapter 24-Sky Sanctuary

Reques could see them coming. His comrades were clearly visible and stood out amongst the well dressed citizens of Aristes. He watched as they awkwardly smiled to one another every few seconds or so. It was...odd. He couldn't recall them acting this way towards one another. Had something happened? Something good? Something wonderful? Something... He could feel his eyebrows raise as he came to an obvious conclusion. A smirk broke his otherwise, unemotional face. They soon arrived in front of him.

“Did...something funny happen?” Fyra looked baffled.

“What's with the weird face?” Andy chimed in.

“Oh nothing,” Reques turned away from them as he looked at the Sanctuary.

“The guard has given us permission to enter. Apparently most of the Callers left while we were taking care of...*errands*.” He grinned again as he walked forward, giving the guard a nod. He could hear the others follow behind.

This Sanctuary was more elegant than the others previous. It resembled something like a white chapel. Painted, glass windows lined the exterior walls like pictures in a children's book. As they approached and opened the marble, white doors, Reques took one last look at the beautiful windows before heading in.

From his research in Calling School, Reques remembered this as being the Sky Sanctuary. It was here, he also recalled that the trial here was one of the hardest.

“Listen guys, I know that the sanctuaries have tested us on various traits thus far, but I remember hearing this place has some of the hardest trials. Whatever happens, I want you to know that I trust you completely,” He gave them a nod and they returned it. Reques gripped his staff tight as he walked up to the familiar map. Looking at the outline of the sanctuary, his nose wrinkled.

“This is...”

“...quite large,” Andy finished as he looked over Reques' shoulder. The Rogan was right. There seemed to be an endless amount of rooms were contained in the sanctuary. On either side, there appeared to be an identical mirror of rooms that eventually led to a room in the back.

“We should get started,” Reques shook his head and looked to either side. He quickly determined they would start with the rooms to the left. It was a gamble either way. As they walked into the first room, Reques noticed several things. First, there were several unlit candles and two tiny beams of light that streamed into the room. They pointed towards two keyholes that were attached to a couple of drawer systems on either side.

“I’m guessing we have to find the keys...” Fyra held up her hand as she attempted to produce a fireball. As it formed in her hand, she held it into the room to try and produce more light. However, the minute the flame entered the dark space, it sputtered out.

“What the...” Fyra tried again with the same result.

“There must be an anti-Anima barrier preventing us from getting outside aid. We probably need to solve this the old fashioned way,” Reques got on his hands and knees as he tried to feel around on the floor for the keys. As he passed through the door, it shut behind him.

“THE HELL?!” Reques stood up and pounded on the door. “What happened?!”

“I think this is part of the test. Stay put for a little while and we will go check out the other room ok?” Fyra tried to calm him down as he could hear footsteps walk away.

“Not like I have a choice...” he muttered and sank to the floor and looked towards the two beams of light. He had felt this sensation before. His house, more specifically his room, had been a dark place. Before, he had wanted this solitude. He craved the time he could spend alone. Now, the tables had turned. The solitude he once considered a salvation, had now become his prison. He could be here for the rest of his life, completely alone.

As he felt all hope slip away, he thought he could see something else in the right beam of light. It seemed to slightly divert towards the end to the keyhole from its original path. Next to the keyhole on the wall was a shadow. It looked to resemble a lever of some sort. Immediately he went over to where the light pointed. Shielding his eyes, he attempted to look towards the light. As he did, what he saw amazed him. The same outline of a lever was splitting the light in half. He put his hands out as he walked

forward. He wasn't sure where exactly he was going, or what was happening. But he figured it was better than sitting and giving up.

It was awhile before he found the cold, steel bar in front of him. He gripped it tightly with both hand as he pulled. It didn't budge. He shifted his weight to the right. This time he felt it shift a little bit before locking. That could only mean...with one more shift, this time to the left, he felt the lever unlock and slide all the way down. As it did, precisely half of the room lit up, while the other remained completely shrouded in darkness. Reques took a second to let his eyes adjust to the light as he looked at the visible half of the room. There were several odd things in the room. First, there were several strange symbols that were written in a red paint above the locked cabinet. Second, there was a small letter put into the wall to his right. Finally, there seemed to be some sort of strange metal box next to the lever.

Reques looked at the red writing again and noticed that the farthest symbol was only half visible. He figured this meant the rest of this alignment of symbols would be unveiled once the room was completely visible. It wouldn't, therefore, be worth his time to investigate this any longer. He moved on to the small letter written into the wall:

“I am the answer to your problem,
The item in which you seek,
Should you fail to decode my riddle,
Forever then shall you be weak.
As far as this riddle goes,
It's really quite simple to understand,
The answer you struggle to find,
Comes with an Eldests' old legend.”

What the hell does this mean? Reques pondered this for awhile. The only Eldest legend he could recall was that about the five keys. This at least was a starting point. He went over to the box, seeing as it couldn't be anything else in this room. As he looked at the designs on it, he recognized them as Eldest writing. What did they say though? The first five words on the six sides of the box, were easy enough, as he was expecting. Bravery, Loyalty, Knowledge, Strength, and Justice were clearly labeled. The symbols on top, which were written over a tiny metal shutter, were hard to make out. It wasn't

one word; that much he was sure of. It was definitely some sort of phrase made up of three separate words. The first word was “The” and the last word was “Smile” but the word in the middle...It was obviously the shorthand way to write the word as the symbols didn’t match any of the letters he had studied in class.

While he thought about this, he thought he could hear voices and footsteps. All of a sudden, the wall behind him shifted with a low groan as it moved to the side. Behind the wall, a worried pair of eyes quickly entered the room.

“Reques are you okay?” Fyra put a hand on his shoulders.

“Are *you* okay?” He tilted his head at this odd display of affection.

“What do you mean?”

“It’s just that you usually so nice.”

“Oh, well, it’s just that I was worried someone weak like you would get hurt while waiting for the actual warriors to show up. Plus, if something happens to you, then it does me no good,” She immediately retracted her hand and scowled.

“Well despite what our proud thief says,” Andy chuckled. “We were worried, and are both glad to see you still in one piece.”

“How did you open the room?”

“It will sound odd, but it seems that these two halls are connected. We went through the other hall and had to solve a few simple puzzles. However, we got stuck in a room where we found out how to open this room up. There are several doors, but they all require some sort of code...how did you get the light on in this part of the room?”

Reques pointed over towards the lever and Andy nodded in acknowledgement.

“We found a key in the other hall. We should see if it leads to something...”

Fyra held out a small key in her palm. Reques quickly relieved her of this as he put it into the cabinet in front of him. His heart sunk as the key failed to turn.

“Try the other one,” Andy leaned against the wall as Reques headed over to the other cabinet. He quickly tried the other lock and found himself successful. The drawer opened as he looked inside and noticed a light switch that lined the bottom. Reques flipped the switch on and immediately light filled the other half of the room. As it did, the symbols on the other side of the room became visible. Just like on the box, only when all the symbols were together did it spell anything.

“Prophecy...” He squinted. He was instantly reminded of the conversation in the bar about an ancient tale involving the five Eldest keys. Something about this struck him as odd and there seemed to be a larger connection to everything.

“Hey do you think...” Fyra looked over at Andy who nodded back.

“Reques while we were in the other room, there was a keypad with letters on one of the three doors. This could be a clue to get us into another room,” He looked at the youth.

“What about the other keyhole in this room?” Reques replied.

“Do you see any other keys?” Fyra rolled her eyes and put her right hand on her hip.

Reques had to acknowledge, even though part of him wanted to keep searching the room, that there was nothing left to do. He had been through everything that was visible in the room. The light had really not revealed anything except for the completed phrase on the wall. He sighed and reluctantly followed his comrades out of the room.

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For the next few hours, the trio continued their way through the sanctuary, solving a multitude of puzzles. They eventually made their way to a bridge that overlooked a steep cliff, to what appeared to be a small building suspended by clouds.

“This Sanctuary sucks,” Fyra leaned against one of the marble pillars lining the bridge.

“I agree,” Reques shook his head still buzzing with riddles. It had been brutal; there had been well over fifteen rooms with some of the most challenging riddles he had ever needed to solve. One had involved figuring out which goblet to choose out of a possible one hundred based on how they sounded when blown across. After taking a couple more moments to clear their minds, they nodded to one another and took a step forward.

“SHIT!” Reques barely had time to reconfigure his balance as his foot went through the bridge. Fyra and Andy were quick to grab his arms and keep him from falling to his death.

“How the hell are we supposed to get there?” Fyra let go of Reques as she scratched his head.

Having troubles Caller?

Reques looked around as he heard the familiar telekinesis ring in his head.

You've come so far. The answer is quite simple really. All you need to do is harness the power of the wind and you shall find yourself here shortly. Good luck.

Reques pondered this for awhile as he looked deep in thought. The power of the wind...like a breeze? He then raised an eyebrow as he took a deep breath. Would this actually work? Fyra and Andy looked at him like he was crazy.

“What are you...” Fyra started asking as Reques blew as hard as he could. Instantly, a stone fixture filled a small part of the otherwise translucent bridge.

“Andy, can you conjure up a thunderstorm?” Reques looked over at the amazed Halfling.

“It should be possible. Let me give it a try,” Andy held out his blade as he focused his anima towards the tip. He closed his eyes and concentrated as clouds began to form in the sky. A gentle breeze began slowly increasing as Andy’s body began to crackle with lightning. Reques watched as the bridge began to form with the ever increasing wind. Andy’s eyes then opened as a single bolt of lightning erupted from his blade and pierced the clouds above.

“That should do it,” He looked at Reques as the wind was now whipping against the stone bridge. The crack of thunder could be heard above as rain started pouring down.

“Nice job Andy,” Reques put a foot on the newly formed bridge, and confidently stepped down once he felt solid ground this time. He began to walk forward, and heard his companions walking behind him. Reques could feel rain droplets blowing against his cheek.

As they neared the end of the bridge, Reques felt the rain calm down and the wind slow. He picked up the pace as it happened and looked back.

“How long did you say this would last Andy?”

“I wasn’t sure...shit!” Reques could hear the realization in his voice as their pace picked up. The three raced towards the end which wasn’t far. Reques jumped to the end once he felt he was close enough and landed in front of the door. He looked back and saw Andy make a jump. Fyra also made a jump, but as she did one of her feet

slipped through the now transparent step and she lost her balance. Andy landed next to Reques as Fyra's right hand grabbed the stone platform just in front of the pair. Andy and Reques quickly grabbed her arm and helped pull her up. The trio huffed a bit, trying to catch their breath as they looked at one another. Fyra looked grateful and nodded to them. With no more time to spare, they all stood up and pushed the double doors open.

As they walked inside of the small building, Reques was speechless. The inside looked like a giant cathedral that was void of any pews or altars.

"What the..." Reques was both amazed and confused at the same time. Why was there nothing here?

It has been awhile since a Caller has actually succeeded in making it to this chamber. The last one that arrived here went crazy and left this sanctuary with hallucinations. Are you prepared to take my challenge knowing this?

"Yes, I am prepared," He looked to the others who nodded to him.

Very well, let us begin. But first...

Reques groaned and fell to the ground as he felt Jazmyne being ripped from his body. Her consciousness screamed as what felt like a knife severed her connection from him. Her body, then floated in front of the companions as Reques stood back up and watched her scream in pain. Her body was ripped apart into little particles of light. The particles then reformed and slowly began to take the form of what appeared to be a giant crane. Its wings crackled with thunder as it slowly finished forming. It was golden with beady black eyes. It looked down at the trio.

I am Mizara, the Thunderbird Call. This test begins now.

Reques felt the ground shake as he stumbled. Without time to react, walls shot up all around, separating him from Andy and Fyra.

"Damn!" Reques could hear Fyra as she punched the wall to his left.

"Guys, we are going to have to do this separately, it feels like a maze of some sort," Reques looked forward and saw a slight opening in the wall.

"I agree. Good luck!" Andy shouted as Reques could hear him running off.

"Be safe..." Fyra took a deep breath before Reques also heard her walk off.

He looked forward and felt a chill drape around him like a cape. Pushing this aside, he pressed forward into the opening ahead of them. As he looked around, he

noticed narrow pathways that went in either direction and seemed to lead to other pathways. Pretty much like a maze...he headed right, knowing if there was a dead end, at least, he would know how to correct himself.

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Reques scampered back and forth. Dead ends on either side. This maze was driving him insane. He had been going at it for awhile now and all of the walls seemed the same to him. He couldn't keep his focus. Had he been here before? Yes, he was certain he had...or wait had he? This maze was driving him insane. He sunk to the floor once he hit his next dead end. No wonder the last Caller that made it this far went crazy. This test was designed to make people go mad. He tried to collect his thoughts to stand up and try it again, but it was useless. He couldn't feel the motivation to go on. Death would find him here.

What are you doing? Frey chose this moment to speak up.

"It's hopeless, I have no idea what I am doing and no idea how to get out of here," Reques could feel tears stinging his eyes.

That's not the Reques I know. Get up.

"What are you talking about?"

When you have a problem, I know that things sometimes seem impossible, but what were you on your way to do before you were kidnapped?

"I was..." Reques had to think about this for a moment. "I was mad at my father. Then, after we talked, I was on my way to..." His eyes lit up at this for a moment. He remembered when things seemed hopeless, he got up anyways and was on his way to tell his father how he felt.

That's right. Now get up, and try again. That is what you do best when things seem impossible.

"Thank you Frey," Reques could feel hope return as he stood up. He would try this again. Obviously Mizara wouldn't forever trap him here. That was not the point of this test. He was sure of this now. With one final push he headed down the pathway in front of him. Though it resembled the rest of the corridors that he had passed through, something about the way it stretched forward seemed foreign. He figured it would be better to start with what was different than opposed to what was the same.

This led him to a slightly open area with three other exits. Good, he hadn't been here before. Just before he was about to try one of the exits, he heard footsteps coming from the exit in front of him. He readied his staff just in case.

"Who's there?" The familiar voice called out just before he arrived in the same room as Reques.

"Andy! It's me get over here!"

"Reques?! How in the heck did you get over here?" Andy's face suddenly poked around the corner into view.

"I'm not entirely sure. How about yourself?"

"Just stumbled around for awhile. This maze is difficult," the Rogan chuckled slightly as he walked into the room.

"You can say that again."

"So how do you propose we get out of here?"

"Well...we know the way I came from doesn't work, and the way you came from doesn't work. We should probably find a way to keep track of where we have already been," Reques couldn't believe he had thought of this earlier. Andy then took out his sword and nicked the wall next to the place they had come from.

"Where did you come out of?" Andy looked back once he was satisfied. Reques pointed to the wall just behind him and Andy made a mark.

"Let's try this one then," Reques began to head towards the exit to their right, but then stopped. "Looks like we weren't the only ones with this idea." He pointed to the mark in the wall next to the exit. Andy chuckled as Reques pointed this out.

"Guess not."

"The other one then?"

"I guess..." Andy rolled his eyes and laughed a bit. It was nice that he was trying to break the tension of this maze. It gave a new energy to this place and he felt as if nothing could stop them now. The pair headed into the final exit, confident they could pass this test.

After winding through the maze a bit longer, following a helpful set of marks, they found themselves on the other side of the room, where the lack of altar had been

before the maze was set up. They also found the final member of their team sitting down on one of the steps found at the very end of this large room.

“About time you guys showed up, geez,” Fyra stood up and folded her arms.

“How did you get through the maze so quickly?” Reques looked at her curiously.

“I’m not entirely sure actually, I sorta just guessed and ended up here eventually.”

“You guessed?” Reques gave her a look of disbelief.

“Guess you could say I’m pretty lucky?” She giggled and winked.

“Or just cocky,” Andy rolled his eyes. The room then began to shake again as the entire maze sunk into the floor.

It appears you have been successful in your quest to pass my test. Mizara floated in front of the group, flapping its wings as particles of light left its body. Within seconds, Jazmyne re-formed next to the Thunderbird. Tell me young Caller, what is it you have learned here?

“That is easy. Between the puzzles and mazes that have been set up here, I have learned to never give up and continue going, even when things seem hopeless. I apparently knew this already, but needed a reminder,” He looked towards the Calls with a firm resolve in his voice.

Bravery. It is the trait which gives humans the ability to push on and accomplish anything in the face of absolute despair. You have displayed this quality well. You truly are a brave spirit who has the power to accomplish anything you set your mind to. Will you accept me as your Call?

“I would be honored,” Reques held out his staff as both Jazmyne and Mizara became part of him. It was the warm glowing light that made him feel complete again, as if everything he was doing was worth the effort.

Before you leave this room, will the one with the daggers please approach the altar?

“Me? But there is no...” Fyra started to protest as an altar appeared in a brilliant display of light in front of them. She walked up to it and saw two glowing golden daggers sitting on the altar. “What are these?”

These are the legendary twins Castor and Pollux. They have been with each other for as long as time itself has existed. If you choose to accept them as your weapons, replace them with your current ones. Fyra nodded as she traded out her daggers for the golden twins.

Reques watched as she glowed for a moment before she sheathed them and left the altar. As soon as the spectacle was over, he looked back towards his companions.

“Thank you both for being brave with me on this journey. For being my comrades,” He nodded.

“Oh brother, are you going to be this sentimental every time we go through a trial? I thought that was just for the sappy loyalty and trust tests,” Fyra groaned as she started to walk away. “Let’s go. The Government isn’t getting any younger or less greedy.” She scoffed. Before she could get far, a small pool of light formed in the center of the room.

I would hate for you to go through all of those challenges I set up for you again. Please feel free to step into the light. It will take you back to the entrance. The companions looked at one another and nodded as they stepped into the light. With a quick force of energy that surged through them, they were sent to the entrance of the Sky Sanctuary.

“What the...” Reques quickly pulled out his staff as he and his comrades saw over a dozen Aristian Guards, who did not look happy to see them.

Chapter 25-Getaway

Fyra kicked another guard as the trio ran through the city. Apparently, they were still wanted on both Aristes and Lorica for disturbing the peace and harboring a fugitive...and needed to now get away quickly. She only knew how to fight the Government, not how to flee from it. Between her experiences on both moons, she felt as if she was becoming an expert in running.

“Behind you!” She yelled as she watched a soldier jump from a ledge to attack Reques. He ducked, but fell to his feet...useless kid. She grit her teeth and summoned a fireball. It hit the soldier in the back and knocked him down. She quickly ran to Reques and helped him up as they continued running.

“Andy! What’s the word on the ship?!” Fyra jumped over a garbage can as they ran into a nearby alley.

“Hath is doing what he can to get to us, but Aristian Space Force is giving him trouble,” Andy was just slightly farther ahead than the others. Fyra was shocked at how fast he was running. She figured it must be the Rogan blood.

“Tell him to get on it faster! I’m not sure how much longer we can keep avoiding this!” A sense of urgency pressed her tone.

“Working on it!”

Fyra felt her heart race as they continued running. She could hear several shots whiz above her head from guns. She was doing the best she could to throw fireballs to distract the guards, but knew she couldn’t keep it up much longer.

“Any day now!” She generated several fireballs and narrowly avoided a soldier that thrust a bayonet towards her. “I’m so fucking tired of being shot at!” She then punched the soldier in the face and jumped over his falling body.

“Got it! Guys! We need to make our way to Coven Point! Hath says we have about twenty minutes before we run into trouble!”

“Twenty minutes?! Do you know where the hell that is?!” Fyra fumed. They were close to the local park which meant that Coven Point was a little over two miles away.

“Yeah and right now I don’t see another option, do you?” Andy shot a look in her direction.

She scowled and sucked it up as they picked up the pace. She was tired of running.

For the next fifteen minutes, the crew fended off bullets and attacking soldiers, doing what they could to avoid unsuspecting citizens caught in the cross hairs. It was shocking how far the Aristian soldiers were willing to go to try and catch them. At one point, Fyra swore she saw them knock an old lady down. It then became a new goal for her. Once she had exposed the Dolorian Government for their injustice towards the lower class, she would come here and help the citizens on her own home moon.

They soon arrived near Coven Point. It was a tiny mound where most of the elite class in Aristes lived. It was at the very top, near the open park, where Fyra finally saw Le'Vatis come into view.

“Let’s pick it up!” Andy called out as they ran towards the point. They were nearing the time limit that had been set and they knew if they delayed any longer, their tiny window of escape would close completely. Reques stopped to catch his breath.

“We can’t stop!” Fyra shouted back at him as she and Andy paused.

“I...can’t...” Reques panted. Sweat dropped down his whole body as his robe was drenched. He was not as used to such intense training. It was painfully obvious.

“You idiot...” Fyra rolled her eyes and got down. He reminded her of Will in this moment. She thought back to how she was helpless for her associate, and secretly hoped he made it out alive. Though she had been helpless for him, she could do this now.

“Fyra, maybe I should...” Andy took a step forward.

“Can it, Green Man. I’ve got this,” She looked at Reques. “Get on, now.”

Reques looked like he was about to protest, but he could barely walk and reluctantly wrapped his arms around her neck. Fyra grabbed his legs and nodded to Andy. The three of them then took off again, Fyra being somewhat slower. It wasn’t long before they finally arrived at the bottom of the ship.

“GET IN!” Hath shouted over the sound system as he lowered the hatch. Andy grabbed Reques off of Fyra as he carried the lad up the ramp. Fyra was about to get on when a haunting voice called out to her.

“Is that you Fyra?” An older man with a cane looked out the window of one of the houses.

“I thought I told you I never wanted to talk to you again,” She stood there, unable to bring her eyes to meet the man that had destroyed her old life.

“I fucking don’t see you for eight years and that is how you talk to me?”

“Fuck you! You drove mom crazy and then tried to tell me the same bullshit!” She raised her fist and made sure her middle finger was completely visible.

“What the hell? What did I ever do to you?!”

“Ruined everything! You are the shittiest father to ever exist. Don’t ever talk to me again you prick!”

“Fyra what are you doing?!” Andy ran down towards her and grabbed her arm.

“You...”

“Grendel...” Andy looked up. Those hollow eyes, the wrinkles that lined the otherwise bald head, those god awful side burns...yes this was the man his mother had been forced to marry.

“Andy, it’s not worth it, he is a piece of shit,” Fyra grabbed his arm. A momentary glare was shared between Andy and Grendel. No words needed to be said for how they felt.

“ANDY, GET ON BOARD!” Hath shouted loudly. Fyra watched as Andy’s gaze was broken as he ran onto the ship, the platform closing up after them.

Fyra felt the floor shake, and the pair of them staggered to hold their balance as Le’Vatis took off. Once the shaking had ended, the pair of them made their way to the bridge.

“Where did Reques go?” Fyra asked once they had arrived and taken their seats.

“I put him down in one of the beds. He is completely wiped out,” Andy strapped himself in. “Hath, what’s the situation?”

“A few Aristian Ships are in the area, but I should be able to avoid them,” He gave them a thumbs up as they quickly rose. “Hang on though, it’s going to get a little rough in here.”

He didn’t have to tell Fyra twice. By the time he had gotten to that point, the ship had begun to violently shake. Fyra felt her whole body lurch forward as the ship

continued to rise. She looked to Andy who was struggling to keep his balance on the seat. After a few more bumps, Le’Vatis finally pushed through the last layer of Aristes’ atmosphere and was back in space.

“Kind of shocking, we didn’t run into any trouble,” Andy mentioned.

“Guess I’m just that good,” Hath cracked his knuckles.

Once Fyra was sure they were not being pursued and that they were on their way to the next moon, she got up.

“I’m going to go to my room. I think that last bump made me queasy,” She wasn’t actually sick, but everything that happened on Aristes was confusing her and she needed time to cope. Before she could reach the doorhandle, she felt a warm hand on her shoulder.

“We need to talk,” she turned around to see Andy looking at her. With a weak nod she turned to face him.

“Andy...are you really...”

“Your older brother? I wondered this too...but...after the way Grendel looked at me...I knew...”

“Andy, I vaguely remember you now. Mom used to talk about you all the time. Then I remember seeing you. You’ve changed a lot.”

“You have as well. You aren’t the little girl who used to wear pink dresses and ask every annoying question possible,” He chuckled.

Fyra fumed at this. She didn’t like to be thought of as a girly girl. Before she had time to argue Andy held a hand up.

“I see our mother in you. Someone who stands up for what she feels is right. Who fights for a cause. I want you to know that you also have a half sister back on U’Roga. She is a good five or six years older than you.”

“I have...a sister? Why didn’t I know her or really you for that matter?”

“When our sister, Medyna, was born, my father died. Eirina fought to keep us, but she had health issues...so our grandparents adopted us. She met Grendel five years after that. That’s when you were born, within a year or two after that. I visited on occasion, but eventually Grendel didn’t want me there anymore. He said I was an abomination. Eirina was going to take you and leave him, but before she could...”

“I know the rest,” Fyra turned her head, not wanting her mother’s heart failure to be said out loud. She couldn’t even cope with it still. Her father had been an alcoholic and heavily involved with the Aristian Government. He had never been okay with the Rogans and when Andy had been there the last time, he had gone into a rage. The rest was history.

“I think I knew it was you...when I heard you humming that tune. Mom used to sing it to me when I couldn’t sleep...”

“Mom...” Fyra felt tears welling up in her eyes. She had done the same for her. In that instant she missed her mother more than anything else and folded her arms for comfort.

“Fyra...” Andy stepped forward and held her tightly. She couldn’t hold back anymore as she cried into his shoulder. She had been alone for so long, thinking that everyone she knew was dead or didn’t give a shit about her. Her arms shook as they found their way around her brother’s strong body. She wasn’t alone...not anymore.

Chapter 26-Trychondria

Andy watched as Reques and Fyra landed next to him and stood up. It had been awhile before they had arrived at the moon Trychondria. This moon was the most abundant with natural resources. It helped provide most of the natural food and fuel supplies for the entire galaxy. There was, however, one little catch. No sooner had the trio stood up, a giant roar sounded from the South.

“What...was that?” Andy pulled out his blade.

“Trychondria for you in a nutshell,” Fyra pulled out her golden daggers and began to run in the opposite direction.

“Huh?”

“She means there are giant beasts on this moon that’ll squash you the minute you stop running!” Reques bolted after her.

Andy had known some pretty large beasts from U’Roga, but as he looked behind where the sound coming from, he could make out the top of a giant shell that shuffled its way through the trees. Though it was probably miles away, it was moving towards him with incredible strides. He didn’t let himself ponder another moment as he took off after his companions.

“How did these beasts all get here?”

“Trychondria has one of the most compatible atmospheres to harbor life out of all of Ungdar’s Moons. Being unchallenged by a nearly flawless ecosystem has allowed the beasts here to grow and evolve over time. And now it is almost impossible for us to harvest the goods from this planet. It’s as if it is trying to prevent us from taking supplies...” Reques huffed.

“Where exactly is the sanctuary on this moon?”

“Not entirely sure. All I know is that in school I was told the sanctuary here would only make itself visible when you least expect it!” They continued to run as the ground began to shake every five seconds. The roaring became increasingly louder as the gigantic beast pursuing them got closer. They group continued to run until a giant quake caused Fyra to stumble and fall.

“Time to show this monster who is boss!” Andy stood his ground as a pair of enormous tusks appeared. It looked like a giant tortoise with tusks, except massively

larger. It stopped and momentarily to face the companions. Every time it shifted to face them, Andy barely was able to keep his balance. The ground felt like the most powerful of earthquakes was ripping the planet in half.

“Andy, there is no way to take down this thing!” Fyra finally found her way to her feet as she looked at him.

“How do you know? Have you ever battled one?”

“Well no but look at it...”

“Either we attempt to take it down, or get flattened! I for one do not like risking my life on chance alone. How about you, sis?” He gave her an encouraging look and with a nod, she pulled out her daggers again.

“Wait a minute. You two are siblings?” Reques was holding onto a tree for dear life.

“We can talk about that later! Let’s focus on taking that thing down!” Andy shouted over the loud roaring as he roared back and charged at the giant beast. Though it attempted to swing its’ tusks at the Rogan, he easily was able to deflect the attack with his sword, and use it to propel him onto the back. He knew he had no time to waste as he drove his blade down. To his dismay, however, it merely was deflected and didn’t even scratch the shell. The beast howled as it then shook, Andy fell to the ground.

He scrambled to his feet as he watched several fire balls blast the beast in the face. Fyra then leapt to strike, but was knocked aside by one of the tusks. Andy jumped up and cushioned her fall.

“We are going to have to work together to even have a chance!” He looked at her. She nodded as they stood, ready to attack the beast. Before they had time to react, Mizara appeared overhead. She blasted the beast with several thunderbolts that streamed from her mouth as she crowed in triumph.

“Go now while it’s distracted!” Reques called to the pair from a distance as he blasted the beast with a flurry of ice.

“Right!” Andy and Fyra shouted back as they jumped up towards the monster. Andy found himself on the back of the monsters’ neck. He attempted to stab the fleshy area that connected the head to the shell. Before he could though, he felt something sharp jab his leg. He yelped and found himself falling off. As he crashed into the tree

just below the titan, he saw spikes coming out of the shell; a clever defense mechanism. The tree broke his fall as he somehow managed to land on his feet. His leg exploded in pain as he cringed and covered the wound.

Andy then tore off a piece of his shirt and some string out of his satchel as he patched up the wound the best he could. He could see Fyra, jumping around and over the spikes trying to get over the top of the shell. She was struggling as the beast seemed to have control over which spikes could be ejected at any time. He could also see Mizara struggling to find a point to strike with the beast with lightning.

He made sure the pressure was enough to hold the wound. As much as he would like to sit and wait in pain for his injury to feel better, until they had defeated the beast, he needed to keep going. As Fyra continued to try and avoid being pierced by the spikes, Andy watched. He suddenly realized there was no control over the spikes, they were rotating and doing the same pattern.

“Reques do you...” Andy looked over as Reques was already readying an ice ball.

“Yeah I noticed it when you fell. The pattern...I have an idea...” He then reeled his arm back and thrust the ice ball towards the shell. Andy was impressed as Reques’ spot on timing as the ball went inside the open hole where the last spike had just retracted into. They waited a moment for the cycle to get back to the spike, and to their delight, it didn’t come up.

“Fyra!” Andy called out and thrust his finger. It took her awhile to figure it out, but then she nodded and jumped over the now open gap. Reques then repeated this a few more times while Fyra made her way to the head of the beast. Andy then felt the ground shake as the beast made its way towards them. There would be no way Fyra could make it to the head without the beast stopping. Andy had to stop this.

“Reques, keep this thing distracted for a bit. I have an idea. I need Brolen, Jazmyne, and Frey though...is that too much to ask?” Andy looked at him.

“No...” Reques then closed his eyes as his remaining Calls appeared.

“Ok, I need each of you to hold one of this beasts’ legs in place! Can you do that?!”

With a quick nod from each of them he pointed his sword towards the beast and charged forward. The monster swung its tusks back and forth in its' wild rage making it hard for Andy to avoid. Normally this wouldn't have been an issue, but his leg throbbed in pain. Andy grit his teeth and pushed past the pain as he hurdled over the tusk, and ducked under the other. Before he knew it, he was underneath the titan.

From this point, it was easy; Andy would merely act as a distraction. Fyra was their major player at this point as she was uninjured and still had a good chance at hitting its vulnerable point. He found himself running to the nearest leg, stumbling the whole time trying to avoid being knocked down by the quakes. It took him awhile but he reached it. As it brought its foot down Andy leapt with all of his strength, cringing as pain shot through his leg. He grabbed onto the beasts' leg and clung to it as it hit the ground. The window of opportunity was at hand as he then took his sword, and with all the strength he could muster he thrust it into the stumpy foot. The beast shrieked as it tried to free itself. Andy's determination was strong as he continued to hold the foot in place.

"NOW!" He knew if the spirits didn't act soon the monster would free itself. Jazmyne appeared and pulled out two strands of fire. She used them to hold the next leg in place as she pulled with all her might. Brolen appeared with his anima axe and brought it down on another foot. Frey lifted a giant boulder and set it down on the last foot with relative ease. With all four feet being held down, the beast couldn't move anymore. It howled and struggled while Andy and the Calls struggled to hold it down.

"FYRA TAKE IT DOWN NOW!" Andy shouted with all of his breath. He then heard her yell and a pair of thuds. He figured she had stabbed it. However, this just made the beast angrier. With another howl it shook as hard as it could. All four of its feet were instantly freed as the four captors were shaken away.

Andy found himself looking straight up at the beast. It glared at him. He looked to his right and saw Fyra there, she was unconscious and crumpled. He saw pieces of bark dust on her clothes and realized she must have been flung against the tree just behind them. The monster then approached them. Was this how they were going to die? Andy crawled over to Fyra...he wanted to be with one of his sisters if this was it. He had no strength left to hold himself together as the beasts' foot took its final step up.

“NOW MIZARA!!!” Reques called out as Mizara appeared above the monster’s head. The thunderbird screeched and let a lightning bolt crack down. Andy failed to see the point in this until the bolt ripped through the neck of the beast, partially severing the head. As the beast fell, defeated, Andy saw Fyra’s daggers fly out of the neck and into the tree behind them. Of course, Reques had used this just like a lightning rod, focusing the attack into essentially a super bolt. Genius.

Reques ran over towards them as the monster’s body completely fell over, defeated. All of the Calls then disappeared as Reques finally stood above his fallen comrades.

“I haven’t been able to fully test this yet...but I supposed I really don’t have much other choice...” Reques held out his hands as a white light appeared. Andy could feel the wound on his leg slowly close up. His body felt a little uncomfortable though. It felt like there was something inside his body slithering around towards his wounds and filling them. After a few moments he looked at his leg. The wound was gone, though there was an obvious battle scar still apparent.

“What did you do?” He said standing up.

“I’m not entirely sure. I just remember something in class about being able to manipulate the body’s fluids in order to speed the healing process.”

“Why haven’t you used this before?”

“Because it decreases a person’s lifeline...it makes the heart work faster to work with my water manipulation in order to speed the healing process...I was advised to only use this in emergencies...”

“I see...” Andy watched as Reques walked over to Fyra and did the same thing.

“Wh...what’s going on?” Fyra’s eyes fluttered opened once Reques is finished.

“Reques just saved our lives...” Andy looked at her.

“Huh?” She directed her attention to Reques as she stood up. “That true?”

“Oh I don’t...know...” Reques seemed flustered.

“Well in any case we should get going. There will probably be a dozen beasts here soon to feed on this guy’s carcass,” Fyra then began walking off.

“Where are you going?” Andy looked at her.

“Anywhere but here,” Fyra continued to walk.

“Beats any plan I have,” Reques followed. Andy chuckled for a moment as they went into the forest after Fyra. For awhile, the group wandered around aimlessly until they came to an opening in front of a lake. By this time the sun was already setting.

“We should probably call it a day and try to figure things out in the morning...” Andy sat down on a broken stump as he looked out across the lake. The other two agreed as they began to set up a camp. Andy set up a fire while the others prepped the temporary sleeping tent. He had saved some of the meat from the beast they had slain earlier for dinner. Once the fire was good enough he began to roast the meat over the blaze. It wasn't long till the aura of the sizzling meat drew Fyra and Reques over. They hungrily gobbled up the food.

“Wow the stars look amazing...” Reques lay back.

“Yeah...” Fyra continued to lick her fingers as she finished up her portion.

“What's going to happen once this quest is over?” The question silenced the group as they listened to the crackling of the flames.

“Well...I suppose we will all go our separate ways...” Andy uncomfortably broke the silence.

“I guess you are right,” Reques sighed. “I suppose I was just getting used to actually having friends for once.”

“Us, friends?” Fyra chuckled. “That's a laugh.”

“Why? What would you call us?”

“Temporary companions. What do you honestly know about us? I can tell you I'm not sure what I really know about either of you.”

“I know that you are tough on the outside, but on the inside you are as fragile as anyone else Fyra. You put on a front like you don't care but in reality, you feel the same connections to me as I do to you...as a friend,” Reques stood up as he looked in her eyes.

“I have no idea what you are talking about,” Fyra turned her head away as she stood up. Before Reques could say another word she walked off into the forest.

“What...a stubborn ass!” Reques balled his fists.

“Let me go talk to her,” Andy put a hand on the youth's shoulder. “I think she is struggling with accepting others...after how much she has been hurt...”

“I suppose...”

“I just want you to know though Reques, that I value your friendship,” He smiled at the Caller before walking after Fyra.

“Andy!” Andy turned around towards Reques. “Thanks.” The boy returned the smile and waved as Andy gave him a thumbs up and continued.

“Fyra where are you?!” Andy had been searching for awhile now with little success. He stumbled around in the dark. He was about to call off the search before he saw a glow and heard soft crying. He approached the glow to see Fyra kneeling on the ground.

“Hey,” He rested his hand on her shoulder.

“Oh...oh hey...” Fyra sniffled and tried to force her tears back.

“What has you so bothered?” He sat next to her.

“I just...don’t want to think about what will happen afterwards...”

“Why is that?”

“Because!” She snapped back, tears streaming from her eyes. “Because I can’t think about losing anyone else!” Her whole body trembled as she stood, the small fire she made, glowed against her physique as if to represent some manifestation of her frustration.

“Fyra...”

“No! I can’t think of that brat as a friend...I can’t...” Her head drooped.

“Whether you do not think Reques is your friend, you have already reached that point,” The Rogan took a step forward.

“N...no stay back...” Fyra took a step back.

“You love him as a comrade...as a friend...though you never meant to,” Andy rushed forward, holding his sister in his arms. “He reminds you of someone you lost...and that scares you. To repeat the pain of losing a dear friend...” He could feel her tears on his chest as she struggled for a few moments. “All I can tell you Fyra, is that it has happened. Whether you like it or not. You have friends again.”

“Andy...I...” Andy could feel her slowly put her arms around him. “I...I’m not...alone?”

“Not when you have Reques...and me. No matter what happens, you will have us forever, just like...those you have lost before. They are always with you,” He smiled as he looked at her.

“Andy...” A smile broke her otherwise sullen face. “T...thank you. I better go back and apologize to the brat huh?”

“I would say that is the logical step.”

“Lead the way green man.” The pair of them headed back towards the makeshift campground. As they arrived, Andy pulled out his blade, he could hear trouble.

“What’s going on?” Fyra looked at him.

“Something isn’t right,” Andy ran forward as Fyra followed him. Once they neared the campfire, Andy was stunned. Everything was wrecked or ruined, the extra meat was scattered everywhere, the tent was torn to shreds, and Reques was...

“LOOK!” Fyra’s voice shattered his observation as he followed her finger into the sky. As he looked, he saw a giant bat like creature flying off. In its claws a familiar face looked in terror to his companions.

“We gotta go now!” Andy didn’t give himself another second to think as he tore off. He could hear Fyra’s footsteps following. For awhile they pair of them pursued their helpless comrade as they dashed over fallen logs and over tiny brooks as they pursued the beast. Andy could feel them falling farther and farther behind, the beast seeming to get just that much more ground on them. Then, just as he thought the beast was about to get out of site, it landed on a nearby mountain. Andy watched as Reques was dragged inside. It was there...Andy knew they had to go. Fyra looked back at him and nodded. Their friend needed them.

Chapter 27-Dark Sanctuary

If the name of this Sanctuary hadn't been plainly obvious before, Fyra found herself completely surrounded in darkness. She scowled and held up her hand to form a flame. "Is there anything we can use as a torch around here?"

After some shuffling around, Andy handed her a stick. "This is all I can find."

Fyra took the stick. By itself she knew it wouldn't last long under blaze. She took a rag out of her satchel and tied it around the end of the stick. "Still not enough...if there were oil or some sort of flammable liquid I could ignite this."

"What about oil from the ship?"

"Hath already said it would be near impossible to land on this planet," Fyra pointed out. "Ugh, we have no time! I'll just light it and hope it lasts long enough to get to Reques." With no further hesitation, Fyra lit the makeshift torch. It was apparent that this Sanctuary was unlike the first three they had visited. It was cold and clammy, much like a system of caverns, with tunnels leading in all directions.

"Where the hell should we start?" Andy said after a few moments of silence.

"I don't know. If there is a directory, like in the other Sanctuaries, I can't find it...should we just start looking anywhere?"

"Sounds good, I guess," Andy shrugged as the pair of them walked to the first tunnel just ahead of them.

###

Reques felt the grasp release as he was dropped in front of a giant column. Despite how dark the cave was, this particular circular opening was well lit by torches that lined the upper part of the wall.

The Caller looked around for the creature that had carried him off from camp, but it proved to be a fruitless endeavor. After wandering around the room, there was no sight of any creature. He went back to the column and looked around. There were no strange markings or anything that seemed out of the ordinary. However, on the front of the column was a small hole. Seeing as there was nothing else in the room, he walked up to it. He bent down and tried to peer into the hole, though it also was futile as all he could see was darkness.

###

“The hell?” Fyra ran her fingers along the cool, dark wall. “Another dead end? This is bullshit!”

After stumbling around in the dimly lit caverns for awhile and fighting several giant batlike beasts with claws and sharp fangs, the pair had come across a multitude of dead ends. It was starting to get on Fyra’s nerves.

“Calm down Fyra,” Andy sighed and then turned around. “We can’t have too many more caverns to choose from. Let’s just keep pushing—“

“Hold on a second...” Fyra stopped his train of thought as her hand rested against something embedded into the wall. She allowed her fingers to slide around the smooth object which stood out in contrast to the rest of the jagged edges. At first, she tried to pull the object, but found it was stuck. Her next instinct was to push against it, which worked as it began to let out a blue glow.

“Woah,” Andy peered down at the object. As he did, the blue light began to spread and follow predetermined lines that were established along the crevasses in the wall.

Fyra felt herself back up slightly as the wall creaked and groaned and began to rise. She watched in awe as small pebbles fell against the grinding of the rock walls. Ahead was another dark tunnel, though she gathered that unlike the rest, this one definitely would not have a dead end.

###

Reques thought he could hear a wall shift somewhere. He tried to locate the source of the noise, but found himself unable to find anything. As he returned to the stone column in the dimly lit room, he noticed a small blue light coming from the previously dark hole. He bent down to peer inside and discovered a small, blue stone sitting where there had previously been nothing. Picking it up, he found that the blue light illuminated the previously dark cavern. He used this stone to begin searching around for more clues.

Several pictures were painted on the walls of the cylindrical room. Most of them seemed to be random drawings of beasts and monsters, but one looked more like an ancient letter.

“Moons...” He thought to himself as he carefully looked at the Eldest writing. The first thing that popped into his head was the five major moons of Ungdar. Could there be some correlation? He rubbed his chin trying to come up with an answer. As he did something made a scratching noise behind him. He whipped around to see what looked like a giant snake with a multitude of twiggy legs slithering towards him. It wasn't any larger than a full sized male human, but it gave him a hungry look with its black pupils. He brought up his rod and slowly began to call Jazmyne. The fire princess illuminated the darkness as she began to materialize in front of him. The beast hissed as it reared up. Reques could see Jazmyne crack her fire whip.

This should be a breeze ... Reques heard Jazmyne whisper as she then flung her whip towards the creature. The whip made a sizzling noise as it cleanly cut through several of the legs. The monster hissed as it then recoiled and lashed its tail at Jazmyne.

Reques, we need to be careful... Jazmyne called out as the tail lightly grazed her leg and instant pain shot up her side. *This creature is poisonous...*

“Got it...” Reques began to generate an ice ball to help out. He threw it as it tried to lunge at Jazmyne. It knocked the creature aside for a moment as Jazmyne used her whip to throw out a few wisps of fire which caught along the body. The creature howled and hissed as it writhed in the fire. Jazmyne walked over to the creature, and was about to bring her whip down as Reques then watched her cringe.

God this pain...the poison it's...unbearable... She said through a strained expression. This momentary cringe gave the monster enough time to recover as it sprung up and pinned her down.

It began to bite her side and Reques could feel a fraction of the pain. He knew that there wasn't much time until Jazmyne would be unable to fight any longer and he needed to think fast. He quickly began to conjure up some ice shards. It didn't take long before with one final cry of agony, Jazmyne vanished. All that remained in the room was the faint, blue glow of the stone and the sounds of the creature crawling towards him. These next few moments would be crucial.

###

The pathway had eventually led to a small chamber with a torch basket in the wall. Fyra didn't waste any time lighting this as their makeshift torch had reached the

end of its life. They looked around the room and soon saw what looked to be a pool of water in a basin raised against the wall. There was also a pair of gloves with long sleeves lying just to the right of the basin.

“Do you know what to do?” Fyra scratched her head after looking from the basin to the gloves for awhile.

“Nope,” Andy folded his arms.

As the pair sat, waiting for the answer to come to them, the torch on the wall suddenly went out. Fyra went to light it again, but just before she could summon her strength, there was a faint glow that emitted from the depths of the basin. The pair walked over and looked into the basin to see a small, red glowing stone sitting at the bottom.

“Do you think we are supposed to get it?” Andy looked over, seeing his sister’s face illuminated by the red glow.

“I guess, but that still doesn’t explain the gloves...” She shrugged as she moved her hand towards the water to get the stone. Just before she could put her fingers to the liquid, she suddenly felt an intense heat. She retracted her hand in an instant and looked over to see Andy do the same.

“Ah, so that’s what the gloves do,” he chuckled as he slipped one on. He reached into the water, steam rising from the contact, and put his hand around the stone. As he tried to lift the object, Fyra noticed strain on his face. He began to pull harder, but to no avail. He pulled his hand out and quickly put on the other glove, attempting to repeat the process.

“It’s like it’s glued down there...” He grit his teeth as he yanked with both hands. After a few more minutes he pulled his hands up and shook his head. “No use, I can’t even feel it budge.”

“Now what?” Fyra sighed as she leaned against the wall. She immediately yelped and jumped forward as something sharp poked her back. She grabbed her knife and turned around. Laughing, she found that it was just a hanger of sorts with another pair of gloves resting on them. She picked them up and slid them on. “Feel like trying this again?” She said looking at her brother. The two of them nodded as they reached into the steaming pool. With all their might they tugged. Unlike the last two attempts,

Fyra felt the stone shift slightly, but then gasped as it came completely loose. The two companions fell to the floor as the stone bounced just behind them.

“Guess we are stronger than we realized,” Andy held his head as he sat up.

Fyra wanted to laugh, but the pounding in her head was great from the impact. After a second or two to let the pounding subside, she stood up and walked over to the stone. She picked it up and as she did, the torch sputtered back to life. In the re-lit room, Fyra now noticed a passageway that hadn't been there before. She figured this appeared after they removed the stone from the pool.

Andy stood up after a few seconds. Fyra made sure he was okay before the pair of them headed into the new passageway.

###

It had been an intense battle. Reques had gotten the first strike of an ice shard which severed the creature's body in half. The creature had retaliated in full force and almost had poisoned him. He had managed to keep his staff in place where the mouth of the beast clamped down upon it. With a push back, he had sent another shard directly into its head, killing it instantly. Reques panted as sweat dripped down his face. Before this moon, he most likely would not have been able to fend for himself like this. It was a result of his training with Andy constantly that had not only made the Rogan a better anima wielder, but had made Reques a better fighter.

He slowly stood up, post battle, and picked up the stone again, walking over to the symbol with the moons on it. He noticed four slots below it. One for each of the moons, except, as he interpreted the Eldest writing, for Trychondria. He wasn't entirely sure why there wasn't one for the moon they were on, but when he was about to question it, the symbol for Lorica appeared before him. This prompted him to put the blue stone into the slot as it seemed to glow brighter when he placed it near the hole. It worked, and a tiny stream of blue light jetted out from the hole and towards the column in the middle of the room.

As he stood, nodding at his accomplishment, he began to wonder what to do next. He had re-visited all of the areas in this chamber, but found nothing else of use to him. This conundrum would have continued to build in his mind, if the shifting of a

nearby wall hadn't occurred. He was about to inspect it, when Fyra and Andy tumbled into the room.

"Guys?" Reques looked at them for a moment in disbelief as a smile proceeded to obliterate his momentary skeptic state.

"About time you show up, you punk," Fyra chuckled.

"About time you rescue me, you old windbag," He scowled back at her.

"What did you say?" Fyra's expression soured in the dim, blue light.

"Is this really the time?" Andy shook his head.

Reques was about to protest, but then noticed the red glow from Fyra's hand.

"I know what to do with that," He grinned as he held out his hand. Fyra tossed him the stone and he walked over to the hole for Winndel. Placing the stone inside, the similar column of red light illuminated the column. As it did, there was a shifting noise as a new pathway appeared.

"Let's go!" Reques felt good being with his companions again as he raced off.

For the next several hours, the trio located the two other stones, a yellow one for Malkon and a purple one for Aristes. Once they had returned to the center chamber and placed the stones in the slots, the column suddenly glowed green and shifted until the column disappeared and revealed a glowing green platform. They stepped on and were taken up through the newly formed hole in the ceiling. They soon came to a chamber with a large opening, and lit by torches covering the ceiling, with a shrine in one of the corners.

Reques nodded to his companions as he stepped forward and approached the shrine.

...do you know right from wrong?...

"Huh?" Reques looked around. However, the voice didn't speak to him again. "I guess I do..."

...you guess eh? Let's put you to the test then...

Reques felt the room shake as Mizara slowly rose out of his body. As she floated just above the group's head, she screamed and her form darkened. Her wings became leathery as her soft claws formed into vicious talons. Soon, it was apparent what she looked like.

“You’re the creature who carried me here!” Reques looked up in amazement. As he continued to watch, the creature’s face and claws disappeared into its body. The body then split in half and with a glow, the former wings took on a sharp, metal form. Two swords, one black and one white, now hovered in the air.

...you control my brother Giganta...if you think you know right from wrong, you must destroy me, Void, with my brother...ready?...

“Wait how do I—“ Reques was interrupted as the black sword dove straight at him. Reques dove out of the way, dropping his rod on the ground. He quickly stood up and looked in amazement as the white sword hovered above his rod. He ran over to his rod and picked it up, as he did, the white sword floated higher. It moved with the movements of his staff. Reques would have had more time to get acquainted with this new technique, but the black sword soon hovered over head, as if to pounce on the Caller.

Andy cried out as he attempted to hit the sword, but was knocked back by an unseen force and hit the wall. Shackles came out of slits in the wall and soon bound the Rogan.

Reques could hear Fyra yelp as she too was presumably shackled. The black sword then dove straight down towards the Caller. With a clang, Reques held the rod in his hands to block the attack, causing the white sword to move exactly how he was thinking. He quickly threw his rod away, which made the white sword hit the black sword out of its destructive path.

...good, you are learning...

The Caller now looked towards the black sword with an intense focus. He began a flurry of hits with his white blade. Back and forth the blades battled as if they were dancing in mid-air. Sparks shot out and sank to the ground, illuminating the floor as the whole room began to light up. Whenever the black blade tried to gain the upper hand against the white blade, it seemed to be outsmarted by Reques’ attacks.

With a few more heavy strokes, the black blade was sent sprawling towards the ground. It looked dormant as it lay there. The white blade pointed with Reques’ command, ready to strike.

...well done, end this battle...

Reques grinned as he was about to bring his rod down to strike, but then something clicked in his mind, something said at the beginning of this battle. *...do you know right from wrong?...* It suddenly dawned on him this was part of the test.

“The battle is over, there is no need,” He smiled and let his sword go to the side. As he did, he heard clicking noises as Andy and Fyra walked over to him.

...I guess you know true Justice after all...very well...will you accept me, Void, as your Call?...

“I accept,” Reques then watched as Mizara separated from the dual blades and was absorbed by light back into Reques. The black sword was next as it disappeared into black spheres of dark energy and became Reques’ fourth Call. The white sword then lost its hue and fell to the ground with a metal clang.

THAT BLADE... Brolen began to speak in Reques’ mind. IT IS THE STRONGEST IN ALL OF UNGDAR. TELL THE WARRIOR IT IS HIS.

Reques looked to Andy, but before he could relay the message, the Rogan looked back, his eyes already understanding. The boy watched his companion walk to the blade and suddenly it regained a silver-colored glow as he raised it up into the air. After a couple seconds he put the blade behind him, resting against his other sword. With no further business, the trio walked back to the glowing green platform which lowered them to their long journey back to the ship.

###

It was some time before they arrived back on the ship. Hath had difficulty finding a place to safely land, but was relieved to find a spot of rock just long enough for the trio to get back on.

“Where to now?” Andy took his usual seat on the bridge. “We’ve been to every moon but you are still one Call short right?”

“There is a reason I was saving this Call for last...it’s in Dolor,” Reques leaned against the wall.

“Why didn’t we just go there first?!” Fyra shrieked looking angrier than ever.

“Besides the fact that they pretty much chased us out of there?” He rolled his eyes. “Because it’s...not exactly in the most reachable of locations...”

“What does that mean?” Fyra looked skeptical.

“I...uhh...” Reques became distant, as if lost in thought.

“Fyra let it go, I’m sure he has his reasons for why we waited on this...let’s just get there. We were going to need to return anyways, I’m sure Reques knew that,” Andy looked to the youth.

“I suppose,” She sighed.

“Hath, have we checked in with General Rouske lately?” Andy looked to their pilot.

“No,” He looked back.

“I’ll do that. In the meantime, everyone get your things ready. We probably will need to be fast since we aren’t exactly the most welcome in this city...” He looked to his two comrades. They both nodded in return and headed to prepare for the final stop in the pilgrimage.

Chapter 28-Revelations

There was chaos in the streets. Eva watched from her office as people argued and fought with one another. The lower class citizens had been furious with the tax reform, as she predicted. The fighting was an added bonus, however. Things were moving along a lot faster than she anticipated.

“Senator Crane!” That nosy assistant again...

“What is it?” She turned to look at the assistant irritatingly.

“An evacuation of the capitol building has been issues, though since you are Head Senator, the Dolorian force needs you to file the order...”

“Give them permission, before you do though, I need you to pass something along to the Senate...”

“This is...” Her assistant looked at the document in astonishment

“I didn’t ask you to read it! This is an emergency, I’m sure they will understand.”

“Yes ma’am...” The assistant ran off as Eva looked towards the window. She was startled when a man with a mask appeared. He approached her as she held out a hand.

“That is close enough. The blood on your clothes reeks,” She held her nose and walked over to her desk.

“Not my fault. You have me working double, plus I had to take down one of the lower ranking officers. He was in the way.”

“You know what Wave? I’m sick,” She looked up with a glare. “And tired of your constant complaining. You know when you signed up for this that bloodshed was necessary. The problem with you is that you are being careless. I’m just thankful I was able to step in with the LeMarcus incident.”

“You can’t blame me for that. You expected me to drop him in front of the building and get away without someone following me? Not exactly a clean operation.”

“Enough!” She slammed her fist into the desk, a sick crack erupted as the wood splintered. “Great, look what you made me do.”

“What exactly are you hoping to accomplish with all of these assassinations and fighting?”

“Easy, the upper class citizens are mad at the lower class for ‘murdering their precious Senators’ and the lower class citizens are mad at the upper class for ‘unfair tax reforms.’ Neither of these affect me of course.”

“Well, that much I was aware of. I believe in your cause for a different world Eva. I want to know how you plan to do that with everyone fighting.”

“I plan on going to the 13th sector,” She smiled as she rearranged her desk to hide the hole she made.

“Really?” Though the mask hid his face, Eva could hear the sudden interest in his voice. “What’s there?”

“Potentially just a legend, but an item I once heard about...something I’ve been searching for years to find. I think it’s probably located in the forbidden slums.”

“You think?”

“I can’t be sure, but from the files I’ve been able to access undercover, most likely this is what I am looking for. This...will help us accomplish our goal—“

“Senator Crane! I’ve got the docu...ment...” The assistant burst in as she looked at Eva, and the masked man. “Oh...my...” Eva shot Wave a glance and a nod. It was common knowledge that several cameras had caught a masked man near the placement of several Senators that had been assassinated. No chances could be taken.

Before she had time to blink, Eva watched Wave seemingly disappear, dragging the assistant into the room and covering her mouth. She watched as he held her assistants’ body to his. Just as he was about to finish her off, Eva held up her hand again.

“Hold,” She walked up to the assistant who looked with scared and wild eyes. “You just had to be quick, didn’t you? Well, at least you’re good at obeying orders.” She chuckled as she took the document from her assistants’ hand. Giving it one look over, she saw the signatures of the entire Senate granting her the access she needed. “Good. Wave, I’m done here. Finish this quietly and let’s go.” She turned around and heard a sickening crack followed by crumpling to the floor. She then reached into the desk drawer and pulled out her katana. The time had finally arrived. She was going to finish what she had started 13 years ago.

###

General Rouske stood in front of the man in the uniform.

“What do you mean there has been some delays? I was told the issue had resolved just yesterday and we would be granted an audience!”

“I’m sorry Rogan. I am under orders that a new issue has arisen. It seems that Dolor is...how do I put it...in a state of Civil War.”

“I see,” Rouske was reminded of their situation on U’Roga. A race fighting within itself. “What can we do until then?”

“Unfortunately nothing. We do not wish any unnecessary bloodshed in congruence with the peace treaty signed on Aristes. Surely a Rogan of your stature should be aware of this.”

“Damn...” Rouske could tell this man would not be any help. Though the military men were few in numbers as most had left that morning, he could not afford to risk the bond that had taken years to form. As he went to go back inside the ship he felt his communicator beeping.

“Yes what is it?”

“General Rouske! It’s And’theith Charal.”

“Andy! What’s the status of your escapade?”

“Almost complete. One tiny hitch though. Our last destination is on Lorica. Has there been any development or change in our situation there?”

“None whatsoever,” The General sighed. “Apparently there is some sort of Civil War going on in Dolor right now.”

“Civil War?”

“Yeah something about Senators dying and tax reforms, blah blah blah. Point is no one is getting in or out of this city for awhile.”

“Sounds bad. How is everyone holding up?”

“They are pretty antsy, I know this whole situation with the Angel’s Frown has got them on edge. Still no—“ He was interrupted by the familiar siren erupting from the ship. Not now... “Andy! Get back here on the double, it’s started!” He hung up the phone and quickly got on the intercom.

“We don’t have time to hesitate, ready the soldiers!” It was easy from this point forward. They needed to invade the city and find the source, regardless of the cost. No other option was possible.

Chapter 29-Back to Lorica

Andy was speechless as he put the communicator down. He was unsure how to respond. The ancient prophecy was coming true.

“What was that all about?” Reques sat on the opposite side of the ship. Having heard a good portion of the conversation he looked at the Rogan with a raised eyebrow.

“I can’t explain right now. Hath! Pick up the speed! We need to get to Lorica fast. It’s happening!”

“Roger!” Hath replied as the Le’Vatis suddenly lurched forward.

“Andy what the hell is going on?” Reques stood up and looked at him.

“I...can’t say until Fyra is here as well. I only want to have to say it once.”

Andy then called for Fyra over the intercom. Once she was in the bridge he looked at them both. “The Angel’s Frown has activated again.”

“You mean that statue that is linked to the device in Dolor right? You mentioned it back when we first met,” Fyra looked at him.

“Yes that’s the one. Well, this time it means that the time is near. Someone is attempting to approach its counterpart. It is unsure when the device will be reached, but the intention is clear. We don’t have much more time.”

“Even if we could get there in time we still have to go to the last Sanctuary...” Reques looked at him.

“I’ve realized this. We will just have to work twice as hard to get there before it is too late. The Rogans have made a stand. This will mean they are entering Civil War—“

“Civil War?!” Fyra suddenly looked interested.

“Yeah sorry I forgot to mention, Dolor is currently in a state of Civil War.”

“What are the details?” Fyra’s tone became concerned.

“Something about Senators dying and new taxes...” Andy did his best to look sympathetic.

“That would set them off...” Fyra looked deep in thought.

“...I do not foresee us having issues entering the city...worst case scenario the Rogans have at least created a distraction. No one will be looking for the wanted thief

and her petty gang.” He watched as the others chuckled a little. It was good they were trying to find some sort of humor in the situation. They would need it.

“Where is the Sanctuary, exactly?” Fyra asked once the mood became serious once again.

“It is located in the slums...the 13th sector to be exact,” Reques looked at the ceiling knowing the answer though hesitant to say it.

“How are we going to get there? Even with the distractions it will be heavily guarded.”

“I don’t know,” Reques sighed. “No Caller has been allowed access since my father.”

“What do we do when a situation seems impossible?” Andy looked up at the pair of them. A smirk was planted on his face. They looked at him with uncertainty and confusion. “We push on.” He looked at them both.

“He’s...”

“...right.”

The others looked at one another and then back to Andy. Resolve had washed over their faces. There was no turning back after this. They had come too far to give up now, even with the odds stacked against them.

“We are approaching Lorica!” Hath shouted as the trio stood up.

“We meet back here in five. Hath, be prepped to drop us off outside of Dolor,” Andy looked at his fellow Rogan who nodded.

It was less than five minutes when the trio assembled back on the bridge with their weapons and essentials.

“Are we good?” Andy looked towards his comrades as he handed them each a pack. A couple of nods sealed the deal. “No regrets?”

“Is my brother stalling?” Fyra raised an eyebrow.

“YOU ARE GOOD TO GO! THIS POSITION SHOULD LAND YOU IN ARI PARK!” Hath shouted over the intercom. “IT HAS BEEN MY PLEASURE BEING YOUR PILOT! GOOD LUCK!” Andy listened as Hath chuckled a bit and the intercom went silent. The door on their right opened as air began to rush in.

Though the group wished they could have given their pilot more of a goodbye, they all knew there was no more time to waste. Fyra looked back at both of them, giving them a thumbs up as she jumped out.

“Always has to be first huh?” Andy shook his head and laughed. Reques smacked his forehead. With one last shrug and a nod the pair barreled after her, back to the city where it all began.

Chapter 30-Into the Fire

Though she had left the ship before, Fyra had never fallen from this height. It was euphoric, tumbling towards Dolor, in the late afternoon. The sun was setting as the entire city began to light up. However, she also noticed what appeared to be small clusters forming in the city. The clusters began to become larger as she continued to freefall towards the city.

Were those...people? The thought of Civil War reappeared in her mind. What tax issue were they all fighting over? Senators had died? A lot of questions plagued her mind, but as she began to make out windows in the buildings below she remembered she was still falling.

Immediately she reached for the back of her pack, grabbing the handle, and pulling with all of her might. She could feel a rush of wind as she soon went from falling at insanely high speeds to floating as if suspended by a cloud. She looked up to see her bright red parachute hanging above, keeping her from plummeting to an untimely death. It was both beautiful and somewhat daunting.

“Fyra!” She could hear Andy call from her left. She looked over at the green man sailing down in a green parachute just slightly faster than her. “Be ready to fight...regardless of who is there.”

“What does that mean?” Fyra raised her eyebrow.

“I know your mind is on this Civil War...and I’m sure many people you know are involved...but—“

“I know ok?! Regardless of who involved...we have a mission...which is more important...” She turned her face away. There would be no greater privilege for her than to join her lower class friends in this fight, but...if someone activated this device, then there would be nothing left to fight for...

“I know you know, I just want you to be consciously aware that you may need to fight your friends in order to help us accomplish our mission,” he gave her a solemn look.

“I was prepared for that the moment we jumped out,” Fyra looked up with a certain seriousness in her eyes. Since Andy did not proceed to say anything else, she

assumed he was satisfied with this answer. Reques now came into view as the three of them slowly floated towards the park below.

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There was a small fire on the grassy area towards the center of the park. Several Rogans were trying to defend themselves from a barrage of bullets from a couple Dolorian Security Guards.

Fyra watched as Reques was the first to touch ground, followed closely by Andy. The pair quickly unstrapped themselves and left the parachutes lying as they ran towards the battle. Fyra floated down and landed on top of Reques' blue parachute as she quickly mimicked their movement. She looked up to see Reques and Andy knock out the Dolorian Guards who subsequently tumbled to the ground. The Rogans looked up with thankful glances as they continued running forwards into the nearby alley.

“Fyra where are we headed?” Reques looked at her.

“The only way I know how to get to sector 13 is through the underground railway...though I'm sure right now it isn't operational at all,” she was reminded of her last trip on the railway...back when she was still part of the Douze Brigade.

“Take us then! We don't have time to think!” Andy shouted.

Fyra nodded. She might have usually thought this was a somewhat rude gesture, but given the circumstances she couldn't blame anyone for trying to get right to the point. She then took off running. The fastest way would be to head towards the Dolorian Government Building and instead take a left at the third fork. That would put them in front of the train station.

The others followed close behind her as they tore off down the road. In front of them people battled in the streets. Though Fyra could pick out a few familiar faces, some lower class, some upper class, for the most part she couldn't tell who was fighting who. In some of the skirmishes, it looked like lower class were fighting other lower class and vice versa. Though she tried her best not to assume what other people meant, Andy's words suddenly rang in her ears. In this chaos, it would be nearly impossible to tell enemy from friend. She had to focus on the mission or else she would become completely encased by this madness.

“Fyra!” A familiar man called out her name as they continued past all of the battling.

Fyra turned to see Gram running towards her. She was glad to see he had survived the fire in Sector 12.

“Gram what the hell is going on?!”

“Hadn’t you heard? The government went ahead and approved that added tax on small businesses,” he huffed as he stopped in front of her. “When Senator LeMarcus died...that woman...Create...Caven...something like that...anyways she took over and went ahead and approved the movement...that was the last straw for most folk...”

“I think I get the idea Gram. Unfortunately I don’t have time to keep talking...”

“Why?”

“We think the entire universe is in grave danger...something about an object in Sector 13...”

It didn’t shock her that at the mention of the Sector, Gram’s eyes became frightened. It was common for the lower class to know of the “Forbidden Sector” and be afraid. This Sector had a bad reputation since it had been heavily gated off years ago and had the label “Forbidden” thrown on it. Anyone found trying to enter the gate was arrested on the spot. Rumors and stories of what lay beyond the Sector were spread, though no one actually had the guts to follow through to find what was there.

“Fyra...do you really think that is smart?” Gram looked at her with panic in his eyes.

“Given the circumstances, I’m pretty damn sure we don’t have a choice...”

“Fyra! We don’t have time to talk!” Andy shouted looking impatient.

“Gram...I’m sorry I have to go...” Fyra gave him a quick pat on the shoulder as she turned to leave.

“Fyra wait...stop by the fountain before you go, I left something there for emergencies...I think you need it more than me,” He chuckled and watched as she ran off.

“Thanks Gram, I—“ She was about to reply as a gunshot rang out. Turning around, she saw Gram looking at bloody spot in the middle of his shirt. “GRAM!” She shouted ready to tear the soldier standing behind him limb from limb.

“Get a hold of yourself!” Andy grabbed her arm.

Red, hot rage boiled within her as she struggled against her brother. Before she could break free, she saw an ice shard pierce the soldier.

“I’m sorry Fyra, but we have to go now!” Andy looked his sister in the eye sternly as she looked at him to protest.

“... fine ...” Fyra felt hot tears run down her face as her brother let go. The trio continued on, Fyra only taking one quick peek back before letting Gram’s face fade away in her mind.

The three of them eventually made their way to the train station. As expected, the place looked abandoned.

“Is there any other way to get to the 13th sector?” Reques whined as he looked at the long tunnel in front of them.

“Nope ...” Fyra looked inside.

The trio proceeded to head into the tunnel. For the next several hours, they wandered down, past all of the slums, overturned train cars, and battled their way through monsters that had entered the city amongst the chaos. Eventually they reached sector 12.

“About ... damn time ...” Reques panted as they reached the bottom. The walk was excruciatingly long and the battles had been fierce. It wasn’t shocking the trio was completely wiped from the trek.

“This way!” Fyra motioned as she continued forward. With a groan the pair followed her. It was weird to see the slums in its burned down state of being. She hadn’t visited it since the fire. As she wandered past all of the shops and businesses she had worked with the Douze Brigade to keep afloat, it saddened her to feel that all of her fighting was in vain. She hadn’t exposed the government and instead had gone on a journey which had kept her away while her friends fought and died in the streets of Dolor. Of course she knew the purpose of their new goal, and without accomplishing it there would be no more slums to protect or government to expose.

“Is this...Sector 12?” Reques caught his breath finally as they wandered through the streets.

“Yeah,” Fyra pushed the pace of the walk trying not to distract herself.

“I heard about it on the news, but I had no idea it was...this bad,” Reques sounded as if he had seen a ghost. “Fyra, I’m sorry...I know how hard this must be—“

“Forget it,” She waved her hand back. “I think we have passed apologies.” She turned around just for a second and looked him deep in the eyes. “You aren’t the person you used to be. That’s enough for me.” She looked at him for a second before snickering and turning around.

“What?” He raised his eyebrow.

“Nothing,” She let the laugh escape for a second. “You might be different, but you are still a spoiled brat to me.”

“So much for that sentimental moment...though I’d expect nothing less from some uppity old woman,” He chuckled.

Fyra would probably have given him some sort of retort, but the gate that had haunted the sector since she had arrived was now looming in the distance. It was a giant concrete wall that had been built when Dolor was established. Very few people were allowed access, and it was heavily monitored.

“My dad told me about this place...” Reques said as they rounded the corner and headed towards what appeared to be a burned down version of the center of the sector. “He is the...last known Caller to complete his Pilgrimage...”

“You say that like you aren’t thrilled or something,” Andy looked at him with concern.

“I’m...not exactly proud to be following in his footsteps...” He shrugged.

“Why?” Fyra suddenly seemed interested.

“Because it’s what he wants me to do...” He sighed. “Do we really have time to be talking about this?”

“If not now, then when?” Fyra stopped for a second. “I know we don’t have a lot of time, but if you have any lingering reservations you need to lay them out now. Andy and I both have put aside everything else to be here...spill it!”

“I want to...draw...” He sighed hanging his head.

“Huh?” Fyra and Andy both looked to each other in confusion.

“I know it sounds silly, but...it’s what makes me happy. To be honest, if I hadn’t met you two and gone on this Pilgrimage...that’s what I wanted to do. Now that I’m doing this, however, I feel I’m just doing what my dad wants me to...”

“Reques,” Andy walked over and put a hand on the youth’s shoulder. “The two of us aren’t on this journey for our original reasons. In fact I’m sure Fyra would much rather be trying to help this Sector rebuild, and I...I would probably have continued training endlessly to be as strong as my fellow Rogan warriors. However, this journey is larger than all of us...and personal issues have to be left behind...can you move forward knowing this?”

“I...” Reques took a breath. “Yeah I can. Sorry guys. Let’s do this.”

The trio eventually made their way to the guarded gate. As they did, Fyra’s eyes widened. “The hell?” In front of the gate lay about thirty slain guards in pools of their own blood. She immediately ran up to one, checked his pulse, and shook her head. “Dead...” Andy and Reques seemed speechless as Fyra walked over to the door. She tried to turn the handle, but found it to be locked. “Shit...”

“...i-is someone t...there?” A weak voice called out from behind one of the wrecked service vehicles.

Fyra walked towards the voice and her posture grew stiff as the figure came into her line of sight. There, leaning against the side of the vehicle, blood pouring out of an open wound on his side, was Officer Castrus, the man who had shot Johnny. Emotions began to flood within Fyra. Part of her wanted to help the man, while the other wanted to finish what someone else had started.

“the...th-thief huh?” The man coughed through struggled speech.

“Do you know this man?” Andy said as he and Reques stood behind her.

“He killed Johnny...” She felt her fist ball up.

“Fyra ... “ Andy gave her a stern look as he rested his hand on her shoulder.

“I know,” She sighed as her fingers unfurled.

“That...damn s-senator...” Officer Castrus coughed and cringed against the car.

“What happened?” Fyra looked at the ground, unable to bring herself to look up at the man who killed her best friend.

“I...it was Crane...she...had a l-letter that I didn’t approve...I tried...to tell her...s-she needed...to state...her r-reason...and that’s when...”

“Eva Crane did this to you?” Fyra looked up at the mention of her name. Though she had never directly interacted with the Senator before, the name was familiar to her. She had heard rumors of a Senator who would stand up for those who were otherwise unrepresented in the Government. Now she was turning on her own city? The tale was somewhat hard to swallow.

“There is no mistake...” Castrus coughed as he struggled to reach for his pocket. The motion prompted Fyra to reach for one of her knives.

“Don’t get...j-jumpy thief...I don’t plan on hurting you...You want past the gate right? There is no other reason...for you to b-be here in the middle of war...” He weakly pulled a keycard out of his pocket and tossed it to the trio. “I’m sorry about your friend...I w-was just following orders...like a dog...just...promise me you’ll s-stop her...” He sighed and then strained his back.

Fyra walked over and picked it up. “I...forgive you. We’ve all been played if what you said is true...I promise to not return this until I stop her. Until then stay alive so I can pound the shit out of you for putting my gang through this...”

“I’ll...do my b-best...” Castrus let out a strained laugh with a cough.

Fyra looked to her comrades with one last head nod as they made their way over to the door that was sealed on the gate. She ran the key card through the slot as the door slid open. As Reques and Andy ran through the door, Fyra took one last look at the man who had haunted her dreams these past few weeks. He was pitiful now, but in a way he was different. She saw he was now thinking independently and making choices on his own now. She admired this. With one last look she followed her comrades through the doors.

The other side of the gate was not what Fyra had expected. Ahead of them lay a narrow path with a pillar at the end. The entirety of the area was covered by darkness from the roof of land above.

“Fyra, I think you can light this up...” Reques pointed towards a symbol with ancient text written below it.

“Just about forgot you can read that strange crap...” Fyra chuckled. “What exactly do I have to do?”

“Just ignite the beacon next to the gate...” Reques turned pointing towards a small bowl-like structure resting near the gate behind them.

Fyra nodded and did what she was instructed. As she did, a glowing energy seemed to pulsate throughout the area and a red light spread its way, illuminating the path in front of them. Far ahead, the pillar also lit up, revealing a fork in the road, going two ways.

It took awhile for them to reach the pillar, but once they did, ancient text was lit up as plain as day.

“One reads the Water Sanctuary with a left arrow, while the other reads Coast Point with a right arrow...” Reques carefully inspected the text in front of him.

“What is at the Coast Point?” Fyra raised an eyebrow.

“Not sure...”

“Well, our destination needs to be the Sanctuary, we can explore this other area later...without the final call, you are pretty much useless right?” She tried to hide her stifled laughter.

“Why you...” Reques looked angry as he turned to face her.

“Enough! This idle banter can wait! We need to go, now!” Andy shouted as he ran down the left path, ushering the others to follow.

Fyra gave Reques a quick nod as they followed in pursuit of their companion. The trio eventually made their way to the front of a giant structure with double doors. It looked old, almost as if it hadn't been touched in several decades.

“This it?” Fyra looked at the building.

“Must be...” Reques replied.

No further dialogue was shared between the comrades as with a couple more seconds to take the building's form into awe, they proceeded to open the door, and walked into the final Sanctuary in their journey.

Chapter 31-Water Sanctuary

If the Eldests hadn't labeled this Sanctuary, it would have been painfully obvious which one it was. Reques felt himself sputter as water dripped on his face. Though the entire temple was seemingly made from stone, small trickles of water seemed to pour from everywhere.

"Guess they don't call it the Water Sanctuary for nothing ... " Reques grumbled as they headed down the linear path.

"You're telling me," Fyra seemed to be batting some mist from her eyes.

Though Reques knew Andy probably was annoyed by the water, the Rogan just smiled and walked on. Reques shook his head, unable to see how anyone could be smiling while being annoyed beyond belief.

The trio soon arrived at what Reques would probably have thought would be the main chamber of the Sanctuary. Water seemed to be pouring in from three different aquaducts into a pit. This pit formed a lake towards the bottom, Reques gathered some twenty stories down, and in the middle of this lake was what appeared to be the shrine.

"I'm guessing we need to find a way to turn off the streams of water..." Andy leaned against the wall.

"...to get to the shrine? Yeah, I was just thinking the same," Reques nodded at his Rogan friend.

"Since we are on a time crunch, we could all split up and seal off one each...since there are three," Fyra rested one of her hands on her hip.

"What if we run into trouble though?" Reques frowned.

"ECHO!" Fyra yelled out as the cavern seemed to reverberate throughout.

"Will it do that if we are inside of a pathway?" Reques raised his eyebrow and shook his head.

"Not sure, but we are wasting time here talking about it," Fyra said taking off along the lefthand side of the overhanging bridge they were on. There was an open doorway at the end.

"Are you not even going to assess the pathway before just taking off?" Reques seemed irritated.

“Nope! Go in full force!” She laughed as she disappeared through the open gap in front of her.

“Andy?!” Reques was wide eyed as he looked at the Rogan.

“Don’t look at me,” He chuckled as he headed for the open doorway just to the right side of the bridge.

“You too?” Reques almost pleaded.

“Like Fyra said,” He rested his hand on the side of the doorway and gave Reques a grin. “This is the fastest way; we don’t have time to argue.” With that he disappeared as well.

Reques sighed, why were they so stubborn? With one more shake of his head, he walked to the open pathway next to the place they had entered this chamber from.

It was similar to the entrance. This pathway was small, darker, and dripping a shit ton of water.

“Damn...” Reques shivered and tried to shake the water off of his body, but unable to stay completely dry. “If I had known that I’d get soaked I’d have brought my extra robe...” He scowled and continued on. It vaguely reminded him of the cave he and Fyra needed to pass through where the water was unavoidable. In that instant he wished she was there to warm and dry his clothing again. It really was odd, a thief, a Caller, and a Rogan had all teamed up on this journey. The thought always made him chuckle.

Reques eventually made his way into a nearby chamber. Inside were a flight of stairs that lead to a platform higher up. The sound of rushing water filled the whole room from above. As his eyes fell from the rushing water noise to the room he was standing in, he noticed a built-in shelf with several objects: a crystal chalice, two wooden stakes, a picture of some odd contraption, a silver ladle, and four small pegs. The hell was he supposed to do with this? He looked at it for awhile before giving up. This prompted him to walk upstairs as no other alternative seemed plausible with a lack of specific details.

At the top of the stairs the rushing water became louder. On the other side of a wooden door on the platform, he could see the source of all of the noise. A stream of seemingly endless water poured out of the nearby opening in a cascading waterfall,

which had been what the trio had seen when they first entered the Sanctuary. There was also something that looked similar to a balance of sorts sitting on the wall next to the door frame. He pushed down on both sides of the balance, but nothing seemed to happen.

However, that was all he found in this room. With a frustrated sigh he walked back down to the items sitting on the shelf. Part of him wanted to go running to the others for help; however, he knew it would just slow them all down. They were counting on him to figure out this puzzle as much as he was counting on them to figure out theirs.

He decided to put each item in front of him and look for anything that appeared to be abnormal. He first scanned over the chalice and noticed a couple of tiny holes. They looked to be about the size of the pegs, and instinctively Reques placed the four pegs into the holes in the chalice. The stakes and the ladle still confused him though. The only item left was the diagram. He looked more closely at it and noticed several things. First was the drawing of the river and the room at the top of the stairs. He then noticed arrows pointing to the edge of the canal that careened into the waterfall; this part of the diagram was labeled 1. It looked like two wooden objects were sticking out. There was another arrow pointing to a water-filled chalice that sat upon the balance's right side with the ladle resting inside; this part was labeled 2.

After looking over the diagram carefully, he took the objects with him and headed back to the other room. As per the directions on the diagram, Reques bent down and inserted the wooden stakes into the metal slots on either side of the waterfall's edge. He then heard a click once both were in and the balance was extended on a stone platform. The next step was to put the chalice on top. Once he did this, he filled the ladle with water and proceeded to fill the chalice to the brim. As the water was poured into the chalice, Reques heard something shift. He looked over to see a wooden gate rise. With the last drop of water, the gate shut and the water in the canal began to rise. In seconds, it was pouring over Reques' feet and he cursed at the sharp and cold liquid. For some reason, the water still poured into the room below, and, Reques gathered, probably back into the same room the fall had been pouring into. Something still seemed to be missing though.

“I hate puzzles...” He scowled as he looked at the diagram again. He tried to see if he had missed any detail. The pegs were in place, the chalice was on the balance, and it had been filled...all of the objects were gone...except...

Reques took the ladle out of his pocket and looked at the diagram again. He saw the ladle resting in the chalice and it suddenly hit him. He placed the ladle in the chalice, and as he did, a hole opened up on the other side of the canal and water soon rushed into the opening. With that, the water going into the other room stopped. The Caller laughed at having completed his puzzle as he walked back towards the main chamber.

The other two waterfalls were still dumping their liquid contents into the pit below, though the shrine appeared to be closer and partially above water. He waited for a bit and debated going to help the others, but just as he was about to head to the door Fyra had gone through, there was a groan, and after a few seconds her waterfall ceased to exist. Reques watched as the shrine in the pit seemed to rise and the water level dropped, revealing more of the shrine.

Almost immediately after, Andy’s waterfall also ceased as the shrine raised to the same level Reques was at, water completely subsiding. Both of his companions soon arrived in the room.

“Ah, so that is what turning off the water did...” Andy said rubbing his chin.

Reques nodded to him, “As soon as I obtain this Call, we get out of here as soon as possible...no telling how much time we have left...you two ready?”

With reassuring gestures he walked forward. The shrine began to glow. Reques cringed as Void seemed to be pulled from his body. The giant, black sword howled with a graveling tone and seemed to glow as its body expanded. Claws extended from its body and a giant, white mane came out from its back. Whiskers came out from a long chin that seemed to be coming from where the hilt of the sword used to be. Reques would have continued watching, but he heard his two companions gasp.

He turned around to see what looked like vines of water wrapped around the legs and arms of his comrades. He started to run towards them, but as he did, they were pulled into a now liquid looking ground below them. Andy was the first to be pulled it,

making a gurgling noise as his body disappeared into the ground. Fyra struggled a bit, looking terrified as her body was slowly drug underneath.

Reques dove to try and reach her hand before it was pulled below. Just as his fingers lightly grazed hers, they were sucked into the ground like the rest of her body. He hit cold stone and cringed as pain shot through his body. After a second or two to recover, he stood up. Hovering above the shrine was the giant form of a dragon. Its entire body was blue, except for the white mane and whiskers. Blue light seemed to pulsate from its tail to its head in waves.

I haven't seen one of you Callers in almost two decades...how's it going?

“What did you do with my friends?!” Reques balled his fists and glared at the Call.

Oh, they are fine...don't you want to play with me a bit?

“Give them back!”

You are no fun...well fine...I'll show you your friends...

As the Call finished talking, two holographic screens appeared on either side of the shrine. They appeared to be of large chambers somewhere in the Sanctuary. As Reques watched, Fyra was lowered into the first room by the water vines and Andy was lowered into the second. Both were dropped to the floor and slowly stood on their feet, trying to find out what was going on. They seemed to pound on walls and hit them with their weapons, but nothing worked.

“Where are they?”

No where you will be able to find...however, you might be able to save them if you are smart enough...or you could just play with me. The dragon seemed to smile with its long mouth.

“What do you mean smart enough?” Reques raised his eyebrow.

Well, that water you all redirected earlier...it... Before the dragon Call could finish talking, there was a rushing sound.

Reques watched in horror as water began to pour into the chambers with Andy and Fyra in them. They looked like they were terrified and in an instant they looked to be frantic.

“Bastard! Let them go!”

You did this to yourself...don't worry though I'll give you a clue...if you can stop the water flowing to the chambers without reactivating the waterfalls, you will at least be able to keep them from drowning...the rest is up to you though...pity you didn't just want to play...

Reques grit his teeth as he turned around and ran towards the chamber where he stopped his waterfall. He at least knew how to stop the first one. He made his way back to the canal and quickly took the ladle out of the chalice. This sealed off the first hole as water once again poured over his feet. He held the ladle tight as he made his way down the stairs, trying not to trip over the rushing water. Eventually he made his way back to the main chamber, seeing that the chambers were nearly half filled. Fyra and Andy seemed to be trying to find ways out as they swum around.

With no time to spare, Reques ran to the opening that Andy had gone through. He barreled up several flights of stairs until he came into a room that seemed to look like someone had lofted there. There was a soaked bed, a desk, and lots of wet papers scattered around. A similar contraption to what he had worked with sat towards the back of the room, a river running in a canal behind it. He ran over to it and pulled the two ladles sitting in opposing golden goblets with different water levels. The hole shut immediately as water began to flow into the room he was in. Two down, one to go. Reques knew he had no time to waste. He scrambled back down the flights of stone stairs and made his way into the chamber. The water level in the other chambers was now nearing the ceiling, Fyra and Andy both seemed to be struggling to stay above the rising water.

Reques couldn't hesitate as he ran up towards the final passageway that Fyra had gone through. Unlike the other two, this section of the Sanctuary snaked around a column, much like a tower, with no stairs, just a ramp of sorts. Reques bolted. His friends were counting on him to save them. Any other thoughts that clouded his mind were pushed aside as he finally reached the top of the tower and pushed the wooden door open.

The room was amazing. There seemed to be a giant glass funnel in the center. It pointed down to three tubes. It was currently resting on the rightmost tube with a stake holding it in place. Reques also noticed a drawing on the wall of the three tubes and

where they went. The middle tube went to the shrine as per the drawing, the right one went somewhere way below the shrine, and the left one seemed to go into the room where he was standing. Reques pushed the funnel to let the wooden stake fall to the ground. He let the funnel go which defaulted to the middle tube. Picking up the stake he moved the funnel to the far left tube. As he did, something metal fell out and onto the ground beside him. He put the stake into the slot to hold the funnel in place as water began to seep all over the ground out of a few ducts. Reques grabbed the metal object, which unshockingly turned out to be a ladle, and then ran back down the ramp. As he did, he slipped on the water and slid down the rest of the way until he had re-entered the chamber.

His eyes immediately went to the two projected screens and let out a sigh of relief seeing both of his comrades still with plenty of room to breathe.

Well done Caller, I'm impressed. You ready to play a game with me yet?

“What happens if we play?” Reques was now picking up on the hint that to get his friends back he was going to have to play this ridiculous game anyways.

It's a riddle...solve it and I'll give you a hint to release your friends from their chambers. Also, I become your Call.

“What happens if I don't solve it?” Reques folded his arms, there had to be a catch.

Nothing, but I'm sure your friends wouldn't appreciate living in water the rest of their lives... the Call chuckled, amused by his own joke.

“Tsk, fine, what's the riddle?” Reques shook his head. There was no more time to waste; the world was depending on him finishing this quest.

You are driving in a two person car, you have an umbrella in the trunk, and it's an extremely rainy day. You stop at a sign and see three people. An old lady waiting for a bus in the rain, a friend you owe a favor to, and the person of your dreams walking on the opposite sidewalk. What do you do?

“Aren't there options or a more definite question structure?” Reques looked desperate.

Unfortunately, no. This is all I am able to tell you...this is your test, not mine.

“And there is a right answer?”

Yup, yup!

Reques pondered the question for awhile. His first instinct was to pick up the person of his dreams as this would benefit him the most. However, the friend and the old lady would still be out in the rain with only one umbrella to give out. This couldn't be the answer... The next thought was to pick his friend up, this would repay the favor he owed him, but then the lady and the person of his dreams would still be out in the rain. That left the old lady. If he picked her up, she wouldn't have to wait in the rain for a bus, which was a nice thought, but still left the other two in the rain with only one umbrella...

This bothered him for awhile until a new thought entered his brain. An option he hadn't considered before. A smile soon crept across his lips as he looked at the Call.

"If I was in this situation, I would give the car to the friend who needs a favor. He can then pick up the old lady so she wouldn't have to wait in the rain anymore."

That takes care of two of the people, but what about you and the person of your dreams?

"If this person is really someone who I want to spend my life with ... " His smile turned into a grin, " ... then what is more romantic than a walk in the rain with an umbrella?"

Congratulations Caller! You have solved my riddle. Here is the hint I promised you. To obtain me as a Call and to rescue your friends, you must use the objects you obtained in each wing of this Sanctuary and use them to spell out the first letter of the first Key. Good luck!

"Wait...which Key?"

The first one...you goof...

Reques was about to protest, but then he thought about what that meant. The Prophecy talked about five Keys that would be essential to protecting the world...and the first one was...

Reques immediately took out the ladles that he had gathered and set them on the ground. He quickly set them up to form a 'K' for knowledge. As he did, they glowed in the floor. He felt the entire room shake and fell backwards. He watched as water drained from the chambers on the screens in front of him. Fyra and Andy soon sat on

the bare floor in their chambers panting and looking exhausted. Reques then felt the floor shift behind him, and looked as giant pits opened up. The screen then shifted as the two chambers lifted from below.

Reques looked back to see both of his comrades slowly come into view as they came up on platforms. The trio, exhausted and wet looked up at the Call, which now split back into the dragon Call and Void.

It has been awhile since a Caller with true knowledge has come here. You have the wisdom to save your friends and overcome any obstacles. Will you accept me, Titantor the dragon Call, as your Call?

“I do,” Reques said looking briefly back at his comrades, thankful they were both still ok.

With that both Calls dissolved into thousands of tiny anima particles and were absorbed into Reques. Fyra and Andy weakly stood up once the spectacle was over and the trio started to hobble out of the room.

Wait...

Reques turned around and felt Titantor leave him briefly as he once again hovered over the shrine.

You didn't tell me this was your last Call silly...as such you are now the Key of Wisdom in the event that the Prophecy of the Eldests comes true. To symbolize this final transformation, you must walk forward and take this staff. It'll not only have the power to increase your anima output, but also looks super duper awesome haha!

Reques walked towards the shrine as a bronze staff seemed to materialize out of thin air and hovered above the shrine. He took it and held it in his grasp, energy seemed to pulse through him.

This is the Eldest Staff. It will hopefully help you in times of great need. Now, I know the journey through this temple was taxing both emotionally and physically. Knowledge is not something to be taken lightly. You have lots of it! Cherish it. I will now transport you all out of this Sanctuary and heal you to full power in the process. Good luck with wherever this path takes you.

Titantor vanished as Reques felt a warm light bathe him. All of his clothes became instantly dry and his bruised back from the fall instantly felt better. He also felt

anima flow through him as the room became blurry. Before he disappeared completely, he looked back to see Andy and Fyra also bathed in light.

Chapter 32-Devil's Smile

Fyra saw the familiar entrance to the Sanctuary. She knew the time for thinking was done. Reques had successfully completed his Pilgrimage and was now the Key of Knowledge. Their window of opportunity was open and with a quick nod to the others they took off full speed. There was only one more path to choose from, and at the end they knew their final battle waited.

"I hope we aren't too late," Reques huffed as they turned the corner towards a giant, shell-like building.

"Well since you haven't become active yet, I'm guessing we still have time..." Andy pointed out.

"Less talking and more running!" Fyra yelled. "The more time we ponder, the better chance Eva has at activating that device!"

With that, the trio became quiet as they barreled towards the building ahead of them. The goal was clear, and the three were not about to back down from the challenge. They had come too far and had too much at stake to just stop now.

Andy was the first to reach the entrance to the shell-like building. The other two followed and headed inside. For awhile, they ran through rooms, all seeming as if they had contained puzzles, but had recently been solved. Every door was unlocked and eventually led them to a spiral staircase. They ran up the staircase, hearts racing as one. Fyra thought the building looked large, but the staircase made it seem ten times as big. After what seemed like hours, the group arrived at the top of the stairs in front of a giant door. There was a broken lock dangling from the handle indicating that someone else was already in the room ahead of them.

"Ready?" Fyra took a step forward and gave her friends a quick glance. Seeing the determination on their faces and their weapons ready she looked forward, taking out her daggers as she turned the door handle.

Pushing the door open with determination, Fyra looked at what appeared to be a balcony overlooking a large body of water. It was funny, Fyra had never heard anything about an underground ocean the entire time she had resided on Lorica. In fact, she really hadn't seen anything on their way to the building either. How could something like this exist?

Her gaze then shifted to two figures in front of them near a podium on the edge of the balcony. One was easily identifiable, the other...Fyra couldn't tell because the figure wore a mask.

"So we were followed, by Fyra the thief and her gang of miscreants," Eva Crane turned her head. "No matter, in mere moments I shall have the Devil's Smile and extract my revenge."

"Revenge?" Fyra's eyes narrowed.

"Oh didn't you know? I hate the Government as much as you and your gang of thieves do. I just choose to deal with them in a more civilized manner," A hint of maniacal laughter toned her voice.

"By activating something that could destroy the entire universe?"

"You really don't know what you are dealing with, do you?"

Fyra could feel her heart sink as her face portrayed frustration. She had a point...they had been merely going by the vague stories they heard. All they knew was that this device would devastate the universe.

"Let me explain a little about this 'Devil's Smile.' According to my research, this device will freeze time for as long as the person activating it so desires."

"Well that sounds harmless..." Reques gave a puzzled look as Eva scoffed.

"Yes indeed it does. However, what makes this dangerous is that the person who activates this device will be unfrozen, along with four other individuals. Who is chosen is completely up to Eldest Spirits. These five individuals will have the fate of a frozen world in their hands. They will be Gods...no one to stop them from doing whatever their hearts desire."

"So in other words, what you are saying is the level of devastation is dependent upon those who are unfrozen?" Fyra felt her fist ball up.

"Correct."

"What exactly do you intend to do once you activate it?" Fyra looked at their adversary with narrowed eyes.

"Simple. Extract revenge."

"The hell does that mean?"

“When I was a child, I lived in the slums on Aristes by the name of Elvira Ramores. My parents never had much money, but loved us, my two sisters and I, with all of their hearts. They worked hard to make sure we had food and a roof over our heads. Anyways, while I was playing hide and seek with my sisters one day, I witnessed my entire family be murdered by some psychopath right in front of my hiding spot. Through some stroke of luck he didn’t think to look where I was hiding, but I will never forget feeling helpless...” Fyra watched as Eva wiped a tear from her eyes. *How awful...*

“The worst part about the whole thing was that the Aristian Government did nothing about it! They just sent me off to a foster family and overlooked it. To them my family was nothing but ‘lower class casualties.’ To me though, it defined who I was. I swore to make things right as they should have been. For ten years I trained to learn the ways of a katana. Once I was confident enough, I found the man who murdered my family and gave him swift justice,” A smile curled across her lips.

“But that wasn’t enough. I wasn’t satisfied with just his death. I spent the next ten years figuring out why that was. I found myself becoming somewhat of a hero because I killed that murderer, and used this to become involved in politics under the alias Eva Crane. I did what I could to help establish more rights and advocate for lower class families. However, this didn’t quench my thirst either. Then I met him. It was the man who was in charge of the ‘investigation’ team that dismissed the case. His name was Cornelius LeMarcus and he was in charge of the Aristian Security Department. You might recognize his name yes? The Head Senator of Dolor. He was the reason the case was never pursued; why I had to take matters into my own hand. Though I couldn’t blame him entirely...he was just acting on behalf of a flawed system. It was because of this, I realized no matter what changes I proposed or how much I could advocate for the lower classes, until I could eliminate everyone who believed in this flawed system, nothing would ever change.

When I finally arrived at this conclusion, I was deported along with LeMaster and several other officials to start up a prototype government on Dolor. I knew the timing wasn’t right to extract my revenge, especially without a plan. For the last two years, I have been researching the Eldests. I found my answer about six months ago in

an ancient text held by the Dolorian Government, about the device that could help change the world. That's when I enlisted the help of my associate, Wave. I had to start a commotion in order to gain access to this area. So, a few assassinations and tax reforms were easily manipulated."

"You planned the entire city collapsing just so you could gain this object? What can you possibly hope to accomplish?" Andy grit his teeth and pulled out his sword.

"Destroying those who would continue to demean 'low class' citizens. You have seen the slums here...even though the Government claims to care about all citizens, separation still exists. No matter where you go or who you try to change, this will never go away. This is why I have to elim--"

"ENOUGH!" Fyra shouted. "Killing people doesn't solve the issue!"

"And what does? Stealing money to give 'low class' a bad name? HA!" Eva sneered as she then began to twist the top of the device. "You are no better than me! In fact, you have done nothing but hurt your cause from the moment you took your first dollar."

"I...I..." Fyra was taken aback. Had she really... "You know nothing about our cause!" She shook herself and glared back.

"Really? It shocks me that you haven't figured it out by now. I know exactly what you are about...the Douze Brigade," Eva stopped as she looked at the masked man to her left. "Wave, I think it's time you stop hiding, there will be no reason once this is activated."

"Yes master," the man slid his hands behind his mask and slowly pulled it over his face.

"N...no way..." Fyra turned white as a ghost. "Will? What...what is this?"

"Oh Fyra," he smirked, tossing the mask aside. "Never once in the three months we worked together did you suspect that 'p-poor little W...Will' was nothing but a spy."

"I...I trusted you..."

"Which is exactly why you never suspected me."

"Why Will?" Fyra's knives dropped as she fell to her knees.

“I had to see if your group was someone that Eva could use in her plan for a New Government; an army of sorts. Unfortunately, I was disappointed that you were nothing but thieves who happened to have a decent technician. So Eva had me attempt to dispose of you. It almost worked, except you escaped; thanks to Johnny.”

“Then it was you who...”

“Who tipped the Dolorian Government? Of course. It was simple, rather than accidentally blow my cover I decided to escape and let the authorities dispose of you during our last operation. I forgot though, you are too stubborn to let yourself die that easily.”

“Will...your family,” Fyra stood up, gathering her wits as she took a step towards this traitor. “You told me your family died because of the government! Isn’t that why you wanted to see change?!”

“Yes that much was true,” He pulled a scythe out, seeing her approach him. “However, your group goes about it the wrong way. There was no chance for me to ever match up Eva’s ideals to yours.”

“Because killing people is never the solution!” Fyra conjured up a fireball in her hand.

“Which is why you will never understand our cause,” Will held up a hand as three black flames appeared in front of him. From the flames, three doppelgangers appeared, all pulling out scythes. “Enough talk.”

Fyra watched as her companions readied their weapons, Reques Calling Titantor into battle. With a quick head nod, she turned back and ran towards the shadow clone in front of her. Though the scythe was larger than her knives, Fyra easily countered the weapon with some pressure adjustments she put on her hits. She slashed the shadow clone which winced, but with a burst of dark flame, it reconstructed as if it never was hit.

“Son of a bitch...” Fyra tried again, with the same result. “Hey do you guys have any idea how to beat these things?”

“Working on it!” Reques called out as Fyra heard Titantor hiss followed by the rush of water. Fyra watched as the shadow clone approached her. *Will is just toying with*

us... The realization hit Fyra like a bullet. The three of them would waste their energy on these clones and when the time was right, he would take them out one by one.

“Reques! Can you distract this clone? I have an idea!” She called to her companion.

“Got it!” Reques appeared in front of her as he began to throw ice shards at the clone.

Fyra used this to get past. Soon, she stood face to face with Will.

“So, we meet again...a reunion of the failed Douze Brigade,” Will laughed.

“Wrong, I’m the last member left. You are just a spineless traitor who used us in your stupid plot,” She balled her fist around her knife.

“Still sore about that huh? Guess it can’t be helped. For what it’s worth, I don’t think you were worthless...just the rest of your team. You have potential...why not help us change the world?”

“I guess you don’t know anything about me or what the potential of the Douze Brigade was. Because of you, Johnny’s gone. Sure he was a bit of a pervert sometimes, but he cared about others. More than you will ever know,” She glared at him.

“So be it. Let’s end this.” He held out his scythe.

“Yes, let’s,” Fyra replied holding her knives in front of her. The next few events were a bit of a blur for Fyra. One moment, the scythe was flying at her, she somehow dodged it, and began running towards Will. Before she could land a hit, she heard a whirring sound behind her and narrowly avoided a back hit by the rebounding weapon by flipping backwards over it. This put her exactly where she started. It was strange, trying to fight this new Will. He was unlike anything she had ever dealt with. He was not the scared, stuttering man who had disappeared in a freak accident. He was an assassin, in every sense of the word. She needed to be careful.

“Over analyzing the situation as always?” Will chuckled as he then threw the scythe at her again. Remembering the timing of the attack, she positioned herself to knock the blade out of the air. She grinned as Will looked baffled. Running forward, she aimed for his neck, but she stopped and jumped back. It was more complicated than she had imagined. The scythe was being controlled by a string of sorts. Actually, there were several strings that seemed that consisted of animaic power.

That was how he was controlling his shadow puppets. Fyra quickly formulated a plan. Running to take the first shot, she narrowly avoided the scythe and quickly cut the thin string. There was a clanging noise as it shattered and the weapon fell to the ground. She similarly cut the strings for the puppets as she continued forward. Though it appeared the assassin was about to reconnect the strings, Fyra anticipated this and threw a knife, distracting him long enough for her to put her other knife against his neck.

“Not bad at all...” Will chuckled, looking as if he was admitting defeat.

Fyra held him until Andy arrived and took her place. She then went past, quickly picking up her knife and ran towards Eva. This would all be over soon.

“Too late...” as if reading her mind, Eva held up a now glowing device.

Fyra tried to throw a knife to cut it out of her hand, but a wave of anima erupted from the device. It stopped the knife in its tracks. Fyra could only watch in horror as the light soon consumed her as well, in the process, freezing all of her thoughts and causing her to drift into darkness.

Chapter 33-Trials

...the hell? Andy could feel his fingers slowly curl as he tried to move his body. The entire world around him was a white, endless abyss. He felt like he was floating as feeling began to return to his legs. How long had he been like this? The last thing he remembered was fighting that shadow warrior and hearing the Senator laughing. Once he gained all sensation in his body he attempted to stand up.

Stand up? Aren't I floating? Andy was confused as his feet touched some invisible surface. He tapped it with his toes a few times, unable to determine what exactly he was standing on. It wasn't glass, but didn't feel like metal either. He put his other foot down and stood up. Andy was past the point of surprise as he began to wander around. Something didn't make sense to him though as he walked aimlessly. Wasn't he supposed to freeze after the device was activated? If that was the case then why was he clearly moving?

And'thieth Charal.

"Wh...who said that?" Andy pulled out his sword and readied himself to fight.

You should know already.

"Well I don't so start talking...wherever you are," He grit his teeth. He couldn't recognize the voice at all.

My name is Tomag'devanti Charal...you once referred to me as father.

"F...father?" Andy could feel energy behind him and turned to see the ghostly image of his father appearing.

You have grown, my son. Unfortunately you still resemble your mother too much. As such you will never become the warrior to lead the people of U'Roga to the Golden Age I desired. Andy could only watch as his father then grabbed a large double-edged lance that generated above his head. Before he could react, the other Rogan rushed at him.

"What are you doing?!" Andy blocked the first strike with Giganta and jumped back to avoid the second strike. His father was fast and dangerous.

I'm going to stop you before you embarrass the Charal name with your impure blood. Tomag roared as he let out a large, yellow aura.

“What did you just do?” Andy felt the aura wash over him, feeling like being run over by an iron blanket.

In order for you to be a true Rogan, you need to learn to fight without Anima. Anima is for the weak that have no other weapon. Andy cursed as he pulled out Satyr.

“This makes no sense! For as long as I remember, you always told me that I should not be ashamed of this mixed blood...that I could be strong without being a full-fledged Rogan. What has changed?”

You thought I was serious? Hah! I merely said that in the slight hope that it would give you the confidence to be the best warrior in the village and train harder. Too bad I was greatly mistaken on those hopes. You are weaker than ever! Tomag charged again, doing a front flip into the air and bringing his lance down.

Andy crossed his blades and countered the blow, holding his father back for a few moments. As he pushed against the gargantuan force, his legs shook. *Tomag is strong, what if he is right?* He yelled and pulled his blades apart, the force knocking his father back. As Tomag fell back, the other end of his blade came up, searing Andy along his arm. Andy screamed in pain, dropping Giganta to try to apply pressure to the wound.

Pathetic...didn't even see that attack coming. His father spat and began to spin the blade rapidly. Andy let go of his arm and struggled to hold Giganta again. There was no time to waste on recovering. If he couldn't get an advantage soon, his father would tear him to shreds.

Andy swiped again at his Father, missing and feeling a sharp pain in his side from the recoil. “God...” He grit and sent a punch in frustration. Ironically this was the first hit that connected as his Father fell down. Andy attempted to use this as a distraction as he leapt up with Satyr, intending to land a blow, but just before impact, his Father vanished, knocking him down from his right side with his leg.

Falling for a trap...typical of a failure. His Father walked over.

It was no use, no matter what he did or how far ahead he thought, Andy knew he couldn't beat Tomag in this state. He stood up and dropped his sword looking straight into his Father's eyes.

What are you doing? You can't possibly hope to beat me just standing there!

Tomag laughed and continued to approach.

"I can't possibly hope to beat you. And I do not wish to. Instead I am going to stand my ground and face you like a Rogan," with resolve, Andy stood his ground.

Tomag pointed his lance up, the tip barely touching his son's forehead. As he saw the unwavering determination in his son's eyes, his expression softened as he set his weapon down. *You are my son. You have become the Key of Strength. Though you were greatly outmatched in physical strength, you have kept both the integrity of a Rogan, and the resolve of a Human. You are true to your word and always a loyal friend to your companions. Congratulations. As my final gift to you, I will now increase your strength to that of a full Rogan. This shall allow you to wield both of your swords at the same time...farewell my son. I'm glad I was able to do this one last thing for you...*

Andy felt a warm glow in his arm and leg muscles. This immediately turned painful as they tightened. Andy watched as his father disappeared and faded into a painful, white unconsciousness.

###

Will had been expecting this. Eva activated the device, and now the Eldests were searching for the most worthy successors to the five Keys. It was as her research had suggested. All Will could do was to wait it out.

Being alone in a white void with no one around really allowed him to reflect on how he ended up as Eva's Assassin. He remembered the first time he met her, his savior. It had been that man, John Satrun, the murderer who preyed upon the low class citizens of Aristes. Will could still remember his mother crying out for him as the man tore her apart, limb by limb, while he sat bound and gagged to a chair in the kitchen. He could feel his father's warm blood pouring onto his face as he tried to protect his son after just coming home from work. John's maniacal laughter rang out and he held his knife above Will's head. Will felt his tears running down his cheek as all hope faded away.

But Will could also remember as that katana ran its course through John's evil head. He saw the white of the murder's eyes as the knife fell to the floor and his body

crumbled to the side. And then Will saw her, Eva Crane, as she spat on the murderer's body and proceeded to free Will from his bonds. After a shaky and tearful hug, she took Will under her wing and he became her apprentice. Training by night and working by day, he did everything to make sure he grew strong to one day repay Eva for rescuing him. Eventually it paid off; he got stronger over time and soon became a bodyguard and assassin for her, doing everything she asked. He never questioned her or her motives, for he believed in everything she stood for. It was a life he was content to live; to serve the woman that had saved him.

Which is precisely why you have already passed your test.

“Who said that?” Will took out his scythe and looked around. Eventually his eyes rested onto a ghostly figure. This figure was not human, it had large hands, a small head, a red robe, and pale skin. It was something he had only ever heard legends talk about.

I am the spirit of an Eldest. I am here to make you the Key of Loyalty. A shining amber light shimmered as a small stone appeared in Will's hand. Though many humans follow their leaders, their parents, and sometimes even their influential friends, at this point in time, I have judged your devotion to Eva Crane to be the most selfless. For this reason, you have been chosen to become the Key of Loyalty.

Will watched in amazement as the stone lifted out of his hand and hovered in front of him. The stone then glowed again and with an unimaginable speed shot into his heart. Will keeled over as he grabbed his chest. Pain erupted in waves. He could feel something changing inside him as he cried out in agony. With one more pulse, Will felt the white in his surroundings overtake him.

###

“What does that mean?” Reques looked up in curiosity. He awoke, alone, in this strange world. After sometime his Calls began to become restless. After calling them, they had informed him that he was to become the Key of Wisdom.

SINCE YOU COMPLETED YOUR PILGRIMAGE, ACCORDING TO ELDEST PROPHECY, YOU ARE TO BECOME THE KEY OF WISDOM, Brolen boomed.

“That really didn’t answer my question...” Reques raised an eyebrow becoming even more confused.

What the big oaf means to say is that you are unfrozen in a frozen world because you became the Key of Wisdom after obtaining Mr. Water Snake over there, Jazmyne had her hand on her hip as she looked at the Caller.

“What exactly do I have to do?”

Reques, all you have to do is admit and feel the power you already have, this will complete your test. If you are truly the Key of Wisdom, the Eldests will acknowledge you and give you the...Final Call, Mizara hovered overhead as her body crackled with lightning.

“Alright...here goes nothing,” Reques shook his head and faced his Calls. Looking from Jazmyne, to Mizara, to Brolen, to Void, to Titantor, and finally to Frey, it dawned on him the incredible journey he had been a part of thus far. He hadn’t really been given much time to reflect on how far he had come or how much he had learned. Somehow, this one moment of reflection strengthened his resolve.

“I have become the Key of Wisdom as many Callers before me. I have completed my pilgrimage and become stronger because of it,” he felt silly stating something he thought was obvious already, but as he did, a halo of light encircled his head, glowing blue.

Congratulations Reques. I never doubted you would reach this stage. I think you have the power to become whatever you desire, Frey floated in front of him as he began to glow a deep blue. I have traveled with you on your entire journey and I can say with all honesty that you are ready to finally become the Key of Wisdom. In order to do that, I will now become Jodega, the ultimate Call, to show your growth in this Pilgrimage. Are you ready to accept this?

“I am,” Reques stood his ground. The Caller watched in awe as Frey became encased in light and his form changed. He grew taller and wider, the light expanding into a new form. Reques shielded his eyes with his hand as one final brilliant flash exploded in front of him. He removed his hand once the light dimmed. Where Frey had been, a majestic figure now stood tall. It resembled a lion with a purple robe. It was a regal figure to behold.

Reques, I am Jodega. It has been awhile since I was last needed in this world. You have already chosen to accept me so I will not keep you waiting any longer.

Reques felt a warm glow as Jodega entered him. Once he had obtained Jodega, Reques felt the halo around his head tighten. He grit his teeth and tried to pry it off, but the tightening continued. Reques fell to the ground as the halo seemed to rip right through his skull. Within a matter of seconds, the pain caused him to black out.

###

“This is getting to be a bore,” Eva rolled her eyes as she sliced open another ghostly figure with her katana. This had been going on for awhile now. She was told by an Eldest Spirit she needed to show that she could deliver true justice. After that, ghosts of Senators and Government figures had appeared in front of her and come at her with weapons. This prompted her to attack without hesitation.

I'm still not entirely convinced you are the Key of Justice. So far all you have been doing is fighting, what is your cause?

“To provide payback!” Eva sliced through another mace-wielding Senator.

For what?

“For...for...” Eva struggled for a second. She knew she was fighting for a cause, but it seemed to evade her mind. She thought harder and took a second to close her eyes and refocus. All of a sudden, a girl stood in front of her. She thought she could recognize the face, but couldn't quite place where she had seen it before. Just as Eva was about to say something, the girl ran away in terror. Eva was confused as a larger ghostlike figure ran past. A ghost she easily recognized. He held a giant knife as he chased the other spirit.

Rage boiled within Eva as she raised her katana. With a leap and quick thrust, she stabbed the ghost of John Satrun. The girl looked back with tears streaming down her eyes...

Thank you sister.

“Sister?” Eva hadn't heard that word in a long time. *Wait was this...* Eva's eyes lit up as they began to well up with water. “Is that...you Sarah?”

“Hey Vi,” the girl smiled and looked right at Eva.

“I haven’t been called that in so long,” Eva took a heavy sigh. This whole situation was impossible.

“But that’s your name, Elvira Ramores. Isn’t it?” She tilted her head sideways.

“I go by a different name now,” Eva bowed her head for a moment.

“Why can’t you be both?”

“What?”

“You heard me. Eva may have given you your connections and katana, but it was because of Elvira that you got your drive and passion.”

Eva became silent as she lost herself in thought. *Drive and passion...*

“How did you feel when you saw that murderer just now?”

“I don’t know I just...I had to protect whomever he was attacking, no matter the cost.”

“How does this apply to what you are doing now?”

“I...I don’t know...”

“What is justice?”

“It’s...knowing how to judge what is right from what is wrong...”

“Exactly, now put it all together. You are my big sis! I know you can do it!”

Eva thought for a bit, how did her families’ murder, justice, and passion all fit together? As she stood there, it finally hit her. She remembered exactly why she was fighting now, what had driven her to this point. Somehow, along the way she had lost her sense of direction. But it had returned.

“I’m doing all of this for the sake of creating a world where no one has to go through what I did. A world where everyone is judged fairly and not by how much they own...”

“Congratulations big sis! And now that you have remembered it, I will do this last thing to help you accomplish your goal,” Sarah then evaporated into a red ball of light. The ball then floated down into her left hand. Eva felt compelled to open her palm as the light then spread out into the shape of a katana.

The minute you activated the Devil’s smile, you were destined to be one of the five Keys. The fact that you are the Key of Loyalty does not surprise me. I just hope I

was able to help refocus your drive and passion to fully embrace this responsibility big sis. Good luck!

Eva silently thanked Sarah as she gripped the blade. As she did she howled in pain. The blade was so hot that her whole body felt like it was on fire. She tried to let go, but found her hand stuck. Nothing she did could pry this blade from her hand. With one last attempt, the pain overcame her senses and she slipped into unconsciousness.

###

Fyra awoke with a start. *Where am I?* She stood up and began looking around. There was nothing around her as far as she could see.

“Hello?” She called out. For awhile longer she wandered around.

Fyra Marang.

“Goddamnit who said that?! What the hell is going on?” She threw her hands up in frustration.

I’m so glad to finally meet you.

“Finally?” Okay this isn’t funny! Who are you?” She pulled out one of her knives and continued to look around.

Why Fyra, I am your ancestor, of course!

“My...what?” She stumbled back a few steps as a ghostly figure appeared in front of her. He looked odd. She noted that he was bald and looked bizarre. His hands looked like long flippers, his face had a beak of sorts, and a brown robe covered the rest of his body. How in any damn way was she related to...this?

Your father—

“What about that lowlife piece of shit?!” Fyra turned away from the figure and folded her arms, wanting nothing more to do with this conversation.

Your father is my descendant...making you also my—

“Don’t say it! I want nothing to do with him! Hear me?!” Fyra spat at the figure, spinning around with hatred in her eyes.

Whether or not you choose to accept him as your father, you are my descendant. And because of this I have to warn you to be careful.

“You keep calling me your descendant. What in the hell does that mean?”

It means you have Eldest blood running through your body. Have you ever noticed odd times when your Anima was able to perform at intense levels or become substantially greater than you can control?

“What kind of absurd question is—“ before Fyra could finish her question, she vaguely remembered her flight through the asteroid while avoiding the Rogan Pirates. She remembered that intense power she was unable to contain.

No regular human could do that...and you know it, don't you? Enough about that, I have to warn you. Be careful of overusing your Anima abilities. Terrible consequences await those who do.

“What does that mean?”

It's too terrible to say...can you promise me this?

“I...” Fyra looked at her hands. Could these really be related to the Eldests? “I guess I have to...” She looked back up at her ancestor.

Good. You have been chosen as the Key of Bravery. You have fought for the down trodden and challenged those who make decisions. I can think of no one else with a worthier cause to earn this honor. I now pass this on to you, my descendent. Please protect this universe with your life.

Fyra nodded as two red spheres of light appeared above her hands. They slowly entered the palms as she screamed in pain. It felt like someone forcing a giant steel rod into an otherwise impenetrable skin surface. With blistering pain Fyra fell to her knees. The agony soon became too much as her mind closed in a blinding, white light.

Chapter 34-Battle for Time

It was odd seeing everything and everyone frozen in place. Fyra cautiously wandered around People and Rogans in mid fight, doing what she could not to accidentally bump into anything. She had awoken a few moments ago, lying in the middle of street just outside of the Government Building. She wasn't sure what to do now, however, as she couldn't find anything else that wasn't already frozen. The Eldests hadn't really been helpful in terms of telling her what to do. That would have been nicer than just giving her implanted red jewels on her hands and wishing her well.

For what seemed like hours, she continued to stumble around the frozen bodies. Earlier she accidentally walked into a frozen man. He crumpled like a stone statue in front of her and his body made an awful shattering sound. It had scared her a bit and had made her aware just how much power she had in this world. Somewhere around, Eva and three other humans did as well. She had to reach them before they caused terrible destruction.

Fyra felt cold in this world, which was weird since she couldn't feel anything except the ground beneath her. There was no wind, no noise, no smells, nothing. She figured that if she dropped a pen, it would be the only thing she heard. *Wait a second...* As Fyra passed by the front of the Government Building again, she heard something. Her eyes immediately shifted to the door. It sounded like a laugh. Not just any laugh, it was a laugh with a maniacal purpose. Fyra reached for the hilt of her knife and pushed the double glass doors open.

She cautiously made her way inside and listened again making sure the doors shut slowly, as to not alert whoever else was here with her. After a second or two, she heard that awful sound of another body shattering. It was similar to the one she had heard earlier. Her heart raced as she ran towards a room down the hall and pushed the doors open with full force.

"I see you finally decided to come enjoy the spectacle," the laugh cackled as Fyra's eyes fell onto the sight of Eva standing on top of a platform in the center of the room which had rows of auditorium seats facing down towards the center like a crater.

"Eva! What the hell is going on?! Where are we?"

“Don’t you see? This is the power of the Devil’s Smile!” She turned to face one of the frozen Senators and proceeded to slice him into pieces with one of her katanas. *Wait katanas?* Didn’t she only have one before? The Senator’s body shattered as Fyra angrily looked at her enemy.

“This is wrong Eva!”

“You are the one who is wrong! With this device I can fix the problems of this world. Create a new world order!” She jumped off of the platform and began to walk towards another frozen Senator.

“I can’t let you do that,” Fyra pulled her daggers out as she charged towards Eva.

“Do you mean to try and stop me?” Eva turned and moments before Fyra was about to strike she blocked the attack with her katanas.

“Damn right!” Fyra growled and kicked one of the blades away, trying to take a slice with her knife. A strong gust of wind pushed Fyra backwards as she slammed into the platform just behind her. She stood up after a second to shake off the blow and watched as wind swirled around Eva.

“You thought you were the only one with powers of the Anima?” She looked back as wind whipped through the auditorium, shattering the dozen or so frozen Senators in the room. “Be warned my dear, I will create this world as I see fit. We cannot have anyone who would judge anyone else and make them less. That’s how it is. If you oppose me,” Eva shot her a look, of pure intensity. “I’ll kill you too.” Another strong gust caused Fyra to shield her eyes. Once the gale of wind had passed, Eva was gone.

Fyra ran outside, back into the street. The world had once again fallen silent. This entire situation was mad. How was she supposed to stop someone who was impossible to locate. She wandered around for awhile, until she once again heard the familiar shattering sound. She ran off towards Center Park where the sound came from. As she arrived, she saw Eva striking down Dolorian Security Guards with one of her katanas and laughing maniacally.

“Stop right now!”

“But why? When I’m finally getting the revenge I have waited years to get?”

“Because it isn’t right!”

Eva stopped as she approached Fyra.

“I believe the matter of what is right and what is wrong is for the Key of Justice to decide. Wouldn’t you agree?”

“Not when their version of right and wrong is skewed,” Fyra held her daggers up, ready for anything Eva could throw at her.

“I warned you not to get in my way,” Eva scowled, grabbing the hilt of her katana.

“I listened. And that’s why I’m here,” Fyra stared her adversary down with narrowed eyes.

“Alright, let’s get this over with so I can go back to fixing this broken world,” Eva sighed and proceeded to unsheathe her second katana.

“Master don’t trouble yourself,” Will appeared in front of Eva, holding his scythe in front of him.

“So you were chosen as a Key also?” Eva looked delighted as she turned from the pair. “He will keep you busy enough—“

“Not so fast!” A bolt of lightning stopped Eva in her tracks.

Fyra turned around, hearing the familiar voice, her eyes lit up as both Andy and Reques appeared behind her.

“What, you think we would just leave you to take on these two yourself? As if we would trust a common thief with that much responsibility,” Reques chuckled as the pair ran to join their comrade.

“So the Five Keys of Prophecy have reunited,” Eva turned around and walked back beside Will. “I think I’ve changed my mind. With our combined strength there is no way they will win and once they are gone, nothing will stop us.”

“I couldn’t agree more,” Will put two fingers to his lips as three shadow clones appeared in front of him from the familiar black flames.

“Reques, Andy, I’m going for Eva, can you guys handle Will?” Fyra knew it would come to this.

“Yeah,” The pair nodded simultaneously.

Fyra looked at them with grateful eyes. “Thank you,” She whispered as she began to focus her fire Anima into her daggers. She knew this battle would take every ounce of strength she could muster.

Fyra lunged towards Eva and thrust her right dagger. Eva parried the blow with one of her blades and immediately thrust up with her other. Fyra had to push against it with her second dagger and leap backwards. As she flew through the air, she felt a bit of pain erupt from her side. She landed on the ground and held her hand on her gash. Fyra hadn’t had time to see Eva’s other katana catch her on the way back. She would have to be more careful.

“Is that all you’ve got?” Eva cackled. “This is going to be even easier than I thought.” She began to swing her blades as she approached Fyra.

Crap, Fyra knew what was coming as she began to conjure a fireball. This was the same familiar attack that Eva had used back in the Government Building. In a matter of moments, if Fyra wasn’t ready, she knew she would be blown to bits. She watched as Eva then stopped and closed her eyes. With this momentary stop, Fyra fired off two fireballs. The impact was successful and Eva’s attack was interrupted.

“What was that?” She shook off the attack and gave Fyra a crazed look. “An attack like that wouldn’t even hurt a rat.” She ran forward with an intense speed.

Fyra gasped and quickly composed herself, countering the hit by one of the katanas. She jumped upwards to avoid being hit by another attack. She thrust her dagger, but found it to be countered by another katana. *I’ve trained so hard, why in the heck can’t I even land a hit on her?* Fyra began to angrily slash at her opponent.

“I’m growing tired of this,” Eva yawned as she knocked Fyra backwards with a gale.

Fyra grunted as her body was flung into a nearby building. She could feel one of her ribs crack as she yelped and struggled back to her feet. This battle was ending faster than she had anticipated. She needed to step up her game. Fyra held out her hands as two fire whips appeared. Pain erupted from her side, but she pushed through it as she approached Eva. She flicked one whip as several plumes of flame shot towards Eva.

Eva laughed and merely cut the plumes. However, while she did, Fyra ran forward, knocking the blade down with one whip, and striking her abdomen with the

other, resolve burned in her eyes. Fyra flipped back and landed on the ground, giving Eva a determined look.

“I see you are finally getting serious,” Eva cracked her neck. She tore off her business suit top and tossed it aside. She winced a bit as she quickly patted out the flames on her shirt and looked at the burn marks. “Maybe you will present some form of challenge after all.” Eva laughed again as a strong breeze began to blow.

Fyra braced herself for an attack as Eva raised one of her arms. She saw the attack coming as the wind continued to pick up speed. Dust was beginning to blow around her face. Eva was preparing to capture her in a make shift tornado. Fyra quickly jumped back. To her dismay, the slowly growing column of wind and dust followed her and was now tearing at the hem of her pants. She needed to act quickly. Fyra focused her energy as she began to create a fire barrier.

Eva continued to tighten the power of the wind funnel she had summoned with her anima. It wouldn't take long before the pressure and force of her attack would rip her opponent to shreds. It had been awhile since she had used this move. She wanted to make sure nothing would stand in her way for her final revenge; not Head Senator LeMarcus, not John Satrun, and certainly not this petty thief. Eva let the thoughts swirl in her head like the dust around her assuredly dead opponent. The dust kept constricting and becoming tighter. Eva then clenched her fist as the wind and sand then caved in on itself and exploded. She grinned, sure that this would be the end of this sad battle. As the dust cleared though, her eyes widened.

Fyra could feel the flames exhaust as the dust cleared around her. She looked up at Eva who looked baffled. It had worked to create a fire shield around her, but the whole ordeal had sapped a lot of her energy reserves. She had needed to manipulate the shield to also help push the wind and dust away so that it didn't hurt her. On top of an already taxing battle physically, she knew her limit was coming up.

“Impossible...” Eva pulled out her katanas and with a scowl rushed towards the thief.

Fyra countered the attack easily. She had the upper hand for the moment. Surviving this attack wasn't easy; she could see it in the Senator's eyes. This had unnerved her. Fyra hoped this would exhaust her opponent's strength enough for her to

gain control of the battle. She continued to parry the blows with her daggers as Eva wildly swung. After a few minutes, the angry Senator jumped back. Fyra used this momentary lapse in the attack to take a swing. As she did, a cool grin washed over Eva's otherwise petrified lips.

In a painful flash, Fyra felt her side erupt in agonizing pain which caused her to fall to the ground. She held the open wound as blood spilled out. In combination with the broken rib just above the wound, Fyra could hardly keep from screaming as she grit her teeth. Tears flowed out of her eyes and she began to feel lightheaded.

"You let your guard down," Eva stood over her head. "You honestly thought I didn't see the pain you were trying to hide? You thought I was naïve enough to waste all my energy in an all-out attack? Hah! Don't make me laugh." She took one of her katana and lifted it about Fyra's head. "You know why you are about to die? It's because you didn't believe in what you were fighting for. My resolve to extract revenge was greater. Farewell, thief."

Not strong enough? Fyra pondered this thought for awhile as she looked over. She could see Reques and Andy fighting Will. With them was a giant Lionlike Spirit. The trio seemed to be fighting hard; Will did not look like he had the upper hand. They had gotten stronger through their trials. Fyra could see it. Fyra remembered the reason she wanted to go on this quest. She wanted to help expose the Government for their wrongdoings and help get rights for the lower class. Her drive was to see that everyone had a future. She had never been a thief for joy or personal gain. She wanted to give back to a population no one else cared about. Although she knew Andy and Reques had their own reasons for being on this quest, the group had come to understand one another. Their reasons had intertwined and become one. They were fighting for the same thing, and seeing her comrades fight hard gave Fyra strength. Fyra felt power surge within her whole body as an intense heat overcame her. With a burst of energy, Fyra yelled to the sky.

Eva took a few steps back. The sudden burst of energy had knocked her off balance. She watched helplessly as Fyra's whole body became incased in flames. The thief yelled as energy continued to pour out. Fire bursts erupted from her body as she stood up. How had this common thief gone from near death to an insane level of Anima

in mere seconds? She knew she would need to be on the defensive until she could accurately gain Intel on how powerful her opponent had become.

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The creature felt hot. Very hot. Though for some reason, it wasn't unbearable like she had imagined. She could see flames dancing around her hands, around her body. She also felt powerful, like nothing could stop her. Looking ahead some small human with swords looked frightened. With good reason.

With a loud howl, the creature ran forward, swiping the blades away. Though this other human tried to resist with wind anima, the creature cackled as the intense wind only made her flames stronger. The human cried out as between the flame strikes by the creature's claws, and being burned by the intense flames, it was obvious the battle was over. Just as the creature was about to deliver a final blow through the head, there was a slight prick to her side.

She tilted her head in an odd angle to look at a man holding a scythe. Was this a futile effort to save the pathetic human she was about to extinguish the life from? *All humans are pathetic. They are weak. They are easily defeated. They are imperfect. Most of all, the sound of their bones cracking as they die is intoxicating.*

The creature laughed hysterically as she turned from her first victim and made her way over to the next. Instead of her brutal onslaught from before, the creature instead held out its claws as flames from around its body centered near the long nails. They erupted in columns of flame and shot through the man with the scythe. He fell back, not quite dead yet, but close.

"Fyra! Stop!" As the creature raised its claw and was about to rush forward, an annoying human voice from the left stopped her. She looked over and saw a human and a green being she did not recognize. She also saw a familiar figure to the left of the human.

"Jodega, long time no see," She cackled at the sight. It wasn't often she saw another Roused Eldest.

"So you have finally been Roused have you Astrifiammante?" Jodega stepped out in front of the human and the other being.

“Please, let’s not use our formal names. Just call me Astra,” The creature smiled with rows of jagged teeth.

“What are you talking about Jodega? What does it mean to be ‘Roused’?”
Reques looked up to his call.

“Little one, do you ever wonder how Eldest spirits remain in sanctuaries to be Called? Isn’t it also funny how we do not resemble the Eldests of old?”

“I guess...”

“There is a grave reason why our race went extinct. Something we were unable to control. Whenever an Eldest is forced or chooses to exert energy beyond what it is normally capable of, they lose their form and become a devastating creature. This creature is driven by one goal, to kill all humans. The only way the Eldests were ever successfully able to calm these Roused Beings was to build a Sanctuary and Seal their powers. This is why Callers are able to obtain a small fragment of their power. I was the last Eldest to be Roused, until Astra, and was sealed away, into the Devil’s Smile. It was a plan concocted by the Eldests to try and destroy the human race before they, in turn, were destroyed. However, it almost completely wiped them out and as a result they created the Keys to pass on to the humans to prevent the day the object was ever used. They did this by sealing their energy in a mass suicide, known as the Animaic Grode, into five objects. Until now, I thought all of the Eldests were dead...”

“This means that Fyra is an Eldest? But she looks nothing like what the books described.”

“That is because she most likely is mostly human. Any Eldest to survive or not take part in the Animaic Grode most likely had to breed with humans with the scarce number of the population left.”

“So Fyra...”

“Was one of those descendants, yes,” Jodega stood in front of Astra.

“Who is Astra?”

“We Eldests have a name chosen for us at birth by Anima. Only other beings completely composed of Anima would be able to know those true names.”

“Enough of this petty talk Jode! I take it we are going to fight. Let’s get it over with so I can go kill some more things!” Astra gleefully began to hop from foot to foot in anticipation.

“Reques, most likely Astra is too powerful for me to defeat, you need to prepare to seal her. In other words, find an object to seal her away in and a large place to draw her in!”

“Wait I thought only Eldests could seal Roused Beings.”

“You are able to Call, correct?”

“Well, yeah...”

“This means you can access a small portion of the Calls sealed in Sanctuaries. Therefore, you should be able to seal Calls into objects.”

“I see. Please do your best then. Andy! Let’s go!”

Astra watched as the green being and the human ran off. “You intend to seal me do you? It’s going to be impossible once I kill that human and am invincible in a frozen world.” She laughed.

“To get to that human you will need to get through me first,” Jodega stood his ground as a giant sword appeared in his claw as he looked ready to fight.

“In your Called state? This should be easy,” she cackled and rushed forward as she swiped with her flaming claws. Each attack was met with sparks as they hit the steel of the sword. She leapt back after a few seconds and then shot flame columns from her claws.

Jodega roared as loud as he could when he saw the flame columns. The energy from the roar countered the columns and held them in place until the attack ended.

“Not bad for a Called Being. Your reputation precedes you Jode,” She grinned as she then slammed her claws into the ground, the ground began to shake as two equally sized cracks appeared in the ground and began to snake their way towards Jodega.

The Lion Call jumped backwards in an attempt to avoid the attack, but found the speed of the snaking cracks to increase with each movement. With one last ditch effort, he jumped onto the roof of a nearby building. However, the cracks went into the

building and with a rumble, sent a flame column up, hitting Jodega's left arm. The force knocked him to the ground just to the left of the building.

"So the legendary King of Calls has some weaknesses after all, huh?" Astra cackled as she gloatingly strode towards the Call. As she walked, the flames from her body seemed to increase. They spread and melted several of the frozen Rogans and Humans into piles of ashes.

Jodega stood up, shrugging off the pain as he looked at the approaching Roused Being. Had he once been like this? So drunk with Anima that he would have done anything to destroy everything? Though he couldn't remember his arousal, he had heard stories from other Calls about it. Something about becoming confined to an object, being sealed away, forced a Call to lie dormant. This state of being somehow rid themselves of the desire for destruction. It left them helpless, only taking a personality when summoned by a Caller.

"I don't know what you are referring to," Jodega cracked his neck and defensively stood.

"Guess I will have to show you won't I?" Astra howled as she then rushed forward, slicing at Jodega with her claws.

Jodega parried each blow, trying to find a way to push past this onslaught. For some reason, Astra didn't seem to be weakening one bit; a constant flurry of untamed and uncapped Anima. Jodega did what he could in order to keep up with the attack, but eventually found himself pushed against a wall. With one final effort, he managed to throw the Roused Being off of him and take several swipes with his blade, slightly catching Astra's left arm on one of the recoiling motions.

"Good job King of Calls," She licked the wound and laughed again, "managed to get one minor hit on me. Oh, but look at you." Her tone suddenly switched as if she was talking to an infant. "You look so tired, does little Jodega need a nap?" She cackled.

Jodega took a few heavy breaths. It was true, something about her energy was sucking his away, or had this being merely exhausted the reserves of energy he had?

"I tire of this battle..." Astra looked bored as she yawned and pointed a finger in Jodega's direction.

The Lion Call prepared to deflect the attack with his blade. To his delight, the attack missed him. However, as he noticed the odd behavior of the attack, the building above his head began to fall down upon him. He ducked and tried to roll out of the way, but found himself pinned down by a spire of cement. He howled as he felt his leg erupt in pain.

“Well, this works too,” Astra approached him. She lifted her claw. Something about the way Jodega looked ready for the blow stopped her. Realization then washed over her face. “Of course, you want me to finish you off...because if your spirit runs out, the Devil’s Smile stops working. Just like that woman I burned up. Luckily, her resolve still keeps her alive, and luckily,” She patted the cement spire, “luckily, this didn’t strike a vital area. Now all that’s left is to kill that boy and that strange green being.”

“It’s called a Rogan!” Astra turned, feeling a sting in her leg. She looked down to see the green being pull his sword out of her ankle.

“A Rogan, huh? Doesn’t really matter,” She swiped at the being, but missed and felt the painful stab of his sword in her flaming hand. “You are just a little annoying fucker aren’t you?” She proceeded to kick the Rogan with her left foot, catching him off guard and knocking him into a nearby building. She began to approach him for a finishing blow as the Rogan stood up and began to run in another direction.

“Where are you going?! The party is just getting started!” Astra howled with laughter as she knocked down buildings on either side of her with blasts of scorching fire. She continued to run after the Rogan for awhile. Just when she lifted up her claw to strike him, he rolled into a nearby building. “Trying to hide from me, huh? Coward! Come out and fight with dignity!” She roared, stopping to change direction into the building after him. Several of the chairs and desks inside the building tumbled next to her as her large form awkwardly tried to make its way through the tiny halls. After struggling for some time, Astra finally stumbled upon the Rogan, who was facing her.

“Ready to stand up and fight eh?!” She cackled. The Rogan then went inside a set of doors to the left of him. “What the fuck are you doing?! I’ll fucking tear you to shreds!” Astra yelled as she tore after him into the double doors. In this inner room it looked as if a pit of stadium seats looked down towards a podium in the center of the

room. In front of the podium, the green devil that continued to evade her stood with his sword drawn.

“Since it seems I have nowhere else to run, I have no choice but to fight you,” the Rogan raised his sword in a defensive stance looking petrified.

“Given up finally? Fine with me!” Astra rushed forward with intense speed raising her claw and preparing to finish him off. All she would need to do is track down the Caller and incapacitate him. That way no one could stop her devastation. Just as she neared the green being she saw him lift his sword as if to swing and she grinned. With an extreme speed, she brought her claw down; she could easily out maneuver this meager attempt. All of a sudden, the Rogan disappeared in front of her eyes and her claw dug itself into the podium. For a second she felt her arm was unable to move, stuck into the stone column.

“Now, Reques!”

Astra felt a wall of water dump on her from above. She sputtered as her flames momentarily were suppressed. Within moments she felt her whole body shiver and looked to see ice crawling up her legs.

The trap had worked flawlessly. Reques continued to concentrate his flow of ice trapping Astra before her flame powers could return. Just as he started to approach her kneecaps, he felt his hands start to burn up. He yelled and his concentration was broken as the ice began to melt into steam. “Your turn, Andy!”

The Rogan didn’t need to be reminded twice. They had anticipated this wouldn’t hold her for long. He held his sword out and concentrated. Lightning crackled down his arms, into the hilt, and finally through the blade. The current of lightning then traveled into the nearby puddle created as sparks began to crackle and dance over the surface. Astra let out a shriek as the lightning finally connected with its target. Andy concentrated harder, pushing his body as the lightning then surrounded the base of the monster, restraining it against the podium. It was all up to Reques now. “Got her!”

Reques heard the signal as he stood just outside of the puddle’s sparkling boundary. He had only ever performed this ritual once before. In Calling school, they had been taught about sealing, but it was never used. Until now, Reques had never thought this art had any use. He put one foot in front of the other, twirling his rod in

front of him as he began to extend his arms in ritualistic movements. His left foot extended out to the side as he looped it in a circle. The movements continued to flow out of him. After a few more circles with the rod, it began to glow. There was now a short period where he had to be quick and precise. “Andy, drop your restraints...now!” He shouted feeling the surge of energy curl up his spine. It would soon arrive at his shoulders which would signal the end of the sealing technique.

“Got it!”

Reques watched as the electricity faded away. The energy finally reached the peak of his shoulders as he yelled and rushed forward. Just before he could make contact, he felt himself blown away by a blast of flame. His whole body flew through the air and crashed on the ground below. He cringed as pain jolted up his leg.

“You didn’t think it was that easy did you?!” Astra’s eyes were bloodshot as a maniacal laughter escaped her lips. “That was a nice try, but you forget I’m a Roused Being. Too bad...” She shot the Rogan with a column of fire out of her claw.

Reques watched helplessly as Andy coughed up blood and flew back through the air. His limp body making an awful cracking noise as it hit one of the seats. The monster howled as it then turned towards him. He tried to stand up, but all of his energy had been spent to try and seal the being. God...they had failed miserably...

Reques...

“F...Fyra?!” Reques thought he was going crazy. He looked up to see the shadowy, white form of a human holding Astra against the podium.

Reques, I’m glad I got to see you one last time. Over this short time, we have gone from hating each other to calling ourselves comrades. You made me believe anything was possible. I don’t have much strength left; Astra’s power continues to drain my body. So I’m giving you this one final gift...please complete your seal.

“Fyra...even if I could, I can’t stand up. Plus, the spot that I have to hit will strike you...in the heart,” He looked up to her.

You don’t have time to argue with me you little shit! Get up and do what you have to do! Ugg you drive me crazy sometimes you spoiled brat!

“I can’t...” Reques was about to protest, but something in his blood boiled as he felt himself stand up. For some reason this argument had stirred energy back within his system. He could feel the energy still curled up on his shoulders...

There! See? I told you so! Now hurry up...I can’t...uggh...

Reques could see her body flickering like a lightbulb. What an awful choice to have to make...Reques let his head hang for a second before pulling up his staff. He knew in the pit of his stomach that she was right and he had no alternative. With a refocus, he brought his staff up as he ran forward. Energy left his shoulders and crawled down his arms, faster than Andy’s bolt of lightning.

“Fyra...I’m so sorry...” He whispered as he plunged his weapon into her heart, piercing Astra’s own behind her. The Roused Being cried out as a column of energy shot up out of the podium and began to pull the creature in like a vacuum. Reques quickly pulled his weapon out and stood back, as to not be pulled in himself. He watched as the light changed to a light blue and began to surround the being. She struggled for a second before part of the light encompassed her head. It made its way down towards the creatures feet and then decompressed into a tiny ball which was sucked into the podium like a tractor beam. Fyra’s physical body reappeared and slumped to the ground. With one final burst of white light, the podium glowed deep red before returning to its natural gray color, ending the sealing ceremony. Reques’ heart pounded as he ran over to Fyra. He rolled her onto her back and lifted her head up. He was on the verge of tears as Fyra took a deep breath and her eyes fluttered open.

“R...Reques...y-you did it...” she coughed in between each pause.

“Fyra, don’t speak, I’ll heal you!” He began to focus any last reserves of energy he could muster.

“It won’t work...your sealing...ceremony...has fatally injured me...you will...die if you try...” She managed to say, lifting a hand to the boy’s face, weakly wiping a tear away before it could slide down his cheek. “Plus...Andy needs help...I...I want to tell you both something...please...”

Reques nodded. He had been able to evaluate how bad it was based on how much it took to even start to heal part of the Anima infested wound. There was nothing he could do for her. He set her down gently and limped over to Andy. He was still

breathing. After a couple seconds of assessing the damage, Reques saw nothing overly bad with the wounds, healing them in seconds, causing some pain to his hurt leg after overextending his Anima limit.

“What...happened?” Andy’s eyes fluttered open as he slowly got to his feet, holding his head and wincing in pain. “Did...we...”

“Yeah...but Andy...Fyra she...”

Andy’s heart skipped a beat as he leapt over the seats in front of him to the body lying near the podium. Nothing else crossed his mind as he knelt to his dying step-sister.

“Andy...is that you?” Fyra coughed, struggling to keep her fluttering eyes from shutting.

“Yeah just hold on! I’ll fix this...” He tried to hold back tears as he felt Reques hobble just behind him.

“Don’t bother, I won’t last...much l...longer. Listen...I just want to thank you...please take care of your family...and...please...f-find some way...to...help...Rogans and H...humans...understand one another...” She coughed violently and took another heavy breath. “Reques...follow...y-your...hear—“ Fyra sputtered as blood spewed out, life left her eyes as she fell to the ground violently shaking out of Andy’s hands.

“Oh...god...no...p-please...” Andy felt his whole body tremble...he just found her. And now she was...gone? The two looked at their fallen comrade, friend, companion, sister... now lying motionless on her side.

“What...now...” Reques couldn’t stop the tears and sat, unable to take his eyes off the sight.

“We...were given a responsibility by the Eldests...we have to destroy the device...so no one else suffers,” Andy tried to stand, but his body felt weak.

“I’ll go...stay here with her...” Reques picked himself up from the seat nearby. Though Andy never responded, Reques knew the Rogan wouldn’t be able to leave this place for some time.

Eventually Reques staggered back to where Will and Eva lay. From what Reques could tell, Will had been dead for some time, though he found Eva clinging onto life.

“Why...why did I fail? I couldn't...change anything...”

Reques wanted to respond, looking at the half burned body missing a leg and all fingers. But he knew, no matter what he said, it wouldn't change her mind. She was set. She had a goal, she failed, and nothing would convince her she was wrong. He simply hobbled over to where the device lay, a good twenty feet from her body. Picking it up, he looked at Jodega who was trapped.

Little one, thank you for saving us all. You gave something very precious in order to protect the universe. Please end this nightmare...

“But if I do...won't you...”

It doesn't matter. The mistake made by the Eldests was grave. Our race, supposedly unable to be unbiased, created this mess. You all have suffered for it. I have done my part to right the wrongs...please allow me to rest now...

“Jodega...thank you,” Reques could feel more tears welling up. He was tired of the death. He already had been forced to kill one companion...and now he had to do it again. He hesitated...the weight bearing down on him.

Don't wait any more! The longer you do, the more chance time will ravage on the bodies of all living creatures! You must...ensure that the universe has a future. Please...

Reques balled up his free fist and then released it. Screaming out of the pain of being unable to do otherwise, he threw the device down as hard as he could. Flashes of Fyra, Jodega, those frozen beings being shattered into dozens of pieces, the people they had encountered along the way, and finally...his little sister's cheerful smile burned brightly in his mind. All of a sudden, light returned to the world. The natural colors returned as people came into motion again. Though he could hear screams echoing around, as people most likely were confused by the sudden deaths of those alive moments before, he watched Jodega dissolve, and Eva arch her back in agonizing pain. Within seconds, both souls had departed from the world.

Chapter 35-Aftermath

Rain fell hard as Reques looked at the open casket. They masked the tears that hung on the edges of his eyes. Looking at the lifeless companion he had spent the last few weeks with was hard. He remembered how she often had seemed uncaring, cold, and even downright nasty towards him, but how overtime, she had warmed up. She had made an emotional transformation in their journey, which reminded him of his own growth. He was stronger now, more confident. He doubted himself less. He knew that he could do anything. This revelation was in part thanks to Fyra. She had been instrumental in shaping his change.

He walked up to the casket and looked at the smile on her face. It would be frozen forever this way, laying in the ground with no future. Something about her smile stuck out to him. It wasn't sarcastic, forced, or fake. It was genuine. He had never seen her smile like that. Had she been at peace in the end? Had she known her fate and taken it willingly for the future of the Universe? Why...had she felt the need to carry this burden alone? Why...why...

“Reques.”

He felt Andy's strong hand grab his shoulder as he pounded against the casket in frustration.

“She chose her path. She didn't conform to any standards. She saved us all...because she wanted to. Neither one of us could have stopped it.”

“Damn it...” Reques turned around at the touch and buried his face in the Rogan's chest. He wrapped his arms around him and cried profusely. She was gone. He couldn't do anything more.

“Reques...I...” Andy was startled, but hugged him back as the companions stood there awhile, crying as one. Thousands of Dolorian Citizens had gathered for this funeral. Fyra's casket was just one of hundreds. There were Senators, lower class citizens, upper class citizens, and even Rogans. Everyone who had perished as a result of this civil war, this prophecy, was being remembered. Covered candles lit up the cloudy night sky for those who had fallen.

For the next few hours, Humans and Rogans alike would mourn the losses. They would lay flowers, pictures, tears, and anything else to wish the citizens a safe passing

into the next life. For the next several days, the government would attempt to reform itself, to apologize to the Rogans for everything. The Rogans in return would accept the apology and begin to pack up. Citizens, both upper and lower class, would work together to rebuild what was destroyed. They would close up the slums and work together to bring Dolor to the surface as one. Class status didn't matter anymore; too much blood was spilled to make that a major concern.

It would be approximately three weeks post funeral when Andy and Reques would wish each other goodbye. Andy, in an attempt to remember his half-sister, would leave Satyr at her grave and vow to make something for the life she gave him. He would leave with the Rogans with the intent to bring all the experiences he had gathered from the moons of Ungdar, back to U'Roga. His goal would be to create stronger ties between Humans and Rogans. Before he would leave, Andy would get one more goodbye with Reques with the intent of seeing each other again in the future.

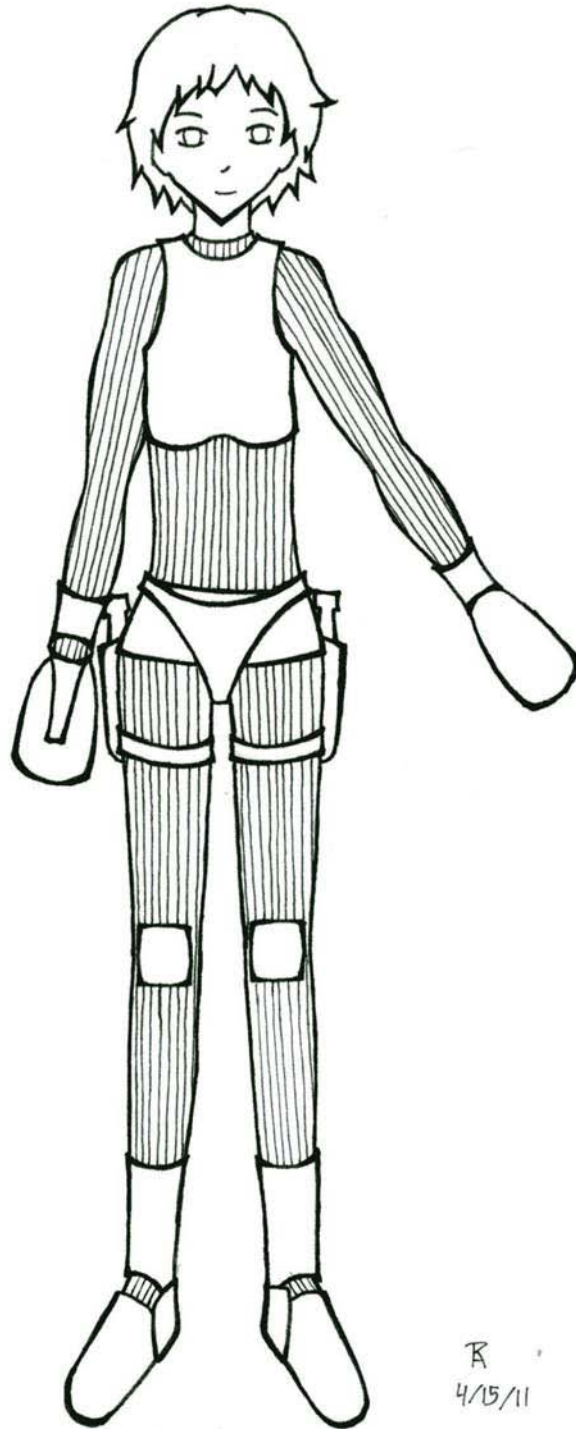
After watching Andy take off, Reques would go back to his family. He would tell them about his plans to pursue being a sketch artist. His father would naturally be furious and tell him he needs to teach the art of Calling, being the Key of Knowledge. Reques would merely smile and apologize before leaving to make his own destiny. He would not forget Fyra's death and ever doubt himself again. It was after all, her death that gave him this second chance. He would, therefore, go to pursue his dream in this city of Hope.

Epilogue

The Dolorian Police had finally left for the day. Outside of the grey mansion they had been at mere moments before, a lonely girl sat on the front porch. In her hand she held the toy horse that was given by her father at her last birthday. As her eyes wandered over the chipped paint and wooden fixtures, tears began to well up. She wiped them to not appear weak as she stood up. Her father's murder had finally been solved a few days ago. It was that damn senator and that masked assassin who had done this. As her fingers then tightened into a ball, she made a promise to herself. She promised that one day, the government would pay, and it would be at the hands of Camila De Vasco...her hands.

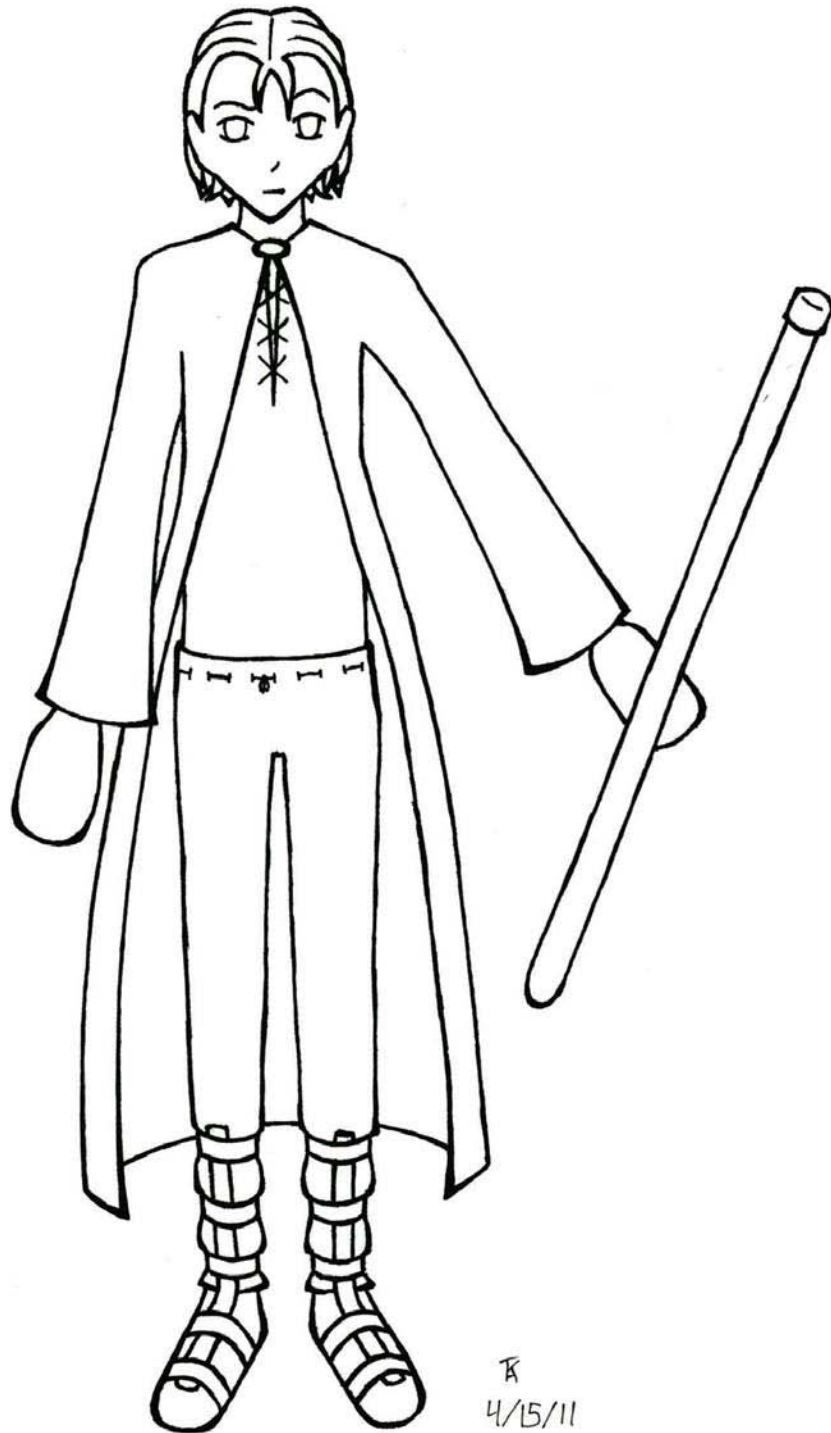
Appendix

Fyra Marang



R
4/15/11

Reques Altaire



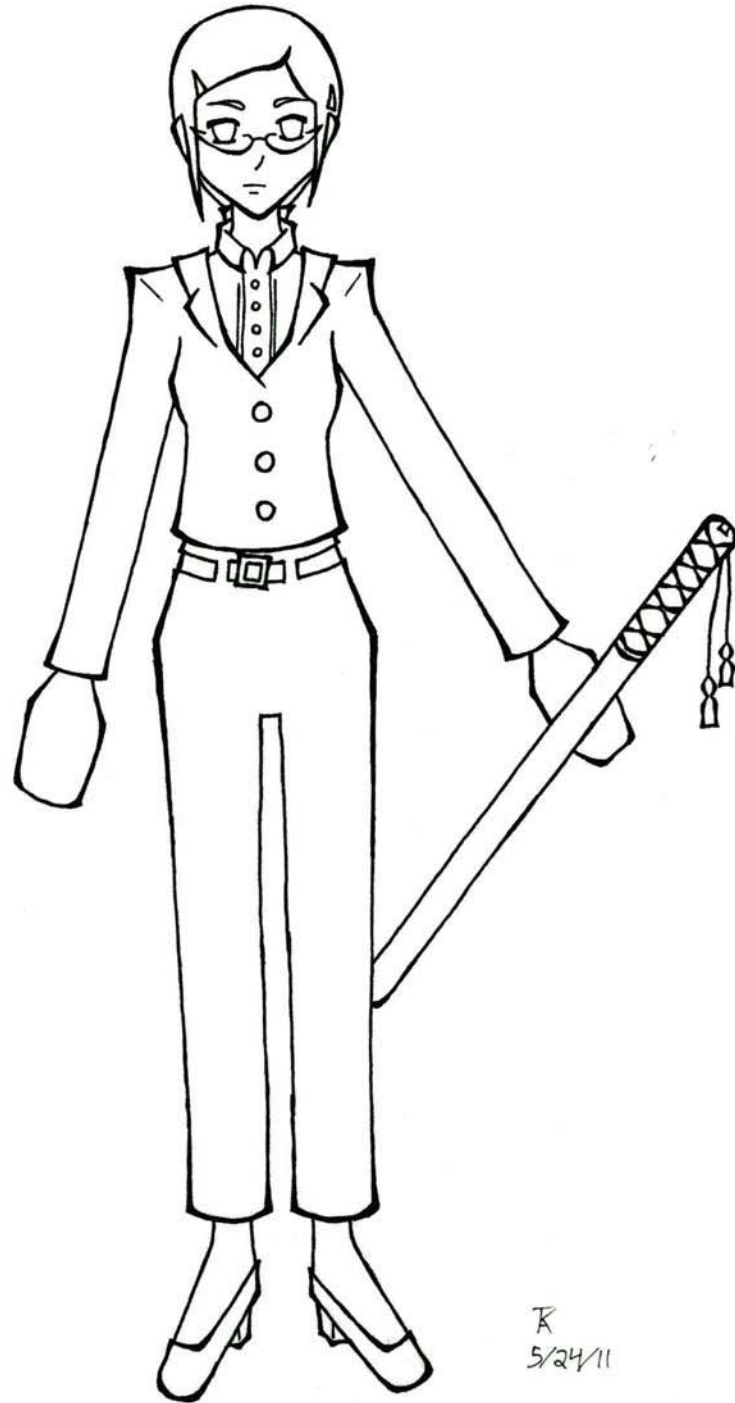
R
4/15/11

Andy Charal



K
5/5/11

Eva Crane



Images provided by my friend Kat Gower

Author's Notes

Context

Fantasy Fiction has been an important part of human society for centuries. In ancient Greece, stories of heroes thwarting giant beasts, warring gods, and forbidden love were common themes. In Shakespearian times, there were mythical lands where tragedies and comedies alike conspired. In more modern times, stories include journeys to the bottom of the sea or the exploration of other planets. Throughout the centuries, all of these stories held one thing in common: to tell stories that appeal to human imagination.

Why is fantasy fiction so important to mankind? In writing this thesis, I realized there would be an underlying challenge to answer this question. The appeal aspect of this was simple enough to answer; people like to have their imagination invoked. The Odyssey, by Homer, is one of the most revered epic poems ever written. Readers are immersed into the journey of Odysseus who is traveling back home from the Trojan War. This tale is used in classrooms worldwide to talk about Ancient Greek Culture and also to initiate discussions of this mysterious author's imagination. This classic example shows how Fantasy Fiction has integrated itself into our everyday education system.

In film and media, fantasy fiction has brought visualization and imagination to life. In James Cameron's Avatar, the audience is taken to the planet Pandora and exposed to the culture of its native inhabitants, the Na'vi. The stunning visual effects enticed viewers to make it the largest monetary grossing film of our time and the winner of numerous awards.

Though the appeal of fiction in our society is apparent, the greater question remains, why is it significant? In The Telegraph, an online version of a UK newspaper, journalist and author Mark Chadbourn addressed the same topic in his article, “The Fantastic Appeal of Fantasy.” At the very end of his article, Chadbourn states, “It's about turning off the mobile phone and the computer and remembering who we are in the deepest, darkest parts of ourselves.” This sums up his point that in society, we perform mundane tasks in life that do not allow us to tap the potential of our imaginations. He believes that there is more than just an aesthetic appeal to fantasy fiction. The genre is a necessity for us because it is a part of who we are as humans.

While I am not sure what it means to be human, I do know that without Fantasy Fiction, this world would be lackluster. Whenever I read a novel like Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers or watch a movie like Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith, I can't help but feel as though without it, I would not have as complete of a personal life. Therefore, I believe the greater significance of the Fantasy Fiction genre is not just appeal, but of how it helps to feed our imagination.

This leads to another question, why is the imagination important? Author Remez Sasson addresses this issue in his article, “The Power of Imagination.” In this article, he discusses how stimulating a person's imagination helps them to develop their own creative ideas, how we describe places, or plan social gatherings based upon things we have already seen or done. In addition, positive emotions evoked from imagination can have a constructive effect on our daily lives. The significance of Fantasy Fiction therefore is apparent, and has a huge need in our society.

Economic discrimination has not only existed in many literary works, but unfortunately plays a huge role in society. Whether looking at the financial inequality differences in the United States or the Caste system of India, monetary wealth plays a key role in reinforcing stereotypes and dividing people based on net economic worth. When most people conceptualize this topic, they often think of the rich looking down on the poor and pitying them or thinking they are better. Stereotypes play both ways. The real issue of monetary wealth is the privileged and the underprivileged. The hard fact about life is that there are people who are economically better off than other people, regardless of how the wealth is obtained. But this creates both positive and negative images to people who are on the opposite sides of the fence.

This theme of economic disparity is common in the fiction genre. It is a topic that is relevant to modern society. As Fiction Genre writers, we tend to want to find characters, concepts, and worlds that people can relate to. For example, in Neil Gaiman's Neverwhere, the main character Richard Mayhew is not as rich as his girlfriend. This creates an initial conflict of him trying to live up to her standards which is a form of the stereotypical "bread winner" scenario for a household.

In The Great Gatsby, Myrtle Wilson wishes to have a wealthy, successful man such as Tom Buchanan for her husband. However, her actual husband does not make much money and cannot provide her with what she wants, making her unhappy.

Solty Rei, an anime, builds most of its plot around what is known as the citizen registration system. Those who are registered can have full financial and medical benefits. Those who are not are bereft of such benefits. This creates a tension-filled knot

of issues for both sides that is filled with stereotypes and prejudices that are hard to overcome.

Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen is another example. In this story, Mr. Charles Bingsley and Jane Bennet fall in love. Unfortunately, Mr. Bingsley's sister, Caroline, does not see this as a suitable match due to Jane's social and economic status. This creates early tension in what becomes a complicated and dramatic series of events.

As shown in the above examples, the theme of economic disparity in society can create astronomical tension in fiction that is relevant to society and can lead to a dramatic plot. Therefore, it is appropriate that my novel falls into this category and represents an already widely relatable conflict within the fiction genre.

Influences for my novel format have come from a variety of other fiction writers including K.A. Applegate and James Rollins.

K.A. Applegate is the author of the Animorphs Series. Her writing technique is unique as each book in her main series is written from the point of view of a different character. What was most influential to me in trying to conceptualize how I was going to write a novel in five months, was her Megamorphs series, which are essentially one shot side stories to the Animorphs series. This was where I got the inspiration for having each one of my main characters, and occasional side characters, narrate different chapters. Much like the format of Megamorphs, my novel allows each character to become developed in a short time span from their own perceptions and perceptions of each other. Also, I worried about having writer's block throughout the process. Using the Megamorph style of writing, I found that switching characters helped eliminate the

tiresome process of writing the same way for each chapter and gave me refreshing new ideas for story direction.

James Rollins has a very interesting and distinct writing style. In his chapters he has a similar writing style as K.A. Applegate's Megamorph series. The difference is that he will often shift perspectives within chapters so that multiple narrators will be present. This creates an interesting tie to both drama and plot twist timing within individual chapters. While most of my chapters stick to a single perspective, there are a few that benefitted from having multiple points of view present: chapters 16, 21, 27, 28, and 33. Chapters 16, 21, and 28 were breaks from the main story to try to build tension in Dolor from the points of view of Eva, Wave, and several side characters. Chapter 27 happened after Reques was separated from Andy and Fyra by a ferocious beast on Trycondria. It takes place from his perspective as well as Fyra's to show how their experiences eventually lead to them finding each other despite the challenges they face separately. Chapter 33 is the transition from the activation of the Devil's Smile to the final battle, where the five main characters are chosen to inherit their powers as the five Keys. It made sense to write each person's inauguration separately without having a string of five chapters with essentially the same outline. Therefore, they all have a perspective with a transition from beginning to end of their transformation into the Keys.

K.A. Applegate and James Rollins have both influenced how I my writing process. By combining both of their techniques, I was able to keep the perspectives for each of my main characters interesting and relevant. I feel that with this style of writing, readers will become enthralled and stay intrigued not only by an interesting story, but whose shift in perspective will be next.

Personal Interest

Since the age of 13, I have found myself drawn to the world of Fantasy Fiction. At first I drew inspiration from pre-existing works such as Final Fantasy, Harry Potter, Star Wars, and more. I loved being a part of worlds that were created by others. A few years ago, I began creating my own stories and my own worlds. I found this process to be even more infectious than being a part of another person's world. The idea that I have the level of creativity and passion to write something based on my own thoughts inspired me in ways I never thought possible.

In my four years at Western Oregon University, I have been through a multitude of leadership trainings. One of the most impactful aspects of this training has been breaking down my own barriers of stereotyping and becoming more inclusive of all people. This training led to my question that eventually became the basis of my novel. The question I have been asking myself since starting college is, "Is it possible for a society to overcome stereotyping?" Though most people would automatically laugh at the idea and dismiss the topic as impossible, I wanted to explore it for myself. From there I began to build the foundation for this novel.

When I first proposed doing this concept as a novel, the first wall I ran into was what sort of "stereotyping" I wanted to explore. A common theme that has always engaged me was privileged versus underprivileged and misconceptions about both sides of the spectrum. The other that stuck with me was misconceptions about differences in race and unfamiliarity with them. Those were the two I chose to focus on and research.

From this point, the novel grew, starting with the creation of a solar system. Some of the concepts of this solar system came naturally. I wanted the whole story to be

a journey that carried them between various moons of one specific planet in this solar system. Along the way, characters were created, destroyed, chosen, abandoned, gender specific, genderless, heroic, demonic, dual species, human, fat, skinny, likable, evil, etc. It took me awhile to settle on the main characters, but once I did, they began to deepen. The main five characters that were essential to my plot were Fyra Marang, a thief whose cause is to take from the rich and give to the poor while trying avoiding an inescapable past; Reques Altaire, a wealthy magician whose powers are derived from spirits (Calls) and who secretly wishes to become a sketch artist; And'theith (Andy) Charal, a half-human, half-alien (known as a Rogan) whose dual blood is both a curse and a blessing; Eva Crane, a Senator from the city of Dolor who helps expose a corrupt financial plot but has ulterior motives; and Wave, a masked assassin who is killing Senators in Dolor. Soon I was developing plotlines around these characters and figuring out how they interacted with the story.

The plotline of the novel was derived from a a variety of sources which include life experiences, captivating dreams, novels, games, movies, television shows, and preexisting original ideas of my own. One of the greatest examples I can give from life experience is the tax reform in this story. When I was growing up here in Oregon, there was a controversial tax reform trying to be passed. Though it wasn't passed, it inspired one of the initial subplots of the story and played into the overall theme well. At the beginning of the story, before the tax reform comes into existence, there is a scene where Fyra finds her home and the slums around it burning to the ground. This scene was based on a dream I had of returning from vacation to find everything in flames. Most plots and details in stories are derived from everyday occurrences for writers,

especially dreams. When I had this dream, I was in the stages of building up my research and plot outline at a point when it was most useful. It helped place Fyra exactly where I needed her to be at the start of her journey.

There are influences throughout this novel that are derivatives from other pre-existing works. The Pilgrimage that Reques, my second main character, has to undertake was a concept similar to one in Final Fantasy X, a video game. Even though the names, practices, and overall structure of the Pilgrimage are different, the ideal concept remains the same. Fyra starts out as part of a rebel faction, known as the Douze Brigade. This faction performs sophisticated, thievery operations, and provides assistance to the downtrodden and the misfortunate by taking back from the upper class “pompous pricks” as Fyra would put it. Though the obvious inspiration for this group comes from Robin Hood, the idea of people defying the law in order to aid the underprivileged has been a growing inspiration for many years.

I have always felt myself drawn to TV shows like Leverage and Solty Rei; movies like The Italian Job and Robin Hood, and video games such as Fire Emblem: Radiant Dawn and Final Fantasy 7. All of these center around the concept of going against the government and the law for the good of others. When mapping out Fyra and her “gang of thieves” I used concepts from existing infamous groups and modified them to meet the qualities of the Douze Brigade.

When attempting to grapple with the concept of economic diversity and how it plays into these plot lines, I often draw from the training I received as a leader during a workshop. This workshop helped me to understand that we all have commonalities and similar situations that can help us to understand one another even though some people

are privileged and others are not. To further my understanding, I read a textbook that a friend lent to me from his Social Diversity class in college. This greatly aided me in designing the first subplot of the story.

Any author hoping to become successful as a standalone writer has to at least have something original to work off of. For example, when creating the Eldest race, I had to flex my imagination. It was a race which was created from massive amounts of Animaic Particles, or through the accretion of magical matter into complete beings. For the society of the Eldests, I had to formulate their laws and their philosophies as a species consisting entirely of magic. Anima magic isn't in itself an original concept, but a being created from it was an idea that I had been building for some time. Another original concept was the development of the Angel's Frown and the Devil's Smile. These are direct byproducts of the Eldest race that helped form the overall plot for the story. Two ancient devices that resonate with one another to signal the end of the world was central to the overall drive and pacing of this piece.

Commentary on Final Product

Overall I would call the project a success. I wrote it to completion and met all of the goals I set out for myself. The sense of satisfaction I have received from meeting my goals with this project is phenomenal. Towards the end, as deadlines arrived, I was afraid I would be turning in something incomplete, but to my delight things fell into place and the entire novel came together.

For example, I thought Fyra, Eva, and Reques evolved into complex characters during the process of writing the story. I was delighted to see the characters write themselves and take on a life of their own. I was also pleased with the entire

progression of the plotline. Everything fell into place and the sequencing happened in relatively believable time.

Although the plotline didn't change overall, certain elements developed in ways I never imagined. For example, towards the end of the story, the brilliant idea of having Fyra's eldest blood consume her came from a completely irrelevant discussion I had with my thesis advisor. In this way it started out as a blessing, giving her an unusually large anima reserve, but ended up as a curse, consuming her and eventually killing her. This idea also solidified an ending for the story which I was initially uncertain about.

If I had more time, there are definitely things I would improve. Though I made the most of the five months I had to write, edit, and revise this story, I definitely would have liked at least a few more months. This would have helped me catch potential grammatical errors, flesh out a few more of the concepts that my thesis advisor, Jeremiah Oxford and I brainstormed throughout the year. At the very least, extra time would have allowed for a few more nights of sleep which would be necessary to retain a good portion of my sanity. Overall, I know that with more time I could have had a more "complete" novel though even with another year I doubt a project like this would have reached my level of perfection and satisfaction. I feel like this statement is true for works by most authors, and even though it isn't perfect, there is a time when you have to become satisfied with what you have and move on. There is plenty of time to come back later and fix minor things here and there. Time was definitely my largest hurdle in this project.

I would have liked to establish Andy and Wave a little more as believable characters. I wasn't entirely dissatisfied with how they turned out, but as the story progressed, so did my ideas of how their character development should go.

I felt at times my story was a little "theme heavy," as my professors would put it. This felt like the story had an agenda and didn't seem natural. Though I've done my best to go back through and find some ways to make the themes a little more subtle, I definitely know this is something I would love to have improved.

During the process, I went through many phases of "highlights" and "lowlights." For me the highlights came from when I completed each individual part of this project. I had broken the novel down into six parts. Each part was fairly standard in the time that I needed to complete them. At the end of each part I felt a sense of satisfaction that made me feel like I was really progressing with this story. Other highlights included my meetings with my advisor, reflecting on how much I had actually accomplished since Summer 2010, and knowing that people were genuinely interested in what I was doing.

One goal I had set out for myself with this project was to be a role model/example for other people who are struggling or trying to find their place as a writer. After my presentation, I had someone come up to me and give me a big hug telling me how awesome they thought it was that I was able to get this project done. They told me that it had not only made them want to read my work but they were inspired enough to start their own. Though I will probably not feel the full impact of this moment until post-graduation, I can honestly say that it took a lot for me to hold back my tears. To know that despite people in my past who were skeptical that I could do a project like this, who told me my overactive imagination would be a hindrance to

my education, and who generally brought me down, I overcame all of that and met at least one goal I set for myself. I touched one person enough to help them feel inspired to write. That to me will sit as one of the highlights, not only of this project, but of my life.

Along with the highlights came the “lowlights.” Most of the lowlights of this project came with the limited amount of time I gave myself to complete it. When I couldn’t make a goal or get a part of my project done by the date I had initially set out for myself, it put me in a funk. I have always had a hard time with not making deadlines I set for myself. Though Professor Oxford knew I would eventually get things done, it was more a disappointment personally. However, after the initial funk I put myself in, I would always find a way to push through the deadline and get it done sooner than anticipated. I believe this is what has helped me overall in being able to finish this project.

Another lowlight for me was not always getting enough sleep to function from day to day in order to get more writing done. One of the most frustrating parts of this project was sacrificing sleep to be able to power through the giant assignment I essentially gave myself. Often I would think, “why did I do this to myself?” or “can I afford to go to bed for a couple hours or should I just keep writing?” It was hard to ask these questions as either one seemed to have more cons and pros. Trying to get over the negativity of the situation definitely was difficult.

I learned several things about myself through the duration of this project. First, I am going to borrow a quote from Winnie the Pooh which hit me about halfway through the term and really gave me the final boost to finish: “... there is something you must always remember. You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and

smarter than you think.” This applies to my journey through writing this novel. At times when I felt like I was taking on something I wouldn’t be able to handle, and felt down about not meeting my own deadlines, this quote was something plastered on my wall for me to look at. It helped give me the sense of purpose and reminded me of why I was doing this project. I learned that even when I am down and pinned against the wall, I have the ability to work through those difficulties and accomplish great things. This self-confidence is something I would say I lacked before taking on this project.

Second, I was able to learn about how well I can manage my own time, set my own goals, and adjust both of these as needed. When taking on a daunting project such as this, growth is key. For me, I learned how much time I need to actually set aside for myself when both writing and editing to get the most out of a “timeline” for a project such as a Fantasy Fiction Novel. This was probably the most beneficial thing I learned about how I can work to be more productive and more efficient in the future.

Finally, I learned how to say “no.” This might seem like a silly thing that I learned as a result of this project, but it is something that helped me finish. Throughout the year, I was offered many times to take on extra projects or tasks outside of this novel. My normal instincts would have been to say yes to everything and run myself down both emotionally and physically. When writing a novel, it isn’t healthy or sane to say yes to everything that comes my way. That also doesn’t mean, however, that I have to become a hermit. It is being able to accurately assess how much time other projects take, how I could adjust my schedule, and assessing the pros and cons of taking on additional work. I learned about my personal limits and when I was too overwhelmed to take something on. This will be essential to my progress as an aspiring author.

Final Thoughts

Thank you Dr. Oxford for helping me in a multitude of revisions, Dr. Gavin Keulks for letting me know I still had options in the program and giving me the idea to do a novel for my thesis, Kat Gower for drawing all of my pictures of my characters, but most of all to the readers for taking the time to read this novel and the afterthoughts of my reflection on this piece. Throughout the whole process, I kept a journal of inspiring quotes and thoughts from my novel, most of which I have included in this expository/Author's Notes section. From here, I want to take closer looks at my characters and revisit the moons of Ungdar. This should inspire me to write other "Tales of Ungdar" and hopefully make this a series or trilogy. I am anxious to see what the future has in store for me. I hope that if you enjoyed reading this novel that in the future, if you see my name or other novels about Ungdar, you will remember me and are able to relate my beginnings as a fledgling author in the Honors Program at Western Oregon University.

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