

Balindrium



Credits

To

Scrollwork Studios

The stage for this epic novel. Thank you.

Josef

For creating an incredible quest arc, driving it, participating, and creating a truly unique and engaging story.

Mercery

For creating the roleplay system that allowed this event to prosper, for hosting the forum that those who congregated here to write it, and for intense, well written involvement in it's story, as well as a co-operative writing of the ending.

Slawter

Yep. I'm crediting myself. Because after nearly one hundred five thousand words, I feel I deserve it. A majority of this is my own writing, but to preserve authenticity of the writing, some posts are still in their original form. Some parts of the story have been cut/trimmed. Some have been added, to add introduction to characters. There might be some mistakes in this in terms of things missed out, but I found none when I checked it. Please alert me if you find any.

To those who submitted characters, and participated in writing the story in roleplay form. This is in no particular order.

Vampire

Otse

Andy

Sarge

Pronam

Dagon

Bethesda

Sorry if I forgot anyone.

Prologue –

The Life of Azmodæum

Born on the isle of Artæum in the year 3E 122, the child was given the name Hefaestæum by his wealthy Altmeri parents. He showed promise in magic, and was quickly enrolled in the Psijic Order. He excelled in all of his studies, and indeed found himself bored by the Greycloaks and their constant talk of the old ways. His attention soon wandered, and he found himself lusting over a beautiful female classmate. The young pair fell in love, a taboo for initiates of the Order, but managed to maintain appearances for some time while having a secret relationship.

During a standard mission for the order, Hefaestæum, his lover, and a few other Psijics were ambushed by an ancient Daedra. The demon had possessed a young girl and she lay in her home unconscious, writhing in agony but making no sound. The group came to try and heal the girl, and the Daedra exploded forth from inside her, making himself manifest with her life force. The beast was massive, and powerful, and its first act was to immediately devour Hefaestæum's girlfriend, and send a blast of terrible energy which should have decimated the elf. Instead, his atronach powers absorbed the whole of the blast, pouring energy forged of pure evil through all of his veins. He felt power like he never knew before, and he felt himself tapping into the raw evil power. He blasted wave after wave of energy at the Daedra, finally killing him, but was enraged and unsatisfied. He turned, his eyes glowing a terrible dark green, and killed the rest of his crew where they stood. The next day, he was on a boat to High Rock.

Fashioning himself as "Azmodæum," he suppressed the Daedric energy flowing through his body, relinquished his connection to the old Elven Gods, and joined the Dwynnen Mages' Guild. This new style of magic appeased him for a great time, and he rose in rank and power for years as he learned the intricacies of the five schools of magic.

Azmodæum was promoted to a high-ranking position in the Camoran Army and was granted a sizeable chunk of land, recently captured in the Wrothgarian Mountains by the Usurper's legion of undead, daedra, and mundane warriors and mages. Upon it Azmodæum constructed a terrible citadel, charging every corner in it with arcane magics and intricate spellwork. Even the name of the castle, Balindrium, was an ancient incantation of protection. He experimented with his power and grew his forces,

maintaining his castle even when the Usurper was killed at sea and most of his forces were decimated on land in 3E 267. When the Imperial Legion finally amassed a force large enough to siege the castle, the battle was bloody and dreadful.

Eventually, the demons and undead that Azmodæum repeated to summon and re-raise were exhausted, and the forces of the legion were upon the black stone gates of Balindrium. When they began to attack the walls, the ground shook ferociously for miles, and the fortress tore from the ground and rose into the air, flying southeast. The crater that was left behind formed a sinkhole, and the entire legion battalion was swallowed up by the earth, leaving a valley of ghosts, spirits, and the undead to feed upon the remains.

Balindrium floated for what seemed to be an eternity over the Wrothgarian mountains while Azmodæum furiously worked to recreate his army. His magical powers now were innumerable, but his soul was almost wholly blackened. His love for his fellow mer was gone completely, and all that he could feel was the desire for more power and the blissful feeling his body felt when he communed with Daedra. He built shrines to different daedra within his sanctum, making deals with all sorts of devils for power, knowledge, and troops.

After one hundred and twenty years of flight, Balindrium landed atop a mountain right by the border of Hammerfell, Skyrim, and Cyrodiil. The weight of the castle crushed the peak of the mountain, and over time the castle and the mountain appeared to be seamlessly fused. Azmodæum ruled behind closed gates for forty-seven years, listening to the whispers and screams of the daedra princes, taking short trips to his blissful Oblivion. The years spent between realms changed him physically, twisting his true self and making him look hideous and evil. But in 3E 433, something told the Warlock to open the doors and prepare for his beloved Oblivion to come to him...

This is the story of Azmodæm. And it begins, in the small town of Cheydinhal, on the streets outside a tavern.

Chapter One

The Cheydinhal Bandits

It was deep within the wall of Cheydinhal that a man was overcome with pain. His head. It felt like it was going to explode. Pounding. It was as if someone were repeatedly

slamming a battering ram at the inside of his skull. And were succeeding in cracking their way out. The dunmer cried out, and dropped his staff, and it bounced across the grey tiled stone paths of Cheydinhal's streets. The pain spread quickly, attacking more than his mind. It was as if fire were consuming his soul. It was the feel of evil. Horrible visions passed before his eyes. Visions of terror. Visions of evil. Visions of pain. It was awful. Weakly, he attempted to gesture at a tall Nord, who was leaving a building, cigarette alight, smoke wafting softly behind him. Then the world went black, and Merthierry Yvienne saw nothing, only darkness. Coming to rest, unconscious on the streets of Cheydinhal.

Upstairs in the tavern, a pair of brilliant blue eyes snapped open, only to be filled with disorientation. Consciousness was not all that welcome to the Nord. All it did was welcome in the age of the hangover. He pressed his head further into the pillow, as if it would cushion the throbbing which was dancing around his head. He tilted his head slightly into the pillow, in an effort to stifle the headache all the more. His eyes caught sight of the slender Dunmer girl lying next to him. Slowly patches of memory of the night before returned to him. As the memories returned, his grin grew. He studied his fine triumph for a moment, before sliding stealthily out of the bed. He had decided he would not enjoy her company while sober. His feet connected with the floor boards, and he raised himself carefully from the bed. A small bowl was filled with water nearby, and he moved towards it, and splashed the cool water in his face, cleansing the sleep from his mind. As the ripples in the water died down, more of his features became apparent. His recently shaven head, his reddish beard which covered his chin. He padded across the room as quietly as were possible for a seven foot Nord, luckily it seemed the Dunmer had had as much to drink as the Nord and wouldn't wake up any time soon, collecting his belongings, and slipping on his clothes. He slipped on a black shirt, and a pair of green trousers, their material faded, which reached down to the knees. He quickly slipped on his shoes, before strapping his precious spear to his back. Josef Engarr stretched, and headed downstairs, leaving the sleeping dunmer to slumber in peace.

As Josef reached the bottom floor, and entered the tavern area, a vaguely familiar figure spoke to him, in a jovial voice.

"Goodness, Nord, I'm surprised to see you alive after all you drank last night."

She smiled, as she spoke. Only the faintest hint of distrust harboured by her people towards his own. He returned the smile, a brief flicker of irony slipping through his thoughts. If only she knew what her people, her cousins in Velothi, really thought of the Nord Josef Engarr.

"Aye. And I'm feeling each and every one of those drinks again today." Josef replied with a broad grin, he tossed the Dunmer Publican a few septims, and drew a tin from the pocket of his green shorts. He looked around for something to strike a light, before noticing a lantern nearby. He stuck the cigarette under the small flame for a moment, before withdrawing it, and sticking the tobacco filled roll between his lips. He looked around the tavern. It was mostly empty, devoid of customers, except for a small group of orcs in the corner who were discussing something in their own language, and occasionally glancing darkly at Josef. He reached into his pocket, and felt it was significantly lighter than before. He paused for a moment, before deciding he'd spent

enough for now, he didn't want to run out of gold. He took his mug of mead, and downed it swiftly. It felt good as it slid down his throat. The perfect eye opener. He headed for the door, having decided he would return later, when he was hungry. For now, a walk and a smoke were just what he needed.

A dunmer heard a door open, and close, from the room next to him. His head was pounding, not helped by the fact he'd had little to no sleep the night before, due to the racket from the next room over. He had no doubt what the pair had been up to. He reached for his clothes as he slid out of bed, and swiftly dressed himself in his usual shirt, and brown pants, before slipping on his leather jacket. His jet black hair was jutting out at strange angles as it always did, and his blood red eyes, well eye, his left was still sporting the white blind look it had always had, took in the sight of the room. He decided now was as good of a time to start the day as any other. He stepped outside the room, and headed down to the tavern. He sat down at the bar, and ordered a mug of mead. His headache was beginning to disperse, and he supposed he could manage this mornings drink, he tossed a couple of coins onto the table top. He noticed a nord leaving the tavern. The dunmer felt a little sorry for the girl upstairs, and wondered if he should go and check on her.

"*Your mead, Elrohir.*" The barkeep spoke, hand outstretched, a full mug in her hand. The dunmer smiled his thanks, and took the mug, beginning to down it, Elrohir L'Hradror forgot the girl upstairs, focusing only on the heavenly nectar slipping down his throat. Just then, there was a loud cry of pain from outside the inn. He paused a moment. And then decided it would be best to find out what was happening. It was always best to know ones surroundings. He headed for the door, and stepped outside.

Yet another Dunmer was about to join the throng on the street. This one had dark brown hair, tangled and unmanaged. One long curved scar on his face was his most prominent feature. He was built like a warrior, because, well, he was. He exited Mach Za's bookstore, and came across a peculiar site, which had most certainly not been there when he'd entered. A fellow Dunmer was lying on the ground, and another was moving to help him, along with a Nord who was armed with a spear. Rayne Felles moved forward to help.

The Dunmer named Elrohir reached the unconscious man first. Shortly followed by the towering Nord that was Josef. Rayne hurried forward, and joined the other two. For a moment, they looked down on the Dunmer, before all looking at each other, and unanimously deciding to carry him. Both Dunmers took an arm, and Josef followed behind, as the two dark elves carried their kinsman back to the inn in an awkward shuffle.

"*Quite a heavy fellow, isn't he?*" Rayne said, partly to break the silence of the three men. Just as he said so, he felt a jolt, and looked down. The Dunmer they had been carrying had awoken. He murmured something, Rayne had to strain to hear it, but he thought he'd said.

"*My old aedra be dead.*" Merthierry spoke. With that, he freed himself from the supportive men, and wavered unsteadily for a moment, before finding his balance once more. Rayne spoke, and told the man his name and asking for his, as he was at a loss of what else he could do.

"No," Merthierry addressed Rayne in an offended way, looking up firmly onto his kinsman. *"A name would merely be intended for reminding me. By the gods, do I want to be reminded?"* he said with his face set in its ultimate state of hostility, baring his teeth. *"Alright listen",* he started. *"What you witnessed at the pavements was an inability to withstand great levels of destructionous power, raging from my very within. My soul longs to put this to use".* He paused his speech, trying to breath concentratedly. He then bowed his head. *"Ancient one, I am unstable. Forgive me for this."*

Rayne listened, but wasn't deterred. He wanted some sort of name, not just a long and confusing explanation.

"As good of a reason as any I suppose, but I doubt either of us would appreciate me calling you 'That guy', At least allow me your name." Rayne replied stubbornly.

While all this was being said, Elrohir was beginning to get confused. That had been a long explanation, and he didn't even know why he was bothering to help. It wasn't his job to help citizens of Cheydinhal. If anything, this was just unwanted attention. He saw the Nord, who had sat down at the bar. He decided that was as good a place to head to as any, and the three dunmer moved over there.

Rayne decided he'd make more progress with the other dunmer, and thought an introduction might be better received from him.

"What's your name fellow Dunmer?" He asked.

"Elrohir."

"Pleased to make your acquaintance. Rayne Felles." Rayne replied. He was about to continue the conversation, and extend his greeting to the Nord, when Merthierry abruptly stood up, and swiftly headed for the door. Rayne was rather taken aback by this strange and sudden disappearance. For a moment he remained still, contemplating whether or not to follow him, before coming to rest on the decision that he might as well see where he went. He headed for the door himself, at a more leisurely pace than his quarry.

Elrohir turned instead to the Nord.

"Are you leaving to? Or should we grab a beer?"

Josef smiled, tossing his last few coins onto the bar, winking once at Dervera as she passed him a frosty mug of mead. *"Eh, why not? I'd hate t' disappoint those Orcs,"* Josef said with a subtle nod towards the group of green-skinned, whispering soldiers. *"They've been telling the same jokes 'bout a Nord walkin' into a Dark Elf bar for the past three days!"*

Laughing heartily, he spun about in his chair, facing the Dunmer. *"My name is Josef,"* he said, his eyes beginning to sparkle with the rowdiness of the buzz he was feeling. It was, after all, his third pint of mead that day, and he had only woke an hour before.

"Josef Wulf-Eye" He quickly lied, glancing around. His real surname would be recognized by any Dunmer who were native of Northwestern Morrowind, and it would not be a pleasant memory it evoked.

"And what should I call ya', friend?" He asked.

"Elrohir Hlaalu" Elrohir replied, with a lie of his own. Ocheeva had always told them to practice deceit at any opportunity, it was a prized tool when you worked for the Dark Brotherhood. Now seemed like a fitting time, it avoided him revealing too much about his identity, and gave him a chance to test his skills.

"Nice to meet you Josef. Doing business in Chorrol?"

"Business? Bah, business is what the damned Cyrodiils call sittin' their asses down, sellin' food, and gettin' fat!" Replied the Nord, slapping Elrohir hard on the back as he did so, knocking a little of the man's beer from his mouth. Josef's voice was growing louder and more boisterous, as his eyes began to glow faintly from the significant volume of alcohol he'd consumed. He didn't take note of the sudden silence from a table across the room. A table full of Orcs, who were looking squarely at him. Anger strong in their gaze.

Elrohir grinned, not noticing the Orcs either, and merely slammed a few coins on the bar, and calling for another round.

"I have a small quarrel with you Nord, I couldn't sleep last night because of you." Elrohir grinned, and received yet another boisterous laugh in return from Josef.

"So, ya' heard that did ya..."

Outside, Rayne stood. He had lost sight of the other Dunmer quite quickly. He'd absentmindedly returned to the inn, his feet had just carried him here. He shrugged. Hell, he could do with a beer anyway. He threw open the door, to be greeted with a roar from a table off to his right, which he couldn't fully see. He stepped further into the bar, spotting the Nord, and the other Dunmer where he had left them. A group of Orcs stood at a table in the corner, the source of the roar.

Josef rose to his feet, as the Orc tossed an absurd accusation that he and Elrohir were selling skooma at them. His vision swam a little, and he realised he was slightly tipsy. He steadied himself quickly, and stared back at the Orcs.

"I take it you did something to annoy these gentlemen?" Elrohir enquired politely to Josef.

"I don't know what they're talkin' bout, but looks like they're looking for a fight." Josef replied. A cocky tone had slipped into his voice, one only fitting for a half drunk Nord.

Rayne had slid in line with the pair, nodding at them as he did so. Josef with a wicked grin, grabbed his mug and threw it with full force at the lead Orc's eye. Rayne ripped his sword free of its sheath, and testing its weight. Sanguinaria, a beautiful work of a blade, well built, and enchanted. He grinned, just as Josef had, and held the sword ready, perfectly balanced, showcasing his skill with a blade. The other Dunmer, Elrohir, turned, and continued the throwing match, by tossing his chair at the Orcs, and ripping his blade free, using the time his chair had created to arm himself properly. The trio stood, all of their weapons held ready. Josef clutching his spear, Rayne his sword, and

Elrohir his dagger. The lead Orc, who was bleeding across his left eye from where Josefs mug had struck him, roared with anger, and pulled a large battle axe from his back. He grinned sadistically, and swung it high in the air, rolling it between his fingers as if it weighed nothing. He brought it down in a swift movement, and smashed the table that he and his party had been sitting at to smithereens. Another drew an enchanted sword, and shot forward with speed towards Rayne. One other disappeared swiftly in a puff of green smoke. For a moment the trio of Nord, and two Dunmers were confused, but then Elrohir spotted the shimmering outline that gave away those who used such spells, and kicked out swift and hard. He struck the man in the chest, and the orcs momentum worked against him, sending him flying backwards. He tripped over the chair that Elrohir had thrown moments before, and lay on the ground in a heap. The Orc with the sword had drawn up close to Rayne, and the giant with the axe was struggling to remove his heavy weapon from a section of flooring he had managed to stick it in when he'd destroyed the table. He was strong though, and he would have freed his weapon by the time anyone reached him.

Rayne met his challengers charge, thrusting outwards with Sanguinaria at a ferocious speed, one that only a master swordsman could muster. But the Orc was experienced also, and swiftly pivoted away, Rayne had anticipated this, and by the time the Orc had completed the manoeuvre, his hand was glowing red. The orc brought up his shield to block an attack from Raynes sword, but Rayne had other ideas. His hand slammed hard into the Orcs face, and bright flames flared into life from his outstretched palm, slithering across the Orcs flesh. Rayne, satisfied the Orc was incapacitated, turned, and took in the state of play. Elrohir was engaging in battle with the Orc who had been invisible. Their knives flashed, and became a blur as the two struck at each other. It was clear Elrohir had the upper hand, and he kept opening wounds here and there on the Orc. He was patiently wearing down his adversary, and would soon cut him to ribbons.

It was Josefs time to leave his mark on the fight. The muscles of his legs tensed, crouching ever so slightly, and then he took off. His knuckles whitened, his teeth clenching. After three great bounds, with extremely long legs making strides to carry the Nord to his quarry, Josef leapt forward, bracing all of his weight on the end of his spear, letting out a deafening Nordic Thu-um battle call as his spear sailed through the air with him behind it.

A sickening crunch, followed by the squishy, sickening sound of steel piercing through an abdomen, echoed throughout the Newlands Lodge. The barkeep Dervera shrieked, staring, unable to understand how the fight had escalated so quickly.

Rayne was impressed. That was impressive skill with a difficult weapon. That had been excellent work with a spear. Unfortunately for the Dark Elf, he hadn't seen an Orc, with a half burned away face stand up behind him, skin charred, but eyes full of fury, and thrust forward, with his sword. Driving it straight through the lower half of his back.

Rayne roared with pain. As it tore through his flesh, and muscle, the Orc roared with triumph. That was his downfall. If he'd made a swift end of Rayne, he might've secured victory. Rayne, somehow still thinking somewhat clearly, swung out backwards with his fist, filling it with the power of paralysis. It slammed hard into the Orcs burnt, soft, vulnerable flesh. The Orc began to scream, but before he could, he went rigid, and collapsed into an undignified heap on the floor. Rayne, clutching at the small hole in his

torso, but didn't lose focus, after all, that was how this had happened. He turned painfully, and pointed his own weapon at the Orc on the floor, and jabbed the man in the ribs, positioning the sword over the mans heart, ready to drive down in an instant. The orc's muscles tensed, showing the paralysis wearing off.

"Move, and it'll be the last thing you ever do." Rayne growled.

Meanwhile, Elrohir set about finishing the war of the knives. Elrohir whipped his hand out to the left, and his opponent moved to intercept, but he flicked his wrist to the right, his blade cutting deeply into the orcs arm. The Orc gasped with pain, and in that momentary lapse of combat awareness, Elrohir's other hand, slammed down on the mans wrist. As soon as it connected, the Orc dropped his knife from his weakened wrist. Elrohir wasted no time in striking his now unguarded chest.

Josef meanwhile was rummaging through the defeated axe mans pockets. He pulled a black bag from his back, and withdrew a roll of cigarettes, a box of tobacco, and a pouch of coins from his pockets. He opened the bag, and searched quickly around inside. He grabbed a small bottle, and withdrew it. He grinned, and turned to Rayne.

"Here Dark Elf. This'll help. I can make you something better when we're away. But this'll keep you for now." Josef called, having noticed his new companions injury. *"It won't taste good though."* He added in a weak attempt at humour, before tossing it to Rayne.

Rayne caught the bottle, and ripped the cork off. He downed the bottle, almost gagging from the taste. He wiped the liquid from his lips, and breathed out. Despite his mouth feeling considerably worse for ware, the potion had done the job. The pain was beginning to dull slightly.

"By the divines that was disgusting. Tasted like rotten Netch carcass." Rayne replied. *"I just need to grab my armour. It's upstairs."*

Rayne had strapped on his armour as he rushed back into the tavern area. He'd seen the guards from the upstairs window, and had heard them soon after. How they were going to get out, he had no idea. When he arrived downstairs, he saw how. Josef and Elrohir had seen to that. A table was positioned by the door, positioned so that with the right amount of leverage, it would be enough to knock a pretty hefty door off it's hinges. Josef, and Elrohir were busy setting about doing so. As Rayne hurried to join them, they heaved, and the heavy door flew off it's hinges. A horrible crunching sound followed, as the two guards who had been hammering on the door were flattened under the heavy lump of wood. The trio began sprinting for the gate. They passed through, making up a quick explanation, saying a pair of guards had been attacked at the inn, and watching the guard dash to their aid. They passed through, and were heading for the stables, when Elrohir stopped, a small grin on his face.

"Mates, I'll have to stay here. I have unfinished business in Cheydinhal. I'll hide somewhere out here untill tomorrow." He looked back at the gate for a moment.

"We sure got into some trouble there, eh?" He said, and his grin grew wider.

The remaining pair threw the Dunmer a salute, and barged past the few stablehands watching the stable, and mounted two horses. It wasn't long before they were merely

dust clouds on the road, and Elrohir had slipped away without a trace. Later that afternoon, the guards abandoned their search, and the stable owners had been reimbursed. Two Dunmer, and a Nord had been labelled as a gang of murderers. Witnesses were appealing for another Dunmer who had been at the bar to come forward, as he had disappeared shortly after the murders, but had been seen conversing with the trio. His name was unknown. The Cheydinhal Bandits had escaped.

Chapter Two

Ale and Fire.

It had been about a week since the incident in Cheydinhal. The search for the trio had been much but abandoned, as the only real witness who had spoken to the group, was supposed to be a Dunmer, unbeknownst to those in Cheydinhal. His name was Merthierry Yvienne.

A cool blanket of snow had descended upon the city of Bruma, as it often did. The already lightly snow topped cabins were slowly becoming small blocks of white. Warm red glows grew within the windows, as those within lit roaring fires. The wooden log cabins were bolted firmly closed, to avoid the cold breeze that swept through the mountains extinguishing their fires. A few men were singing merrily on the streets, struggling to remain upright. But otherwise it was mostly quiet. A lot of the town was asleep, and one by one lights were being extinguished from the windows. However, there was still a little life in the town. Both inns were still open. One full to the brim, the other, was almost devoid of customers.

Olavs tavern was the unlucky inn to be suffering from a lack of customers. Four men, and a Khajiit were the only patrons of the inn. The Khajiit was wearing a leather coat he'd won somewhat unfairly in a game of liars dice from a farmer, while ordering his pint. He was tall. His hair was in dreadlocks, though they didn't look as if they saw much attention from a brush. His green eyes were scanning the gamblers table. The four were sitting around a table, and were gambling their troubles away. Not to mention their money. Liars Dice. The Khajiit received his pint of mead, and walked past the table. Just then a soldier at the table laughed as he pulled in a small pile of septims. He leant forward as he did so, and a beautifully crafted sword was revealed in splendour, but only for a moment. But that was all Hroarez Shavir needed. He made an about turn, and sat down at the table.

"Gentlemen. Mind if I join." Hroarez The Khajiit asked.

A few hours later, three of the four men had left. Only Hroarez, and the soldier remained. They both remained at the table. The soldier sat opposite Hroarez. He leant forward in his chair, so that he could better talk with his opponent.

"What're you betting Khajiit?" Asked the Soldier.

"Me. My hire for the year." Hroarez offered bluntly.

The soldier merely shook his head, and replied.

"I don't need a cat for a year." He answered, and leant back a little, as if losing interest.

"What then? What does a soldier need?" Asked Hroarez.

"Enough about what you're betting, what do you want me to bet." Replied the Soldier, slightly irritated now.

"Your sword." Replied Hroarez, calmly. No change in his tone. No change in his features. No doubt.

"Then I want everything. Whatever you own, is mine if I win."

"Deal."

Later, a man left the inn, significantly lighter than when he'd entered. Hroarez Shavir on the other hand, happened to be sporting an exceptionally crafted Kantana, the produce of a spot of light cheating, as he downed drink after drink.

An altogether more sober character entered the inn. Olav grunted at the influx of cold air, and gave the newcomer a look as to close the door, or else. The hooded man moved to close the door, but the wind slammed it close with force, before the robed figure could do so. It seemed the weather was getting a little worse. The hooded man slid past the bar, and Hroarez, who was growing less sober by the minute. Merthierry Yvienne moved past both in silence, and walked straight to the corner, and sat down on a stool in silence, and let the shadows absorb him.

Merthierry was absorbed in dark thoughts. He took no heed of the cold garments that covered him, soaked through from the snow that had settled on his cloak. He was shivering slightly. He could have moved next to the fireplace, to warm him and his clothes. But he was terrified of the yellow and orange demon that was fire.

Strange it was then, that mere moments later he stood, a smile that would unsettle a grown man across his face. Devilish, and uninviting. Evil and wicked. He stumbled towards the fireplace, seemingly no longer afraid, and stuck his hand deep into the flickering flames. He closed his hand, and quenched the fire instantly. Olav looked up, irritated. In response, Merthierry let loose the flames, and a roaring pillar of flame burst from his palm, rocketing up the chimney so far that it could have been seen across the mountains in Skyrim. Merthierry immediately felt his strength desert him, and he tumbled forwards into the raging inferno. Lucky he was then, that his garments were sodden.

Moments later he tumbled out of the fireplace. Drenched as the mans garments had been, the flames had not had enough time to catch alight on his clothing. He seemed to have come out of his momentary battle with the flames quite well. Olav hurried over, and after kneeling by him for a moment, declaring him alive.

As soon as Merthierry had been swallowed by the flames, Hroarez had been on his feet moving to help, but Olav had got there first. Hroarez agreed to help the publican drag the dunmer upstairs, and to find a bed for him. As they ascended, he mumbled weakly. The words didn't mean much to the duo carrying him.

"Resdaynia, Vivehk".

Once they had deposited Merthierry on a bed, Olav hurried away to get more blankets for him. Hroarez had kept his mouth shut, but he had plenty to say on the heat subject.

Later, down in the tavern, about an hour since Merthierry took his tumble in the fire, another man entered the Tavern, weary from his travels. His hair hangs loosely, mostly straight, about mid eye length. Dark brown eyes, survey the room with interest. A redguard, although his skin tone is much lighter than others of his race, so he appears more as if he were just tanned. A pair of grey robes hang loosely from his frame, concealing the chainmail beneath. He strides into the inn, clutching his robes close to him, to protect himself from the cold. He wasn't used to Olavs tavern, he was used to frequenting The Jerall View. But today, they were overbooked, and besides, he wasn't one to complain. He loved change, staying somewhere different was a good experience to him. Besides it'd be a little cheaper at least. He strides over towards Olav.

"I'd like a room. Under the name of Silassen Ilden." The tall Redguard says, with a warm smile, he says beginning to reach into his pocket for a few septims to pay for the room, but he was interrupted by a sound from the stairs. A man came stumbling down from the rooms upstairs, he looked slightly burnt, yet a little damp at the same time.

Silassen began to move towards the man, to see if he could be of any help, but another man called from a nearby table.

"He's alright'...Just a... burned." Hroarez calls. He was feeling sociable, and plunks a chair down at the table, clearing a few bottles away to make space on the table.

Silassen hesitated a moment, then assured himself that the other man would be fine. He moved over to Hroarez's table, and sat down. Hroarez roared an invitation to Merthierry, although he didn't address him that way.

"We need him!" Hroarez said and pointed at Merthierry, *"Fireman! Sit, sit! Olav! Mead!"* Hroarez said and stood up, but fell back into the chair.

Silassen laughed lightly, and then looked at Hroarez.

"I think you my friend, have maybe had a little to much." He says, keeping a straight face, before a grin spreads across his face.

"On the other hand, a little more couldn't hurt." Silassen says, and turns to Olav.

"Olav! My good friend here has been buying for himself all night! Keep them coming till this runs out of coins, or I run out of consciousness!" Silassen roars happily, and prepares to lay into his first mug of mead of the night.

Merthierry slipped out of the tavern, the last thing he needed was drunken company. Another gust of wind swept through the inn as the door opened for a moment. Olav looked up, momentarily annoyed at the traffic causing the fireplace to flicker in the wind.

It was late into the night, that the inn fell silent, and Olav could clean up what the other customers had left, laughter and talk dieing away, as Silassens money bag ran low, and the two men eventually passed out from all the mead they'd drank.

The next morning, Silassen's eyes snapped open. He couldn't understand why there were two moons, or why either of them were green. His head was pounding as if there were a wrestling match taking place in his skull. But he was determined to find out this

mystery. It took a moment for his eyes to focus, before he realised he was looking up at two apples, which looked distinctly like planets from his hungover point of view. He groaned, and made a move to sit up, and with a yelp slipped off his chair. He chuckled a little, and moved his hands to check if he'd frittered away all his money. He found his pouch was significantly lighter, but his bag and his pockets seemed to have a little left. Still, a trip to Chorrol would be worthwhile, to restock his coffers. He pulled himself off the floor, and headed for the door. Despite the daytime, Silassen pulled his hood over to his head. He tries to quietly close the door, but the wind hadn't died down over night, and a particularly strong gust slammed it behind him with a bang.

Hroarez woke with a start as the door closed with a crash, slamming powerfully into it's frame. He looks at the accumulated bottles around him, and grins. His hangover wasn't particularly bad. He picked up his Kantana, he'd probably dropped it at some point during last nights drinking session. As he passed the bar, he stumbled, and grabbed a small metal box for support. He paused for a moment, and shook it. He was greeted by the welcome sound of metal coins shaking around the tin. He grinned, and tucked it beneath the folds of his coat, and slid out of the inn door.

Chapter Three

Poison

A weary traveller stood outside the gate of Chorrol. The sun was shining brightly, and there didn't seem to be any clouds. The walls of Chorrol stood tall, framed by the morning sun, making the city come out in all its splendour. The whole city looked as if silhouetted. The watchtowers towering above even the tall trees from the forests, and the great walls standing tall in their strong pose. It was as if it were a picture. But the feature of the city that bothered the traveller the most was the gate. He looked young, most likely in his early twenties. His eyes were a shade of green, contrasting greatly with his dark blonde hair, he was clad in steel armour, which looked as if it had seen better days, a cloak draped over his shoulders. Seris Marentius stepped forward, and asked the man the best inn available in town. The guard smiled, happy to help, and pointed out directions to the Oak and Crosier, outlining its advantages over 'The Grey Mare'.

Further within the city, a man stepped out of the Mages Guild building. He was wearing a pair of mages robes, his medium length brown hair fell naturally, not really maintained, but not messy either. His eyes matched his hair, and they squinted up at the new days sun for a moment. He was about to turn off for 'The Grey Mare', his thoughts focused on lunch. But then something stopped him. He felt like something a little better today, and he decided to head towards 'The Oak and Crosier' instead. He didn't feel like burdening the Mages Guild by detracting from their food supplies, even if he was technically allowed to do so. Augustus Rainor checked his pockets for gold, and then set off for lunch.

Seris had been in 'The Oak and Crosier' for awhile. He'd been approached by a man, held a short conversation with him, and had ordered a small mug of mead to cool him down from the warm day outside. It was a pleasant way to spend the afternoon, the inn wasn't over filled, so it wasn't stuffy. It was just a relaxed atmosphere, people coming and going, some stopping for lunch, others merely stopping for a talk. A Breton walked through the door of the inn, he was clad in mages guild robes, and had brown hair. He looked around for a table, and spotted Seris. He headed over, and gestured to the spare seat.

"Hi, mind if I take this seat?" Augustus asked.

"By all means." Seris replied with a smile.

"I'm Augustus by the way. Augustus Rainor." Augustus told Seris, as he seated himself.

"Nice to meet you, I'm Seris. Seris Marentius." Seris replied.

"Can I get some food here, please." Augustus motions to a passing barmaid, who nods, and heads off to the bar. *"So what brings you hear Seris? Business?"*

Seris nodded before replying, and took a sip of his ale.

"I came from Hammerfell, the lack of work, and decent pay, have brought me here. I am a smith of trade, would you know of anything I could do to earn a living? My father has shown me the basics of maintaining magical weapons, are there any people in your guild using these kind of weaponry?" Seris replied in length.

Augustus outlined a few of Seris's options in Chorrol as a smith. A short while after, Seris departed, he needed to visit the Fighters Guild, and Augustus had to finish his lunch. The two parted ways, thinking little of their encounter. Probably expecting to see very little of each other ever again.

Seris headed into the fighters guild, and asked for directions to find Sabine the smithy. A few helpful guild members pointed the way, and he thanked them, before heading off to look for her. He found her training outside. He waited patiently until she took a break, and put a proposal to her about working on some of her weapons. She wiped the sweat from her brow.

"Can't. They're guild property, you've gotta be a guild member before I can let you near 'em. If the guildmasters in a good mood, you'll get a job to do and she'll let you join." She replied, before returning to training. Seris thanked her for her time, and headed towards the guild masters office.

Augustus was feeling suitably filled after his meal. It had been a simple one, but far better than anything 'The Grey Mare' would've been able to whip up. He stood from his chair, and edged his way out of the corner the table was in. He decided a short walk, then he'd return to the guild hall, and see if there was any work he could do for Teekus.

Seris left the guild hall feeling rather pleased with himself. He'd scored a position at a respectable guild, at it's head office no less, and he'd got a simple job to pay his bills already. It was a weapon shipment delivery. Nothing dangerous, and nothing too difficult. Just a little time to stretch his legs, and earn a bit of cash. It was then that he spotted a familiar Breton. Augustus Rainor had spotted him, and was making his way over. He soon caught up.

"Hello Seris. Didn't think I'd see you again. Where are you headed?" He asked.

"I'm headed up north, I need to deliver some weapons to an Ayleid-ruin. Does a mage have any interest in some ayleid-magic?" Seris replied, inviting him along.

"Of course. I could do with stocking up on Welkynd Stones. Give me a few minutes to grab my gear. Meet me at the North Gate, twenty minutes." Augustus replied quickly, hurrying away to collect his things.

Silassen Ilden was half way along the Orange road to Chorrol. He was walking briskly. His hangover had worn off earlier that morning, and he'd been enjoying the walk ever since. He loved being on the road. He couldn't find anything better than the sense of freedom when you were on the move. He could feel the sun beating down on him, and thought that the chainmail under his robe might have been a bad idea. But he felt too happy to much care. You could practically smell the forest. All of a sudden he felt his foot fall from underneath him. He tried to steady himself for a moment, and for one crazy moment he almost managed to right himself. But then he fell with a crash, laughing and groaning at the same time. He rubbed where he'd fallen, and checked his boot for what he'd stepped in. He froze. Dripping from his boot was a reddish substance, rapidly

turning brown. Silassen scrambled to his feet, and back tracked to the spot where he'd fallen. He peered down at the small puddle. There was a dark stain on the cobbles, around the puddle. But the small puddle of liquid that remained was a dark crimson. Blood.

Seris and Augustus were moving slowly along the road, towards the ruin. They had the weapons shipment strapped to the back of a bay horse, who was plodding along leisurely beside them. They were moving deeper into the woods, although they were sticking to the road for now. There were plenty of bushes around them. They were talking, telling each other about themselves. Then Seris hushed Augustus. He look focused. As if he were listening intently to something.

Silassen had followed the blood, off to the edge of the road. It had been more difficult to follow after it had gone into the woods, and been sponged up by the soft forest floor. He cast his eyes around once more, attempting to find the source of the disturbance. His eye caught on something jutting out of a bush. He cautiously walked towards it. A few paces away he stopped. It was two things jutting out of the bush. A leg, and, a tail? Carefully, ready to whip his hand away at any moment, Silassen reached a hand into the bush, and took hold of the tail, and yanked. The dead body of a wolf slid out of the bush, rather ungracefully. An arrow protruded from it's hind quarter. Silassen frowned. He was no expert, but he doubted that it would have been enough to kill an animal outright. He nervously tugged on the boot. It didn't budge. Silassen tugged harder, and a man slid out of the bush also. Unlike the wolf, it was clear how he'd died. His throat had been torn to shreds, by claws. There were jagged tooth marks across his arm, and a chunk of flesh had been bitten out of his leg. He must of wrestled the wolf to the bush. But that still didn't explain how the arrow had killed the wolf. Then the sun shifted slightly through the leaves, and it caught something, causing it to glint in the new sunlight. He reached out and took it. It was a large potion bottle. He uncorked it, and raised it to his nose, and sniffed it. It smelt vile. He couldn't quite place what it was though. But something made him lose interest in the bottle entirely. Faintly in the distance, he could hear the howling of wolves. And they were hungry. He drew his sword, and began to sprint towards the source of the howling. You'd think that would be the last thing you'd run towards, but he was pretty sure he'd heard shouts in the same direction.

Seris clocked it a moment before it happened. Wolves.

"WOLVES!" He roared to Augustus.

They burst out of the tree line, claws extended, mouths wide, jagged teeth, and a look on hunger, and madness in their eyes. Seris whipped out his sword, and swung it round in a vicious arc, bringing it smashing down on the lead wolves head, knocking it away, and killing it in one skillfull sweep. Augustus had taken a different tactic, and instead of using his frankly impressive enchanted sword, had decided to let fly with his hands. He balled up his hand, then spread his fingers wide, and shot a fireball at one of the wolves. The wolf tried to bound to the side, but it didn't have time to change direction, and it caught alight. Yapping it bounded around, trying to slap the flames out with it's tail,

rather than roll over to quench them. Seris ducked low as a wolf threw itself at him, and he stuck his sword upwards, raking it along its underbelly. It continued through the air for a moment, leaving a trail of blood, before colliding nastily with Augustus. Causing him to trip, as he threw a lightning bolt at the wolf nearest to him. It was now that Silassen burst onto the scene. Augustus was on the ground, trying to throw off the writhing body of the wolf Seris had been dealing with. Silassen saw Augustus on the floor, and a wolf climb upon him. Without thinking, Silassen tossed the bottle he'd picked up at the wolf. It spun through the air, and shattered on impact of the wolf. A thick green liquid burst from the broken bottle, and trickled into the wolf's fur, staining it. Immediately it burst into a frenzy. It went wild, kicking and writhing. It collapsed on the floor, and its back legs spasmed wildly. Silassen made a note; Don't touch the green stuff. Or that wolf. He brought his sword forward, and set about helping the others finish the wolves.

It was a short while later, that the three men had made camp around the battle area. None of the trio had been hurt in the fight, not even Augustus who had been pinned on the ground for part of the short duration of the fight. The eventual kill count had ended with three wolves despatched by Seris, another three by Silassen, and a further two by Augustus. Seris had apologised many times to Augustus over sending the other wolf flying at him. They were sitting at the camp, on a few bits of logs they'd brought from the forest, by a small fire, designed to keep them warm. Silassen had introduced himself, and when he'd discovered the two were on a Guild contract, he had decided to tag along. He was telling them about life in Bruma.

"It's good up there. A bit cold perhaps, but the Nords are a good folk. It's just full of-" He was cut off mid sentence by a whistling sound. A thud. He looked around confused, as did the others. Then they see, embedded in the wood next to Seris. An arrow. Another whistle.

"What the...?" Silassen murmured, before another arrow slammed into the log next to him. He yelped and flattened himself to the ground, moments before another arrow slammed into where he'd been sitting. He looked to the others. Seris had managed to dodge the projectiles, but Augustus had had no such luck. An arrow had caught him in the arm.

"I...I..Feel faint." He mouthed, unable to speak, before he collapsed on the ground. Seris made an army crawl forwards, and checked the other man's pulse. He was still breathing. An ugly green welt had formed where he'd been struck.

"Poison" Yelled Seris to Silassen, trying to make himself heard of the chorus of thuds from the arrows. An image of a large bottle breaking over a wolf's head formed in his mind. Now that he thought about it, the body he'd found had been carrying a quiver. He cursed under his breath, then turned to Seris.

"Silba...Locut..." Augustus mumbled.

"I'm going to try and draw them away. Help Augustus." Silassen yelled, and without a moment's hesitation, crawled away from the log, and sprinted away down the road at phenomenal speed. It was crazy, but even in the heat of battle, Silassen enjoyed the run. Pushing that crazy thought from his mind, he focused on the chase, and pelted down the road, followed by a hail of arrows, and yells from the bandits within the treeline.

Back at the clearing, the hail had stopped. Seris was desperately trying to revive Augustus, but wasn't enjoying a great deal of success. He tried various restoration spells, but almost all were to no avail. Then at last, Augustus gasped, and coughed. His eyes snapped open, and he rolled over onto the floor. Seris yelled with triumph, but was cut short sharply. All he felt was a dull pain in the back of the head. Augustus yelped as Seris fell forward. He scrambled to remove Hellfire from its sheath, but a large bandit with a club stepped forward, and leant in close.

"I wouldn't do that if I was you little man. I wouldn't want to hurt you anymore than I'm gonna anyway." He said softly, with a malicious grin. He raised the club, and Augustus saw nothing.

Silassen stopped. He could keep up this pace for awhile, and he was a fair way ahead of his pursuers. But he felt tired. It was strange, his legs felt odd. Not tired, but as if their strength had deserted them. He looked down at his arm, and froze. There was a small graze along his forearm. It had turned slightly green. He quietly swore. His vision was hazy. The world appeared to be swimming. He couldn't focus. It was blurry. He could see blobs running towards him, but they could be anyone. He didn't care. He just wanted to sleep. And he did.

Chapter Three

A New Arrival

A man of average height stepped off of the boarding plank in Anvil. His hair which slipped over his eyes a little, to form a fringe, following behind him, whipped back a little by the wind. It was a light blonde, and suited the man well. He was fairly broad, probably from his years in the legion. His eyes were a light blue, well contrasted to his hair. He looked totally at home in civilian clothing, despite his soldierly build. He looked around, taking in the new sights, new smells, new ideas. He looked in his late twenties, but in reality had just hit the thirty mark. He didn't look like the sort you could tell who he was by looking at him, but he didn't look particularly mysterious either. He marched up to the desk, his leather boots making soft padding noises as he walked. A few others had disembarked the ship with him. He looked at a sign, it read.

"Welcome to Anvil Port."

He smiled. Cyrodiil. Another place to tick off his list. He sniffed in the air, and discovered he could still smell the sea. He'd spent a long time smelling the sea while he travelled over here. What he needed was a **fresh** pint of mead. He'd been living off sea food for weeks, and he wanted something proper. Something fresh, and that would slip down the throat without complaint. He noticed a port tavern, and resolved to head there right after he'd finished getting the papers that allowed him access to Cyrodiil.

"Next!"

A loud voice rang out, and Bethras looked towards the line he was in. He realised he was at the front, and hurried forward to be seen to. In front of him was a middle aged woman, who looked incredibly bored. She was smoking a cigarette, and twirling a lock of her black hair around her finger.

"Reason for travel to Cyrodiil."

"Pleasure."

"Great. Name?"

"Bethras Northwode."

"Terrific. Welcome to Cyrodiil, pinnacle of the empire, blah blah and all that horse shit."

The woman said with all the emotion of a bed pan. She slammed a stamp down on the papers, and handed them to Bethras, pausing to take another puff of her cigarette.

"NEXT!"

Bethras headed for the tavern, tucking his new registration papers into his bag as he went, looking at the big red approved sign stamped across them. An easy entry, yet still worthy of celebration he decided. Just before he reached the tavern, he noticed something on the wooden boardwalk which looked a little out of place, he stooped, and

picked it up. A brass ring. He slipped it onto his finger. He thought nothing of it, and would dispose of it later, but thought it looked good for the time being.

He pushed open the door to the tavern, and headed across to the bar. There weren't many people inside. There was a nord, another man who was slumped across the table, surrounded by enough bottles that if they'd been full, would've been enough to fill a barrel. And a strikingly attractive imperial woman standing in the corner, her blonde hair fell over shoulders, and her dress left little to the imagination. She was sitting at the bar, and looked over at Bethras as he approached.

"I'll have an ale." He told the barkeep. He searched around in his bag, and pulled out a plump money bag, he took out a handful of septims, and dropped a couple of coins on the counter. The man nodded, and began rummaging around beneath the bar for a bottle. Bethras leant against the bar, and stuffed the money bag back in his pack. He wasn't sure, but the woman might of started coming towards him as soon as he'd produced the money bag.

"Why hello there stranger. Travelling alone?" She asked, pushing her chest out a little.

"Erm..Yes. I'm Bethras." He replied, almost stammering at how close she was getting.

She leant in so close he could smell whatever sweet smelling ointment she was wearing. She leaned in till she was pressing up against him. And whispered in his ear.

"Travelling alone can be awful lonely. Come to my house, on the edge of the hill. Me and my friends will show you a good time. Come tonight sugar, eleven at night. Don't forget to bring your bags, you'll be staying the night." She whispered seductively in his ear, her hand slowly running up his leg, and her tongue licked down his cheek as she pulled away from him, and she slowly walked out of the tavern, allowing him to watch her go. Bethras was gobsmacked. He turned to the tavern master, who didn't look at all surprised. He handed him the ale.

"Just so ye' know. It's ten right now. You can go rushing off to her later." He added, before turning away to collect the bottles from the unconscious mans table.

Bethras looked around for a seat in the bar, contemplating how long it would be before he could go to the house on the hill, before the Nord came and sat down next to him.

"I wouldn't go if I was you." He said simply.

"Why the hell not? I can think of plenty of reasons to go." Bethras replied with a grin.

"Yeah? Well I can think of plenty not to. Didn't you think it was a bit odd that she ignored you till you produced that little money bag?" He answered.

Bethras was about to reply, but then he slowly closed his mouth. He knew the other man was right, but he still wasn't entirely convinced. As if reading his mind, the Nord continued.

"Trust me. I've seen guys walk out of here after her, and come back with barely a scrap of clothing on there back. I'm willing to bet they gave it up voluntarily, but I doubt they realised they'd be giving them everything they got. Trust me. Don't go near that house."

He finished, and ordered another mug of ale from the barkeep. Dejected, Bethras decided the man was right, and decided he owed him thanks.

"Thank you for your advice. I wasn't..I wasn't thinking straight. I'm Bethras, yourself?" Bethras told the Nord.

"It's nothin'. Might wanna slip off that ring, in case anymore sirens come in 'ere." He answered.

"Huh?" Bethras replied, a curious look on his face.

"They only go for married guys. Don't get caught that way. They saw the ring, thought you were game." He answered plainly.

"Oh. Thank you. You've been very helpful so far my good man, but if I could ask one more thing of you?"

"Shoot."

"Where would be best for me to go from here? I'm a traveller, and I was wondering where I should see first." Asked Bethras.

"Normally I'd say Kvatch, but I'm gonna say head straight on through to Chorrol. Nice place. I'd ditch Anvil for now though lad, there'll be all sorts of Mercenary types coming in, and they're not always a pleasant bunch. T'is raiding season at the moment." He replied.

"Thanks." Bethras replied plainly, before finishing his drink, thanking the tavern keep, and heading off for the road to Chorrol, pack slung across his back, walking slightly faster past the house he saw on the hill, worried about what those inside would do if he'd actually gone.

Hundreds of miles away, on the opposite end of the province, at the city of Cheydinhal, an Dunmer was leaving the city gates. His name was Elrohir L'Hradror, and Ocheeva was displeased. He had been sent away, without a mission. Since he had little other direction, he thought why not track down those who had got him into this mess.

Chapter Four

Outlaws

After riding at a grueling pace for a little under a week. In complete silence, first to the East, and then gradually to the south, Josef finally came to a halt at the top of a small overlook, facing a cool, freshwater river. The sun, already beginning its descent towards the horizon, reflected its warm light off the lapping waves. He pointed across the river at a flat spot near a cave door,

"That looks like a good place to stop 'fer the night. But right now our ponies are half dead," He said, hopping off the skewbald-furred beast with a heavy pat on her back *"an' I'm as hungry as a damn cliff racer! We gotta get us some food before we start settin up to sleep."*

Josef turned after dismounting and looked at his fellow outlaw. After looking him up and down once, he began to laugh, and didn't stop until it was a bit uncomfortable.

"Sorry, Dunmer, I jes' realized that we all just became outlaws together and ya' don't know my name, or I yers. I'm Josef." He said with a polite nod towards the two mounted men. His stomach roared, and he added, *"And I'm hungry!"*

Rayne could feel every bone in his body aching. Long horse rides always made him feel that way. He decided he'd have a stretch atop his horse. He returned the Nords hospitality, and told him his name in return.

"Rayne Felles, and I too could do with something to ea-" Rayne began to reply, when he stretched a little too far, and he slipped off his horse, and the small puddle to his left rushed up to meet him. He crashed into the pool, causing as large of a splash as would've been possible from the tiny collection of water. However, there was still enough there for it to waterlog his armour. Cursing as he did so, Rayne removed his armour, knowing it'd be useless if it was filled with grimy water.

"Dont you dare laugh, or the mudcrabs will have something nice to eat tonight!" He roared at Josef.

Josef smiled only for a brief moment as the Dunmer fell clumsily off his horse.

"Not too many o' them in Morrowind, friend? Well, Rayne, ya said the magic word I think. Mudcrabs!" Josef said.

Josef unpacked all his belongings from the horse, including a large roll of tanned netch leather and a large backpack, and laid them on the flat surface which was to be the campsite. He dug through the backpack, puffing absent-mindedly on his cigarette. He had to dig quite far into the pack, and it seemed that whatever he was looking for was quite near the bottom. After a moment, he surfaced from the bag, victoriously gripping the handle of a small, razor-sharp axe. It was originally a fellow Barbarian's, and it was designed for combat: The grippable end on the handle was about a hand-and-a-half, really the only distinguishing feature to keep it from being classified as a hand hatchet. The steel axe head was small, and made the handle look somewhat large in comparison.

Although it was a type of war-axe, Josef had never used an axe in combat and indeed did not quite know how. He was quite skilled, however, at using the portable axe to chop wood, and before an hour's time had quickly felled three dead deciduous trees with long, straight branches. He started to chop the heavy trunks into manageable sections, but quickly abandoned this chore, deciding that an axe was the wrong tool for such a task and instead chopped all the large limbs off from the trees. He bundled up a rather large stack of the wood and carried it back to the camp, only forty yards off or so.

Once at the camp, he used three of the straightest, longest boughs of wood to hold the ceiling of the tent up. The tent was an ingenious creation; two quilts of animal leather stitched together in such a way to make the netch-leather ceiling rise up in a dome around a elkskin floor. The floor's many skins still had their furs attached, and the effect was a multi-colored brown and grey fur carpet, slightly worn out from countless footsteps.

Now that the tent was set up, Josef turned his attention to the fire. He dug out a small pit with the flat end of his axe and started piling wood in a pyramid around some dead brush. He reached into his pocket for his small tin of matches, but found it empty. Sighing in frustration, he walked back to the tent, dug through his bag again and returned to the side of the pit. He uncorked two vials, one colored a gleaming orange and the other a dusty grey. He poured the grey, then the orange onto the wood and it started to smoke.

He backed away quickly, and then sat down cross-legged with his two open vials. As the fire burst into existence a few feet away, Josef grabbed a handful of small sticks from the pile nearby and began dipping them, one after the other, in the orange vial, and then into the grey vial. After this odd routine, he dropped each stick gingerly back into his tin. Enjoying the warm glow, Josef sat in silence by the fire, lighting another cigarette with a hot coal that popped itself noisily out of the pit.

As soon as Rayne had gotten out of sight of his companion, he sank down next to a tree clutching the still open wound, lifting his shirt he looked at the wound, the potion Josef had given him had helped a little by forming a scab over it, probably a minor healing potion, he chanted some words and felt the wound start burning hot and then it was freezing cold and then back to normal, looking down the only thing you could see was a bright red scar, which he knew would fade eventually, getting back up, he walked for a while.

Rayne ended up just down around the bend in the river, hiding amongst some bushes, from his hiding spot he could see three deer drinking from the river, he grabbed an arrow and notched it, staying crouched in the bushes he brought the bow up, aiming at the biggest deer down at the river, and was about to loose it when THWACK! THWACK! THWACK! The deer, frightened, ran for all they were worth, Rayne stood up frustrated and looked to where the noise was and could see Josef cutting down a tree.

"Goddamn nords..." Rayne muttered.

Picking his way out of the bushes, he looked down to the river and saw some mudcrabs sleeping in the afternoon sun

"Didnt Josef say something about mudcrabs and food? or something?"

Walking down to them Rayne pulled some leather straps out from his satchel and grabbed one, binding its claws like he saw in the markets, which he found harder then he had originally thought, after succeeding he sat it on its back so it didnt scuttle away and repeated the process on the other two mudcrabs.

Stalking back in to camp a while later, he saw the Nord sitting in front of a fire, turning to Josef he complimented him with

"Nice fire..." Pulling out the still living mudcrabs from a sack he threw them in to the pond near their camp *" You said you wanted mudcrabs right?"* Rayne said while watching the mudcrabs play happily in the pond, unaware of their tasty futures.

Rayne was twisting and turning on his bed. He was nicely filled. He and Josef had eaten earlier that evening. Josef had turned the Mudcrabs into a rather tasty stew. Rayne had actually enjoyed it. But still he couldn't sleep. His thoughts were of the past few days. How he'd gone from perfectly respectable citizen, to an outlawed bandit. How a simple bar room brawl had caused him to flee Cheydinhal with a hole in his abdomen. He got up. If he couldn't sleep, then a walk might help calm him so he could drop off later. He walked for a little while, before coming to rest by a tree. He felt much calmer now. He hovered by the tree, looking out at the road they had travelled. He saw someone making his way up the road. Heading towards the camp. He frowned. They were coming from the same direction they had been. From Cheydinhal. Could it be a guard of some description? Rayne was taking no chances, and slid into the bushes, concealing himself until the man would walk by.

Elrohir was traversing a road. He'd been making good time. He knew mindlessly chasing a group of two men through The Nibenay wasn't the best of ideas, but he had little else to do. Besides he owed Josef his thanks for helping them to escape. He could see a pillar of smoke forming in the distance. Perhaps a camp fire. A flicker of hope that it might be his bandit duo shimmered into life. He pressed forward more quickly.

Rayne couldn't properly see the man from the cover of the undergrowth. But he'd seen him tilt his head towards the smoke rising from our campsite, and quicken his pace, moving with purpose, towards our base. Rayne stealthily followed. He drew Sanguinaria, and whispered to the woods.

"Kynareth, Goddess of the Winds, grant me your gift!" And with that, he leapt, sword high in the air, ready to bring it down crashing upon his targets head.

Elrohir heard someone whisper a few words. Something about a gift, and the goddess of the winds. Then he saw a blade flash, and without thinking he dived to the left, tripping over a rock face, and tumbling into the undergrowth.

Rayne gave chase with a yell, still unaware of his opponents identity. He was having a hard time keeping up with his more agile kinsman. Eventually though, Rayne threw his last scrap of energy into the chase, and managed to grab a hold of the mans cloak, and halt him in his tracks. He brought his sword forward, and while gasping for breath, detailed what would happen if he moved.

Elrohir recognised that voice, he turned with a start. It was Rayne!

"Peace friend! It is me, Elrohir! From the Lodge." Elrohir spoke quickly, and tucked away his dagger, trusting Rayne not to slit his throat. A moment passed, and then Rayne replied to Elrohir.

"Oh..." He replied lamely. He withdrew his sword, freeing Elrohir of the danger, and copying him to sheath his weapon also.

"Im so sorry friend, I thought it was the legion, I mean, if they caught us..."

Rayne pulled Elrohir back to his feet and brushed the dirt off him,

"I'm glad you came looking for us, ill lead you to the camp" Already walking towards the bright campfire down the hill.

Elrohir waited for Rayne to brush the forest floor off him, before following him back to the camp, and responding to his apology rather simply.

"No worries."

As if deaf to the sounds of the struggle, Josef groggily woke up a few minutes later with no sign of alarm. He yawned loudly, stretched, and dressed, but left his armor in the tent. Lighting a cigarette, he walked through the doorway of the tent and was surprised to see Elrohir.

"Hey there, if it ain't Sera Hlaalu himself! Business in Cheydinhal, he says, I bet that business wears a skirt? What kept ya?" Josef replied with a laugh.

And with a heavy thud he sat down on a stump by the fire. He puffed on his cigarette, blowing his smoke into the fire's, his cold-looking blue eyes dancing with the reflection of the blaze.

"Well boys, we got 'erselves a fun little predicament now don't we? We got 'ta find a right place to stay, and find some... source of income," Josef said, pausing as if to emphasize the meaning of his words.

Josef picked up his spear from the ground next to him and used it to stoke the fire. He then grabbed the middle, tossed it gently in his hand as if to test the weight of it, and hurled it at a nearby log. The spear closed the short distance quick as lightning, and with a loud crack it lodged firmly into the wood. Josef grabbed the end of his spear and pulled it back within reach, examining it with a stern look before pulling the log off the sharp spearhead and tossing it atop the flaming orange coals.

There was a moment of silence, before Rayne spoke up, shifting his weight on the log as he talked, and put his suggestion to the group.

"We could become bandits." He said simply. It was a strange sentence to put so simply, but he did so anyway, looking as if it was no big thing. He shifted himself once again, so that he was closer to the fire, anxious to soak up a little more warmth, it was precious because of the cold night air.

Elrohir withdrew a loaf of bread from his jacket, it wasn't anything special, but he was hungry from his travels. He paused a moment, and then answered Rayne.

"Aren't we *already*?" Elrohir asked

"*I say we move south towards Leyawiin,*" He continued and broke off a small piece of the bread, "*The more distance the better. Hopefully we can outrun the news of our recent infamy.*" He finished, and popped a piece of bread into his mouth, and chewed thoughtfully.

"*True I 'spose.*" Rayne replied with a shrug. "*We could always offer our services as Mercenaries for Anvil. I hear they're hiring this time of year. You'd know that already though Josef, wouldn't you.*" He finished, winking at Josef to show he meant it in humour.

The group discussed their plans, and they reached an agreement. Elrohir had the best idea, to head for the town of Leyawiin. After another short discussion, they decided one of them should keep watch, in case of guards, and Rayne offered to take the first watch.

Elrohir got to thinking as he moved to a nearby tree, to rest his back against, nodding a goodnight to Rayne as he moved off to take watch. He sank against the tree trunk, and tried to think of a reason to stay with the group. He liked this group, perhaps Rayne less so than Josef, as he was a bit more rash about his actions, but none the less he enjoyed his time with them. But he was a member of the dark brotherhood. He shouldn't be sticking to any group. He was still trying to come up with a good enough reason to stay, when Rayne gave him one, and he was on his feet in an instant.

"*Josef! Wake up, there's trouble coming this way. Elrohir, get up, guards.*" Rayne called softly to them, careful not to make too much noise. Rayne went straight for his armour, and began suiting up. Elrohir meanwhile dashed over to the fire, and stamped on it, crushing the flames beneath his boot, and plunging them into darkness. For a moment there was silence, before Rayne cursed as he walked into a tree.

The sudden darkness made the guards' torches, bobbing up and down in the distance, all the more easy to see. As their eyes adjusted to the dark, Elrohir moved quietly away, sinking into the foliage, dagger drawn, moving stealthily towards the guards. Rayne meanwhile, had realised Josef still had not stirred. He moved back over to the snoring Nord, and nudged him with his foot.

"*Josef. Pirates are stealing your skooma.*"

Elrohir had drawn up alongside their guards, and could see their formation. There was a line at the front, and they were keeping in order. But a few had fallen behind a little, and were slightly more scattered than the others. He was buzzing in anticipation of the kill. After all, this is what he did for a living. He crept closer, to the guard at the back. In one fluid motion he darted from the bushes, in complete silence, and used one hand to slam over the guard's mouth, and the other to sweep his blade across the man's throat. It felt good, seeing the red mist in the air, the crimson trickle rapidly in a glorious cascade of

blood from the hole in the mans throat. Perfection. As the guards final breath collapsed, his torch fell to the ground with a slight thud. But the other guards had moved a little further forward, and didn't hear the tiny sound. Elrohir glanced around, the guards helmet was still nearby, as was the torch. Swiftly he retrieved the torch and held it high enough so that the guards didn't realise they'd lost an ally. He picked up the helmet, and advanced. If the two groups clashed, he'd be behind enemy lines, ready and waiting.

Chapter Five

Antidote

Silassen's eyes snapped open as he regained consciousness. The first thing that occurred to him, was that someone was forcing a hot liquid down his throat. He coughed and gagged. Spitting out the liquid, figuring whatever it was wouldn't be good for him. He didn't enjoy a great deal of success. He wasn't able to move that much, probably a result of the poison. But he could slowly feel it wearing off. But it wasn't a pleasant sensation. He could feel cut's, scrapes bruises all over his body. A few felt distinctly like arrow wounds. They must of pounded him with arrows just after he'd passed out. He could turn his head a little, as the antidote they'd given him worked it's way through his veins, spreading throughout his body. He could count five guards in the room. One was clutching a very familiar short sword. Silassen's eyes focused on the sword for a

moment, before coming to focus on the man who was holding onto it. He was a tall broad man, imperial by the looks of him. He was clad in leather armour, and his muscles showed through the thin material. Other similarly built men dotted the room, though none were quite as large as the one with his sword. Silassen looked into the mans face. He was about to ask him who he was before he beat him to the punch.

"Who are you and your friends? Why are you on our turf?" Barked the man. He was clearly the leader of the bandits. Now Silassen knew why a weapon shipment needed to be delivered near here. Clearly there were fighters guild members in the area, and they were here to take these guys out. Probably hadn't succeeded.

"We're just trav-" Silassen began trying the innocent approach, before the man drew back his fist and let Silassen have it in the stomach, driving the wind out of him. Silassen gasped for air. That punch had enough power behind it to put an ogre to shame. He would've liked to of slid to his knees, but he wasn't going to grant the man the satisfaction.

"Don't play games with me worm. Why. Are. You. Here." The imperial roared, hand shooting for the sword on his belt. Silassens sword.

"Seeing...As...that information is...keeping me alive, I'm not...exactly going to give it up easily...am I." Silassen replied, gasping for air, but keeping his eyes locked into the taller imperials, a defiant glint in his stare.

The imperial roared, and drew back his fist to hit him again. But he paused before he struck, and instead leaned in close.

"I'll be back. And when I am, you're gonna wish you'd never been born."

"One of us is going to die today. It won't be me." Replied Silassen, with an equal amount of venom in his voice. The imperial merely grinned, and left. Leaving the other five in the room, who sat, steely faced, watching him.

Augustus woke first, as he'd been knocked unconscious when he'd been taken, rather than being incapacitated by the potion. There weren't any guards in the room. He guessed they were with Seris. Or anyone else they might of captured. He crept forward, to the edge of the doorway, and could hear people talking.

"Boss wants another batch of revival. Imperial got hit by the arrows to."

"They got the redguard awake then?"

"Yeah. I thought he'd of got hit to much but turns out he's as alright as the others."

"Fair enough. What'd they do with their stuff?" At this point in the conversation Augustus's hand slid to his side, to find Hellfire missing. He cursed in his head, and tuned back into the bandits conversation.

"...took it below, that place with the spikes." He heard one of them finish saying.

Just then Augustus heard a crash, and a series of yells, he hurried towards the source of the sound. There was another series of yells, and another crash, followed by a grunt and

a dull thud. Augustus hurried round the corner, hands held in combat position, ready to cast a spell at a moments notice. He peeked round the corner, and relief flooded his face as he relaxed.

"*Seris.*" He breathed. Before him stood his friend, still clad in his steel armour as he had been before.

"*Why haven't they taken your armour?*" He asked, puzzled.

"*They were trying to, that's why I woke up. It's a good job they didn't, he would've hurt me a lot worse if he'd managed to get it off before I awoke.*" He replied, speaking quickly

"*C'mon. I heard our weapons are below.*"

Silassen was lying in the room, eyes closed, trying to figure a way out of this mess, when he heard shouting from the corridor. Another bandit popped his head round the corner, and barked an order to the others. His friends had gotten free, and everyone was to conduct a search of the ruins, and kill those who had escaped. Silassen was left alone, with one single guard. He was leaning against the doorway, his left hand resting on his sword hilt, the others were holding a cigarette loosely between two fingers. His eyes were fixed on Silassen as he moved to stand upright. Silassen took a step towards him, and immediately he dropped the cigarette, both hands flying to his sword. Silassen lurched forward, but his opponent was faster, and had his sword drawn by the time Silassen was next to him. Silassen knew he was in trouble. The bandit didn't exactly look experienced, and normally taking on a single armed opponent wouldn't have bothered Silassen, he'd been taught by one of the best the Fighters Guild had to offer in hand to hand combat, Mordryn Owyn. But now, when he was in this weakened state, he was a little on edge. He let the other man make the first move. Without warning the bandit thrust outwards, Silassen side stepped the blow, and brought the flat of his palm down on the blade, loosening the mans grip on the hilt, and moved forward with his other hand to yank it outwards, a move that disarmed the man in an instant, before he could retaliate, Silassen hit him round the head with the hilt of the sword, clubbing him unconscious.

"*Thanks Mordryn*" Silassen thought to himself, and hurried out of the cell, searching for his friends.

Seris and Augustus had delved deeper into the ruins, making sure to keep track of where they were. They'd heard shouts soon after Seris had incapacitated his guard, and were now moving away from the sounds of voices. They were planning to search for their weapons, then get the hell out of the ruin. Time was ticking. The bandits knew the ruin better than themselves, and it was only a matter of time before they tracked them down, or the duo backed themselves into a corner. But as their luck had it, they turned a corner, and found themselves standing in large hall. It had probably of been a great room of splendour in it's day, but now it was just a crumbling statement to the dead age of the Ayleids. Pillars lay in pieces, chunks lying across of the room. All of the casks in the room had been cracked open, and welkynd stones were scattered throughout the room. In the center of the room, there was a central platform. It was slightly raised off of the floor. It was one of the traps that the ayleids had left behind many years ago. But

all that mattered to Seris and Augustus, was that at the end of the room there was a group of tables. Many different objects cluttered the tabletop. Papers, maps, alchemy equipment, spare weapons, and more importantly, Seris and Augustus's weaponry. Unfortunately, there were two bandits, standing guard over two men in Fighters Guild cloaks. The men they'd been sent to resupply. What was worse, they had spotted the duo, and were advancing swords drawn.

Silassen ducked behind a pillar, as one of the bandits turned the corner and almost spotted him. That was the second time he'd nearly been spotted. He was still clutching the sword he'd taken from the guard. It just didn't feel the same as his shortsword. He advanced after he was sure the bandits hadn't spotted him. As he rounded the corner, he saw that his caution had not been required. Before him was a large hall. A variety of things were taking place. Seris was backing away from a bandit, defenceless. Augustus was standing guard behind a scamp he had summoned, which was tossing fireball after fireball at the advancing bandit. It seemed to be handling the criminal aptly, as he had to keep dancing away from the flames. Silassen dashed in, some of his strength returning at the sight of his friends. He shot forward, sliding in behind Seris's adversary, and making short work of the man. He didn't feel good about it, he would've preferred to of fought the man fairly, but where his friends were concerned, certainty of victory outweighed honour. He grinned at Seris, and turned to Augustus in time to see the Scamp flicker out of existence, but it had done it's job. The bandit lay dead, his clothes singed, and his flesh burnt.

"Quick, grab some weapons." Seris said

"And cut their bonds." Silassen added, gesturing to the two other captives rope bindings.

Soon the trio had all of their equipment returned, weapons and all. Except for Silassen, who's weapon he knew to be in the hands of the Bandit ringleader. You understand then, his uncertainty of whether to be happy or worried when he made his entrance into the hall, flanked by eight other burly men. Fully armed, fully rested, and eager for battle. They were striding through the middle of the hall. Augustus's eyes darted to the block just in front of them, he makes eye contact with the others, trying to let them know what would happen if their oppressors stood on it.

"So. Got your weapons back. And found yourself some new friends I see. Good. It'll be more fun to slaughter you if you put up a bit of a challenge." The lead bandit announced, an arrogant tone, sure of victory. He took a cocky step forward, and his group unanimously followed. Augustus stepped back a little, and the lead bandit howled.

"Running away are ya'? Run 'em through lads." He roared. Augustus grinned, and flicked a mocking salute to the bandit ringleader, who paused, confused. Then the floor shot up from beneath him, and wrenched him, and his followers, from the solid ground, and up towards the dull coloured spikes above. All that was heard from below was half a dozen shrieks cut short by a sickening crunch. Slowly the block descended. Augustus marvelled at how the trap was still working, Seris wondered about it's workings, and how the mechanisms worked, and Silassen moved forward to retrieve his sword. Although only a couple of bodies had returned down the podium, the others remained impaled on the spikes, Silassens sword lay amongst the pool of blood on the dais. It was on the edge of the square block. Cautiously he reached forward, ready to whip his hand away if

the block even began to shudder. It didn't and he grabbed his sword. It felt good to have it in his hands again. He sheathed it, and turned to the others.

"So did we finish the contract or not?"

Chapter Six

Hunted.

Varnand Rainor. That was a name that was on the minds of many Morag Tong agents these days. Not in the way it had once been. He had once been a respected agent himself. One of their best to be sure. Even at the age of thirty he had been high in ranking in their eyes. But recently, things had taken a turn for the worse for the Breton's way of life. It had been common knowledge amongst those in high ranking in the Morag Tong order that he had been taken from his village at birth. That wasn't to say he himself had known it. It had only been by pure chance that the Breton had noticed the letter with his name on the envelope. It was pure chance that he'd thought it might have been a contract, and he'd decided he would take a little peak. But the words on that page had turned his life upside down. While they told nothing of his brother, and he remains in ignorance of that fact to this day, they told him much of his history. Never the most patient of men, Varnand had wasted no time in tracking down his place of

birth. And shortly after taking one of his now most prized possessions from the burnt rubble that would have been his home had the followers of mephala not taken him. He had taken the hellfire dagger from a hut amidst the rubble, now his most precious possession.

He brooded over this dark thought as he stoked the flickering flames of his fire. He was twirling hellfire between his fingers, the reason for his sudden reminiscence. He'd been having dreams. Fragmented dreams, but dreams none the less. Whenever he slept, he had visions. Visions of a castle. It emanated evil, and seemed to be seamlessly fused with the mountain top. Sometimes, the dream showed a flash of a face. The face of an altmer, twisted by Daedric magic, and years of dark arts. His flesh was disformed, and he radiated power. But more than that, every time he woke from the dream he felt a calling. With a promise. A promise that the Morag Tong would trouble him no more. Varnand had been troubled by these dreams ever since he'd found the mountains. He somehow knew, that if he wanted to find the castle, he would know the way. He slammed his knife into the log next to him. He'd made his decision. He gathered his belongings from around the cave, and packed them all into the small bag that he'd tucked in a small crevice by the mouth of the cave. He took a left turn without thinking about it in the slightest. It was going to be a long trek through the mountains.

Adonis Vile exhaled the smoke. He'd been travelling for days. He'd been enjoying his freedom from the brotherhood. While he missed the imaginative ways he had been occasionally given to murder others, he had killed since his expulsion, and he'd been free to do so as he pleased, he'd had time to revel in the kill, and draw all the sick pleasure he could from it. And now? He was travelling to Bruma. He didn't like to stay in one place to long. To many bodies means to much attention. Besides, a Nord had been rude about his mismatched eyes in a tavern a few days ago. Killing him hadn't quenched his anger for the Nordish breed. He needed to bag another. He dropped the tobacco roll, and stepped on it, though he needn't have bothered. The mountainous winds were sweeping down the road to Bruma, and would have doused the embers in the cigarette. Thoughts of the Nord made him drift back to where his life of murder had begun. He remembered his childhood. Those who'd called him names, pushed him in the mud, bullied him. They'd regretted later of course, when he'd hunted them down one by one. He was a murderer before he hit sixteen. And he loved it. He stood up from the log he'd been sitting on, and swung his pack back onto his back. It connected with his bow, and his quiver jangled slightly. He grunted, and moved on towards Bruma.

Little did Adonis Vile know, it was the meddling fingers of Azmodæum that were pulling him closer to the city of Bruma, and that the final cogs of fate were slotting into place, setting the stones rolling for Azmodæum's invasion of the province of Cyrodiil.

Chapter Seven

The Wolf.

Rayne sat by the campfire, which they had relit once they'd run off the guards. Rayne had seen Elrohir slip behind enemy lines. He'd felt dejected since the battle. Aside from Elrohir cutting down the guard, he'd managed to avoid any fatalities. He'd confused most of the guards, by igniting various areas of the road with fire spells, and lighting a few tree's. The guards were clearly inexperienced, and had bolted after enough confusion had been sewn. Josef had woken shortly after the fight, as when he'd first awoken he had been groggy, and slow to get moving. The rest of the night was uneventful, the three men had discussed the battle, Rayne remaining quiet for the most part,

disappointed that Elrohir had spoiled what could have been a clean sheet. Josef had said little, and soon the trio had returned to their tents, and gradually drifted off, welcoming sleep. When they woke, it was still dark, the night still very much alive.

Rayne had been a little sullen when he had woken, Elrohir's ruthlessness still fresh in his mind, he wished that he hadn't killed the guard, that way it would have been a clean way to end the fight, without unnecessary bloodshed and death. He hadn't said as much, and while it had bothered him, it was a minor disturbance to him, one dead guard wasn't the end of the world.

The group were packing away their few possessions, the tents, bits of food they had not yet eaten, the sleeping rolls, amongst a few other things, and talk had gradually progressed, casual conversation about the vermin that are goblins, towards more personal stories, such as one another's history. Rayne had been the first to speak, his sullenness from Elrohirs murder now completely dissipated. He had explained to them the intricacies of the five remaining great houses of Morrowind, and how he himself was the Telvanni, and how assassins, hired by the great house Hlaalu, had been the terrible cause of his parents death, briefly mentioning his brother, Leyam. As he'd described this particular dark stage of his life, Elrohir had shifted uncomfortably slightly, a small unbidden fact that he had told Josef that his name was Hlaalu, and his better concealed secret, that he to was an assassin. Rayne proceeded to talk of the other Telvanni member who had taken him in, unaware of Elrohir's small uncomfortable movement.

Josef meanwhile spoke of his opinions on the Telvanni, and rumours he had heard of their wizards, and their supposed immortality.

By this time the group had since packed their meagre belongings, checked their weapons, and had been underway on horseback for their destination, Elrohir riding with Rayne, uncomfortably perched on the back of his horse.

"I'm going to walk a bit, Rayne." Elrohir said, before slipping off of the horse, and taking up his place alongside his mounted companions, he tuned back into the conversation, in time to hear Rayne ask Josef about his life.

"What about you Josef? Wife? Kids?" He asked.

Josef didn't reply for a moment, merely kicked the flanks of his horse gently, lightly pushing it's sides with his heel, prompting it to trot forward slightly, tightening the formation, and offering the group a better view if they were to so require one. He took out a cigarette, and struck a match, sparking a flame into life, and held it up for a moment, watching the flame dance at the end of the small fragile strip of wood, before holding it up to the tobacco roll, and taking a long drag. Finally, he answered Raynes question.

"Rayne, I ain't got a 'wife,' or any children. My family lived out in the wilds o' Skyrim, seperate from the ways of Cyrodiil and their damn taxes 'n laws. My ancestors lived there long ago when there was still a flowin' river and a mild First Seed in the valley, and Dunmer would try to invade and my forefathers would push 'em back, and we'd go into their land 'fer food and supplies and such. Then they'd push us back. It got to be over the years that our valley got colder 'n colder, and the Dunmer invaded less and less. We never quit raidin nobody who came on our turf, and takin' what we needed. But one year, instead of a wave of Redoran shock troops comin' down from the mountains, it was

the whole damn Imperial Legion. This was a couple years ago now, so I was still but 17 or 18. I had a girl I 'spose I liked enough to keep around, and she was gettin big in the belly too 'round that time, but I left the camp before they ever showed up, never knew. When I came walkin' back to my home, it was a damn crater. Not one of my people surrendered and not one of them lived that night."

"That was the night my clan had the 'final battle' and went to the 'ultimate paradise,' the night when my gods and my people left without me." He ended sourly, anger slipping momentarily into his voice. He spat on the ground again, losing his cigarette in the process. He cursed, and slipped off his horse, searching for the fallen tobacco, near the treeline.

Anger flared amidst Raynes mind. What the empire had done to Josef, and his people, was disgraceful. They had no right. They'd been wiped from existence, and what reason had the Legion had? From Josef's story, absolutely none.

"Don't worry, When it's your time to find the ultimate paradise ill be beside you, sword's drawn and fighting till the last breath." Rayne told Josef, his voice strong. He smiled reassuringly as he said so. There was a moment of silence, where Rayne paused to wave away some of the smoke that had drifted from Josef's direction. He turned to Elrohir, and broke the silence.

"What about you Elrohir? Any family?" He asked. Josef meanwhile still peering into the treeline, following the flickering embers left by his precious cigarette.

Elrohir looked into the sky and took a deep breath. This was one of his favorite parts of infiltrating groups; lying and improvising. He quickly gathered what he knew about Morrowind and Hlaalu.

"Aye, and a quite big one indeed." He said with a smile, referring to his last name, *"But my closer relatives, no, I haven't seen them in a while."* he said and put his hand in his pockets.

"We Hlaalu have a reputation of being merchants and politicians, and my family in Morrowind has mostly been made of these. My brother has been rising within Hlaalu in years, and I don't even know what rank he holds by now.," he looked at the group he was walking with, *"My sister skipped the process of ranks and went directly to a high status from marrying a councilor."* He took a deep breath and looked down into the ground, an easy trick to build atmosphere and give a second to improvise his next move. *"When my brother learned politics with my father, I trained with my uncle. He learned me the way of the dagger and threats."* he said and let out a small semi-embarrassed grin, *"Your newest Hlaalu acquaintance is no politician or merchant, he's a representative for the House Hlaalu who deals stubborn merchants, opposing politicians and what not."*

"I am not even an assassin, I'm a violent and threatening negotiator." He said and shook his head.

Elrohir paused after his story, and looked at Rayne.

"I'm starving. Got any food?" He asked, snapping the family reminiscences that had been filling the conversation for the last hour or so.

Rayne laughed, and rummaged around his pack, he came up with three small red fruits.

"About all I've got is apples. We'd have meat, but the lumberjack over there scared away the deer." Rayne chuckled, nodding towards where Josef had been. Then he stopped. Josef wasn't there. He paused, and looked around. Josefs footprints disappeared inside the forest. He looked at the sky. It was still dark. Morning was a little way off yet, at least an hour or so. He slid off his horse, and motioned for Elrohir to do the same. He drew his weapon, suddenly on edge, though he wasn't sure why. He edged towards the treeline, claymore held ready, Elrohir had his blades drawn.

Elrohir edged a little closer, moving slightly ahead of Rayne, and called out.

"Josef? Where are you?"

Almost as if in answer, there was a shout, and Josef flew threw the treeline, the huge burly nord sailing through the air, and smashing through branches, narrowly avoiding a vicious looking tree, the trunk of which had a large bump. He smashed into the floor, and the wind was driven out of him momentarily. Elrohir stepped closer to the tree's, and was met with something that felt like the force of a battering ram smacking into his shoulder. His roar of surprise was cut short, and he was flattened to the floor similar to Josef. He felt something dig into his armour, but his flesh remained untouched. He looked up with anger in his eyes. Anger which dissolved into fear. Josef struggled to his feet, and withdrew his spear. Fury twinkling in his bright blue eyes. He reached behind his back, and pulled out his spear. For a moment no one moved. Not their assailant, not Rayne or Josef, nor Elrohir trapped beneath the heaving mass of wiry brown fur that was his opponent. And the trio gazed in awe, at something they had heard tales, and legends of. But never seen in it's true, hideous, and utterly terrifying form. Before them, stood a fully fledged Werewolf. It's long brown twisted hair covering it's huge, muscular body. It's arms, clearly muscled, and strong looking, ended with vicious looking hooked claws. Sharp claws. Deadly claws. It's legs ended much the same. It's head looked like the experiment of some sick conjuror. It was twisted, and looked wrong. But most importantly. It was the head of a wolf. And one massively defining feature. It had long, yellow curved fangs. And it was impossible, but it half looked like it was grinning. While they were transfixed by the sight of the hideous beast, it let out a terrible howl, which reverberated throughout the rolling hills of the countryside. It was enough to chill the heart of a grown man. Enough to force the most hardened warrior to turn and flee. Yet none did. Faced with one of the worlds most terrifying beasts. They stood their ground, weapons held high, excluding of course Elrohir, pinned beneath the beast. Josef swiped a bottle of poison from his bag, eyes still fixated on the wolf. He tore the cork from the vials top, and stabbed his spear deep into the vial. The bottle smashed, but it did not matter. Josefs spear glistened with a deadly poison, and he beckoned the wolf on. The wolf howled once more, and threw itself towards the Nord, who brought his spear up, his grip loosening on the handle slightly, allowing him to have more reach. It worked. His spear pierced the beasts hip, cleaving it just above the bone. It did little physical

damage, and the force of the beast colliding with the spear jarred his arm, but the damage was done. Already the beasts systems were slowing, as the poison worked it's way through the monsters veins.

The beast was strong though, and fast. It swung a mighty arm, and it's hairy elbow smashed into Rayne, tossing him into Josef as if he were a twig, not a fully grown man. The two were tangled amidst each other for a moment, trying to avoid getting caught on Josefs spear. The beast didn't waste time howling this time, he shot forward, jagged claws extended and fangs bared, eager to rip their throats to shreds, and sink it's teeth into their arteries, filled with hot, salty, delicious blood. To tear the meat from their bones, and feed.

Chapter Eight

Follower

A wind swept through the cold city of Bruma, as it often did. The snow fall was beginning to pick up, and the citizens were beginning to file inside. It had been a quiet day, and the guards were resting on their laurels, happy to of had a day without disturbance.

They were a bit sleepy, at ease from their first lazy day in a long time. But it was cold, and the guard still needed to change shift, even if nothing much appeared to be happening. So slowly, they changed over. Sleepily shuffling between posts, leaving the gates unguarded for a few crucial moments. Exploiting that key second, was a man. He slipped inside the city gates. No one much noticed. A lone figure, clad all in black, his hood pulled down low over his face. He moved with a fluid grace, his robes fluttering behind him in the wind, their rustling barely a whisper on the night air. His pace was swift, yet measured, and he moved with confidence in his stride. It was only a few mere moments, before he slid into the shadows, not a trace of him remaining, the footprints he had left, already swept away by a light showering of snow, and the barest movement of the wind. He melted into the blackness, and was soon lost to the city of Bruma. He crouched behind a building, and the cogs of his mind fell into place, beginning to turn. He needed to plan his attack. He needed to pick a target. Then observe, then think of a delicious way to wring the life from their body. The only specification required was that they be a Nord. His mind was warming up, inventive methods of slaughter coursing through his brain, he imagined all the glorious ways to kill his next target, and he smiled, a cold, cruel smile, and evil smile. But Adonis Vile was not the only agent of evil that night. No, a presence far worse than he roamed the streets of Bruma. One that smiled at the thought of a hundred deaths, not one. That was not what made them different though, what made them different, was that for one of the men, the death of one hundred men was a rational thought.

This will not do, this is simply terrible. What an insufferable host... The skin may as well fall right off of this one...

In the back of the city, a homeless Imperial man, dressed in long, loose rags, stands huddled cold by a small burning torch. He shivers, brushing snow from his dark mop of hair. He says aloud to himself that he can barely stand the cold, before the wind blows even stronger. Struggling, the man makes a choking sound and falls to the ground limply. A tear wells in his eye as he feels the life pour out of him and is unable to move a muscle to do anything about it. As his consciousness passes from his body, the eyes open again, but the dark brown irises are replaced instead with a dazzlingly pale green.

Filthy, disgusting humans... Reeking of swine... this body will smell better as a corpse than it did in life!

The man unsteadily stands again, no longer showing any signs of being cold. His skin is pale, almost blue, as if the blood inside the man's body didn't move at all.

The castle...

When the man walked towards the tall stone staircase, it became apparent that something was not right. He walked as if he was used to a different set of legs, as if his own legs were something totally new to him. He looked wholly drunk, which was not that unusual of a sight in Bruma. But the combination of being drunken and homeless would not work in his favor. As he approached the archway of the castle, he was turned away by the yellow-suited guards sternly.

The man stumbled away from the guards, but as soon as he was a meager distance away from them his confused and drunken facial expression melted away to one of pure, unadulterated rage.

I will drink their blood like wine before too long... Must have patience..... Hmmm... What is this?

The man looked around as if he sensed something, as if he was looking for someone nearby. He stopped moving altogether, and his eyes closed where he stood. The wind blew cold once more, and snow whipped up from nearby banks and whirled around the city violently.

The whispers of a terrible, inhuman voice pried their way from the winds into Adonis's ears. *"Dunmer... come to me, and bring me a... Gift"*

As the whispers reached Adonis's ears, images flashed into his eyes. Images of the Bruma castle, and of all the guards yelling and running after something, distracted. And when the word Gift slithered into Adonis' mind, the image of an old Ayleid tome, surrounded by candles and hidden in a display case, flashed solidly into his mind. Without any more words, Adonis knew exactly what was asked of him, and even more than that, knew that once he had the book and was out of Bruma he would somehow know where to go. Adonis had no choice but to see these things, but nothing moved his muscles or forced him to do anything.

When the wind subsided, Adonis was still obscured by shadows, still perfectly healthy, still able to control his body normally. But the peace provided by the end of the howling gale was cut short by the sound of a scream from the direction of the castle. The man had opened his eyes once more, and had run past the guards into the castle, snatching up a weapon from a rack on the wall as he moved. He was running too fast for the guards to catch him, but the guards didn't know that escape and treasure were not among the man's goals. In fact, the man ran in the opposite direction of the treasure, towards the guard's barracks, screaming in an indecipherable language and catching the attention of every guard in the palace.

Adonis grinned with savage delight. The terror of the guards excited him. He held himself in check, he had to carry out the deed that had been asked of him, not lose himself in revelling in others pain and terror. He moved towards the castle at speed, breaking into a light jog. Despite the images he had seen moments ago, and the shouts he could hear, his eyes flicked left and right, sweeping his surroundings for danger. His fingers twitched by his knife. The temptation to chase down a defenceless, distracted guard was strong, but he kept his murderous impulses in check. He focused on the mission, his feet carrying towards his objective. He grinned, whoever had sent him the messages had been powerful. He knew exactly where he was going, and yet he had never once set foot in the great stone fortress that was Bruma's castle before. He darted up some stairs, his feet barely making a sound as he shot up the stairs two at a time. He came to pause in front of a door. Large and oak, quickly he slid his hand into his robes, and pulled out a small thin metal device. He slotted it swiftly into the keyhole, and

patiently hooked the tumblers, and soon had the door swinging open. He slid into the room, and quietly closed the door behind him. The images replayed in his mind, and he moved to the wall on his left. It looked the same as any other area in the room, which was small, and cluttered with junk, but he knew it was the right place to go. His hands slithered over the wall, until he found it. A block, the same as any other. His palm rested on it for a moment, before he pushed it gently, and it slid back. He heard whirring sounds, and clicking noises, as cogs, and other gears slotted into place. Various parts of the wall withdrew as the first brick had done, and soon the wall was coming apart smoothly in front of him. It was not long before the space where the wall had been was gone, and was replaced by a gaping hole in the stone wall. Beyond this hole, was a dimly lit room, dotted with cobwebs. The candle light from the room Adonis Vile was standing in shone brightly enough, to cast a thin beam of light onto a thick, and ancient looking book. He knew it was the object that the strange power had requested. Even without the visions he would of known that, it was clearly contained words of great power. Adonis wondered if the Countess even knew of this room, and how long this book had been here. He didn't spend long pondering these questions though, he didn't have the time. He knew the distraction from the source of the shouting couldn't last long. He grabbed the tome, and slipped away.

Behind him, back in the castle, the guards cornered the vagrant. They stepped further and further towards him, pushing his back against the wall. The vagrant clumsily backed up, trying to keep himself from the dangerous men. Proud looks of duty and victory shone on their faces, as they believed they had kept the castle safe on this night. Anger too shone in their eyes, for this drunken vagrant had ran two of their sworn brothers through, as if magically enhanced in strength and agility. But the man looked tired now, and his body was beginning to bloat disgustingly. He fell kneeling to their feet before a weapon could even come near him. The man's head cocked up violently, and he vomited all over the feet and legs of the guards. Then the man promptly died without a sound, leaving the guards feeling rather apprehensive. The anticlimax of the man dying without being injured was only overshadowed by the guards' feeling of disgust at the thick, oddly-colored soup of organs that now covered their lower halves.

Meanwhile, out in the cold, Adonis was approached by a haunting sight: A skinned hound walking the mortal plane. It looked at the Dark Elf in a knowing way, the moonlight reflecting off his retina in a haunting green. The dog ran off to the West-Northwest a bit, and then turned and waited impatiently for Adonis to follow. It moved quickly, did not wag its tail, and did not make a sound.

Adonis greeted the dog with a nod, taking the dogs otherworldly appearance in his stride. A powerful mage had conjured this morbid creature, and by the looks of it, wanted him to follow. Adonis strode after the necromancers pet, his eyes glinting. Fresh in his mind, was promise that this dogs master, would bring him many to slaughter.

Chapter Nine

Mixed Blood

The werewolf tore towards the duo at incredible speed, Rayne had just managed to struggle to his feet, before the creature was upon him. With both burly arms it lifted him off the ground with apparent ease, it tensed its arms, ready to throw him as if he weighed nothing, but then all of a sudden, merely dropped him. Rayne hit the dirt sprawling, and quickly rolled over, in case this was some insane ploy by the werewolf to make him turn

his back and run. But then he realised the true reason why the werebeast had dropped him. Clinging on for dear life, clutching the handle of his dagger, was Elrohir, desperately hanging to the Werewolfs back. The wolf was howling with rage, and it's hands were scrabbling at it's back, trying to wrench the dagger from it's shoulder blade. One of it's large arms connected with Elrohir, knocking him off, and face first into the floor. Before the dunmer could react, the wolf was on him once more, and it howled in delight, happy to of secured a victim. Rayne sprinted at the wolf, claymore held high, but the creature was not as distracted by it's captured prey as it seemed. It turned as Rayne prepared to swing, and raised one giant hand, grabbed him by the middle, and threw him at incredible speed towards the treeline. A cry was heard, but the werewolf had now turned it's attention fully to Elrohir. The situation seemed helpless. The wolf was slowing due to Josefs poison, but it was obvious it still had the strength to at least claim one victim. Rayne had been taken out of the immediate equation, and Elrohir was helplessly pinned beneath the beast. Josef was on his feet, but weaponless, his spear was to far away for him to retrieve it, and save Elrohir. Elrohirs dagger was embedded in the small of the wolfs back, and as for Raynes claymore. Josefs eyes scanned the clearing for it, and his hear leapt. It was lying discarded next to the monster. He launched himself forwards, and swept up the sword, but the wolf had caught wind of his attack, he leapt in one great bound off of Elrohir, and threw his whole weight onto Josef, his teeth bared. The two collided with enough force to make the ground shake. There was a colossal whirl of curses and howls, and the two were practically a blur, in the mindless frenzy that was their combat, before it all came to a swift end, with a high pitched whine.

When Elrohir managed to drag himself to his feet, there was an odd quiet. The same eerie silence which followed any battle, the sudden transmission from the maelstrom of chaos and noise, to the absence of sound and restoration of order. Lieing in front of the dunmer, was Josef the nord. On top of him as a werewolf, slumped limply on top of him, a thick daedric claymore protruding from his back.

Josef groaned, and rolled the beast off of him, pulling the great sword out of the wolfs lifeless form. He spat out a red substance, blood. He wasn't sure whose it was, his own, or the wolfs. Josef stood, and surveyed the damage. He was hurting all over like hell, that had been one tough dog to put down. His whole body ached. He kicked the wolf one more time, just to make perfectly sure that it was dead.

Elrohir looked at the towering Nord. His normally white skin was drenched in the dark crimson blood of the werewolf. His clothes were similarly coated in the red substance. The area around his mouth was particularly disturbing, as it seemed the creature had emptied it's precious blood supply mostly around there.

The Nord was the first to move. His hand still clutching the claymore, he walked over to the area where Rayne had been thrown. He couldn't see him. He called out, as he continued to cast his gaze around, desperately searching for a body. Failing to spot one, he called out again, and this time, a weak voice greeted him through the tree's.

"Did we get him?"

Josef felt relief flow through him, and on top of that, an odd sort of pain. There were the usual aches, pains, and surges of pain that you would expect from normal wounds, but

his shoulder, his shoulder was something else. He hadn't felt a pain like this in, well, never. He grunted, and dismissed it for the time being. He moved towards the spot he had heard his friend's voice. He pushed through a group of branches, and found Rayne lying in a small clearing. It was closer to the road than he had first thought, he had just misjudged the location of where the werewolf had thrown him. He finally opened his mouth to reply to his friend, as Elrohir followed him into the open space.

"Yeah we got 'im" Josef said, trying to grin, but the pain in his shoulder causing him to grimace. *"And I'm needin' a damned bandage too."* He added. He knelt down, and handed Rayne the claymore that was rightfully his.

Rayne's hands grasped the hilt of the great sword tightly. His knuckles were white, and cold. His skin was clammy, and the colour was draining from his face. He was lying very still, the only indication that he was alive, was his chest rising and falling softly. His eyes flickered open, and he stared at the sky, the rays of early morning poking through the branches of the tree's. He almost smiled as the weak rays of sun landed on his face.

Josef and Elrohir said nothing. Merely watched as the pool of dark crimson seeped across the dry ground near his head. They both knew what was happening. There was a small stain on the bark of the tree Rayne was slumped against. They had no doubt as to what it was. They were almost as still as Rayne, shifting every so often so as to keep warm.

Rayne stirred with a start. Josef and Elrohir were instantly alert, they moved a little closer. Then nothing. It was over. There was no dramatic ending. Death embraced him, and life left his body. Josef and Elrohir did not speak, as they set about burying the body. They buried him, and once they had laid the earth on top of him once more, Josef stepped forward, and slammed Rayne's claymore hard into the dirt, hilt in the air. It marked the grave of a great elf.

Chapter Ten

Balindrium

The forests grew thicker, and the mountains became steeper. The dog, grotesque in appearance but sturdy in build, led the way through the valleys, never stopping for too long. It would pause if the Dunmer following it tarried behind far enough, and turn to give it an impatient look. It led at a steady pace, bringing Adonis closer to the fortress of Azmodæum. When the time began to drag on, Adonis felt a wave of reassurance pass through him, easing his hunger and revitalizing any weariness in his muscles.

The power of the Skinned Wolf's master seemed to reach far indeed, but it could only do so much. It could not remotely protect the pair from the wolves stalking the mountain, their howls echoing hungrily over the powdery snow. It would not be long before they

would be upon Adonis Vile and the wolf, and it would soon be time for the Dunmer to prove his mettle in combat as well as stealth.

Adonis Vile heard the howls of the wolves. Up here in the mountains, and so numerous in numbers, Adonis knew that they would be a more difficult challenge than the stragglers who sometimes wandered to close to Bruma.

Adonis stopped and the hound looked at him inquisitively. Adonis merely slid out of his robes, revealing the shrouded armour, born from his days in the dark brotherhood. He shivered briefly from the cold, before he adjusted. He felt comfortable, more able to kill when he wore the black garments. He reached behind him, took hold of his bow, and pulled two arrows from his quiver, and notched them to the bow string, he looked around, the position was good. A natural bottle neck, and as such would make it more difficult for the wolves to attack in unison. He waited patiently. He heard the soft panting, barely audible over the mountain winds. And then they were upon him, a group of five wolves advancing, two at the front, two behind and one at the back, he looked behind him, there were more behind him of a similar number.

The skinned wolf, backed away cautiously, still making no sound. The two wolves at the front of the pack advancing in front of Adonis broke into a run. Adonis fired without hesitation, the two arrows finding their mark, burying themselves into both wolves chest, causing them to thrash wildly, the wolves behind began to slow to late, and yapped as they tumbled to the floor, caught in the death throes of the first two wolves.

Adonis turned and faced the other wolves advancing from behind, he quickly notched another arrow to the string and fired once more, bringing down one more wolf, the wolves from behind, having seen what happened to those in front were not so easily tricked, and leapt over the foremost wolf, Adonis cursed, and whipped out his knife, he darted to the side, and stabbed viciously sideways, catching the wolfs neck, he yanked at the knife, pulling it out, another wolf dives for him, and Adonis drops to one knee, and brings his knife up, raking the wolfs underbelly, blood and entrails whipping at his face as the wolf sailed overhead. He glares at the last two wolves, who growl in response, and leap at him, however in their anger and confusion, they collide with each other, and tumble over the edge of the mountain, howling as they go. Then something slams into Vile's back. He curses as he hits the cold rock hard, and twists, the wolf is on top of him, it's full weight on his chest, preventing him from getting up, the wolf bends his head down, and attempts to tear open Adonis's neck, Adonis reaches up, grabs a hold of the wolfs neck and twists sharply, and hears a crack, as the bones snap. Adonis begins to heave the wolf off of him, as the other two clamber on top also.

Adonis looks frantically to the side. His dagger, which he had dropped when the wolf hit him, was lying on the ground, just out of his reach. The wolves leer at him. And then the skinned hound nudges the dagger closer, and Adonis feels his hand close around the hilt, he swings in an arc, and drives it through the neck of the first wolf. The wolf shuddered, and then frantically began to spasm. The other wolf yelped, as it's dying ally kicked around thrashing more and more violently. The steady stream of blood spilling all over Adonis. The one remaining wolf lost it's nerve, and made an attempt to bolt, but it slipped in the messy pool of blood left by the impressively still dying wolf. It skidded to the right, right over the edge of the cliff line.

The wolf, who's neck was playing host to Adonis's knife, shuddered once more, and slumped forward on Adonis. He was glad of the warmth, but knew that his guide would not wait long. He took a deep breath, and heaved the wolf off of him. He glanced around at the dead wolverine carcasses surrounding him. He grinned, a little cocky from his unlikely victory.

A human look of satisfaction seemed to pass over the skinned wolf's eyes. He looked at Adonis for a long moment that hung in the air for an eternity. Then the silence was broken when the skinned wolf turned the exposed muscles of his head and neck and pointed them at the sky, emitting a long howl.

The howl was otherworldly and haunting, a thousand times more terrible than the howls of the now-dead wolves during their approach. It seemed to ebb and flow, to pulse as if it were pouring out of a hole in the bottom of a container; Never stopping, but constantly louder or quieter than the second before. The air seemed to stand still atop the mountain.

Blood decorated the ground in dazzling streaks of crimson, splashed over the crisp white powder where the battle had just ensued. The beasts whose blood was spilled lay lifeless and cold... Until Adonis notices the paws of the nearest one twitching to the pulse of the Skinned Wolf's howl

The five wolf carcasses that did not tumble down the cliffside stood anew, devoid of hunger or emotion. Their bodies seemed wrong, not having been carefully prepared like the skinned wolf's. But nonetheless, the pack of animals stood sturdy in a circle around Adonis, the life stricken from their eyes. The Skinned Wolf's howl tapered off and ended, and the mountain was silent once more.

A nearby sheet of ice proved to be an excellent sled, and the thorny vines creeping south from Skyrim provided a cruel-looking set of harnesses for the beasts, who didn't seem to mind the thorns being set within their flesh in the slightest. Within an hour of the fight against the wolves, Adonis was being pulled through the twisting valleys and up over dangerous peaks by their corpses.

"I have seen your heart, Dunmer... and it is as mine. Our hearts will not give way for the weakness of others, or for the short-lived foolishness of men... Soon you will know... soon I will show you..".

The sun began to peek its naked face above the mountains, meaning that it had been daylight in most of Cyrodiil for some time now. The reanimated corpses that drew Adonis through the snow took a sharp turn to the North, heading right, and began to run faster. The cold, biting wind tingled at Adonis's face in an exhilarating, yet bitterly cold sensation. With the sky beginning to shine blue over the icy Jerralls, Adonis found himself being carried up the side of a mountain. The wolves moved faster and faster, snow and ice completely matting their bloodied coats. The lead dog's muscles were covered in frost, shining with the rays of the sun. But all of a sudden, the lead dog vanished, and then the other five, and then everything went white...

As Adonis crashed through the snowbank, he had no time to brace himself for the terrible impact he was expecting to feel any moment now. He was amazed when his vision cleared and he saw himself in an expansive tunnel in the mountain, carved out of the rock and coated with ice. The tunnels twisted and turned, and intersected at times, and the entire ride through was intensely dark. The dunmer could hear the screams and laughs of terrible creatures down the intersecting hallways, but saw nothing while he rode through the darkness.

As quickly and as abruptly as the trip through the dark began, Adonis found himself thrust back out into the daylight. The sun was shining high to his right, and he found himself atop the mountain, standing in a walled courtyard surrounding an enormous castle. After so much travelling, the six wolves keeled over and died. Careful inspection would reveal that all of them had broken at least one leg and never stopped running.

Towering before him, nearly a thousand feet tall from the mountaintop he was standing on to the tallest precipice, was Balindrium. The dark grey stone walls shimmered with the dazzling, shifting colors of multiple enchantments enveloping the building. The towers numbered a dozen, and their design was notably daedric. The heavy ebony gates standing before Adonis were adorned with horned skulls bearing rubied eyes, all seeming to stare right into his own red eyes. With a terrifying squeal of ebony scraping ebony, the gates opened wide for the first time in an eternity.

Scraping feet of snow out of the way seemingly of their own accord, the gates were enormous, and, when open, the gaping space of darkness standing before Adonis could have housed a hundred men from shoulder to shoulder, marching outwards. The stale, dusty air inside beckoned, and the voice spoke once more.

"Enter, my cousin, my friend, Enter Balindrium, and receive rewards beyond your imagination... Power... Power over life and death."

He had been asleep, when a voice spoke to him. It told him to come here, to serve his patron, Mephala. He had obeyed. And standing in front of this gargantuan of a fortress, he was glad. Whomever was the master of this place, they were powerful. Very powerful. Something dark and sinister emanated from this castle. Something very much evil. Varnand Rainor stepped forward, toward the gates of Balindrium.

As the huge doors slammed shut and Adonis' eyes began to adjust to the light, he began to see how truly enormous this fortress was. The room that he was in was a great antechamber, with various torches burning in every corner of the expansive room. The

torches each burned in trios, and each trio was a different unnatural color. The lights matched the ones directly above and below them, and the expanse of torches stretching upwards against the cold stone walls and ceilings provided a dizzying effect as Adonis caught himself staring up into them. They seemed to converge on a point in the center of the room, towering high above floor level.

When Adonis returned his gaze to floor level, his eyes could finally begin to make out the shapes of objects hidden in the room. At the base of each torch column, there stood a statue of a Daedric Prince, Sixteen in number, each arranged so that they faced the center of the antechamber, each evenly spaced from the last. Their shadows cut long swaths out of the flooring, each illuminated by a different flickering color. The red fire of Mehrunes Dagon's torches burnt twice as brightly as any other color in the room, and Adonis could almost feel Dagon's fury emanating from the cold statue. In fact, all the princes seemed to stare at Adonis as he made his way to the center of the room. The room was large enough so that Adonis couldn't make out the shapes of the silhouettes bustling about at the base of each statue, but he heard the familiar cries of scamps and daedroth, the rattling of bones and sinew, and the hushed voices of man and mer.

As he stepped dead center, a circular pattern in the floor, about 20 feet in diameter, lit up all around Adonis. White light shimmered up from the floor, and Adonis found himself disoriented, lost, seemingly falling. When he realized that his feet were again on the ground, the room was different, and he was in a lavish throne room of wickedness, though he did not yet see the throne. He was standing in a room with dark, etched stone walls, the etchings appearing to be in the daedric alphabet, though their meaning was beyond Adonis. Jewels of different sorts beset the Daedric Runes in strange places, some of them humming with electricity, others of them so icy-cold that steam and dew rolled off of them. Directly before him was a balcony, and a chilly wind drew in from its open maw. Through dark stormclouds, Adonis could see most of Northern Cyrodiil from this vantage point; White Gold Tower stood tall on the Southeastern horizon, looking strange in its green environment when staring upon it from the barren, wintry Jeralls.

Adonis felt compelled to step out onto the balcony. The railings were made of a stone that looked like giant intertwined rose thorns with no flowers. Once outside, Adonis could fully grasp the size of the fortress, and it was staggering in its unholy beauty. The walls shimmered and breathed with magic, wrought of the gunmetal-grey marble of the Wrothgarians, but the towers, the only parts of the building that were higher still than the balcony Adonis stood upon, were twisted, haunting black-and-red steel. The dozen twisted towers of Balindrium's upper complex appeared to have been put there by the Daedra themselves, grown out of the old turrets of the castle. If the biting winds carried just right, Adonis could hear otherworldly cries and howls, haunting and indescribable noises, calling down from the highest parapets. Looking back over Cyrodiil, Adonis could see the cities of Bruma and Chorrol. To the left he could see the edge of the city of Falkreath, in Skyrim, and far to the right he could see a similar portion of Hammerfell's fair city Elinhir.

Do you like what you see, Dunmer? the voice began in Adonis' head once more, but as it continued, the source of the sound shifted unnaturally from Adonis' head to the open doorway of the balcony. Without turning around, Adonis knew that the source of the voice, and the strange power that drew him here, was now behind him on the balcony, and stepping up to stand beside him on the edge of the balcony. "All that you see before you, the land our ancestors called 'Dawn's Beauty.' Do you like what you see?"

And as the figure turned, he swept his arm dramatically over the railing of the balcony.

"Or... do you see what I see? Do you see Dawn's Beauty being besmirched by the short-lived drives and desires of man? Man, who should rule this land and rule over us, its owners! Man, who cannot even rule his own body for more than a pitiful four score years without succumbing to death at some invisible hand?!"

The Elf appeared angry now. His skin was so pale and cold it appeared to be made of polished grey slate. He stood a full head taller than Adonis, and his hair was long, silky, and white, coming down to the Altmer's collar bones. His eyes were the same pale, otherworldly green that the skinned wolf sported, shimmering with unholy energies of every variety. He seemed to stare right through Adonis's eyes and into his very soul.

"But I forget my manners. You have done me a great service, bringing me that tome from the foolish Nibenean ruler of Bruma, and yet I know not your name, nor you mine. You will find that I am a most generous host when appeased. I am the Lord of this great Castle Balindrium, King of this Mountain, and the decider of Fates. I am Death incarnate, walking with the spark of life intact. I am called Azmodæum."

"Well then, Azmodæum, I think it's time you met your new assassin. My name is Adonis Vile, and I deal in death." Adonis replied with the wickedest of grins.

Azmodæum smiled a wide, twisted smile when he heard Adonis Vile pledge his loyalty. His teeth were perfectly aligned, sharp-looking, and pure white, which set them off from his slate-gray skin. *"Ahhh, good, good. I could tell, you know... I knew from the moment my Eye caught you that you were a like-minded individual... I will have further duties for you soon, very soon... but first..."*

Azmodæum gestured towards the book obscured by Vile's cloak. *"...I will need that tome. You will be rewarded beyond measure, in gifts of wealth, power, and of the flesh, Adonis Vile; You will be rewarded for your loyalty."*

Just then, the teleporting pad in the dark room adjacent to the balcony lit up in a dazzling show of color. Varnard Rainor stood nervously in the center of it, unaccustomed to the strange magics that had guided and teleported him here. Visions of Mephala had plagued Varnard for the last three nights, ever since the last Morag Tong hunting crew had stumbled upon his frozen campground. Mephala had spoken personally to Varnard about his betrayal of her secret order, and had talked also at length about how Varnard

was to repent to Mephala. Then, Varnard would indoubtedly dream about the mountain range that lay before him, and the dream would inevitably end at the Ebony Gates of Balindrium.

Varnand cursed as strange magics whipped him from where he had been walking. At the center of the room, there was a lit up white pattern. On a nearby balcony, an Altmer stood, speaking with a Dark Elf. *"I am Varnand, ex-assasin of the Morag Tong. Which one of you are the one who called me here?"* Varnand said, not intimidated by the scowling Altmer, or the daedra who stared at him from the turrets of the castle.

"Ah, and as for you, my Breton friend, I imagine you are quite confused? You have entered Balindrium, Halfling, and the Morag Tong will trouble you no more as long as you are within its walls. But the stay here will not be free, Halfling. I am a Mer who, regrettably, has enormous goals that will not fulfill themselves while I entertain idle guests. So what shall it be? Do you wish to return to the wilderness to fight your former clan brothers? Or will you stay, and accompany Sera Vile here on a trip to fair Skingrad for me?"

"Eh... I will accompany Sir.....Vile, is it? What is it we must retrieve from Skingrad? Or are we tasked with assassinating someone?" Varnand asked enthusiastically, happy to hear the Morag Tong would bother him no more.

"Adonis Vile." Adonis said shortly. He considered throwing an insult. But then his anger died away, even if this man was previously a member of the Morag Tong, now he despised them, as did he. As an ex-member of the Dark Brotherhood he would take some time to fully accept this man, as allegiance to the Morag Tong was sickening to him, but perhaps overtime he may become a valuable ally. He decided to extend the same question to the new arrival.

"And your name Breton? Speak quickly."

Azmodæum turned with a great flourish of his arm, facing the two shorter mer and interrupting Adonis' introduction to Varnard. His face looked wrong. His pale green eyes seemed focused on a place several yards behind his new recruits, and his face didn't twitch or move with the natural energy of living flesh. Yet he lived, and stood before them, without the scent of vampirism or the magical intervention of a lich. Azmodæum stood before them, an Ancient pillar of magical strength, and offered no information about himself or how he lived with such power. He told them only what they could do to further please their new master.

"In Skingrad, There lives a human by the name of Else God-Hater. She is an ally of ours and should not be harmed. She has in her possession, however, a set of rings that were loaned to her. I have need of both rings. I fear that she may not willfully hand them over to gentlemen of your status... But if you can retrieve them without harming or killing the Nord I will be most pleased. She still lives because she has sworn allegiance to an old friend... and, if she dies, the rings will disappear because of the nature of the loan. If she is to die, you will have to deal with a treacherous Daedra Prince to bring them back into Nirn. I care not to speak his name, for he can hear me from downstairs... but take it from me that he is not pleasant to make promises and oaths to."

Azmodæum reached into the recesses of a pocket on his shimmering, extravagantly appointed robe. His long, scarred hand emerged with bony fingers clutching an amulet. The amulet was absolutely beautiful, forged of adamantium, with two glowing green emeralds set in its skull-shaped charm. He held it aloft to Adonis Vile. *"I want you to wear this for the duration of your journey. It will fortify your persuasive skills. I do not want you to remove it until I have instructed you to do so. Keep an eye out in Skingrad for powerful mer who can be recruited as allies... I will inspect each recruit personally."*

And as Adonis took the glorious-looking amulet from his new Master's hand, Azmodæum spoke again. *"You will have plenty of time to become acquainted on the journey to Skingrad. I trust that you will cooperate considering your shared goals. Let no harm come to your partner... each of you has powerful enemies that may try to strike while you are far from Balindrium. But then again, I'm sure each of you would enjoy tearing the entrails from those who would follow you. Now go!"*

Chapter Eleven

Vintage of Skingrad

Draken Vladmir walked the grounds of the West Weald, the peaceful and soothing area covered with small settlements and scattered farmlands owned by various mortals. They may live above Draken, but Draken is older, and if not wealthier than these pathetic individuals that plague the very air Draken is suppose to breath. Draken scoffed at the thought and continued down the road to the front gates of Skingrad, a frown written over his pale face. The night was cool, quiet, as it was suppose to be. No trouble, no problems, the warm bloods slumbered beneath their covers, some were ready to retreat into the safety of their own homes. Draken's "day" had just begun.

The ground insects that filled the air with their songs silenced as the vampire strolled by them, each fearing he would step over their puny bodies. Despite the clear warm weather, he wore a black and burgundy outfit, very common by rich folks and wealthy nobles, his blood was cold, it made no sense in wearing disgusting beggar clothes or mid

level outfits, Draken had to show his worth, part of it anyway. Gold trimmed shoes walked over the dirt road towards the Castle gate. The town, the buildings, the castle itself was marvelous, no doubt a beautiful structure overlooked by a Count, Janus Hassildor. Draken wanted very much to meet him, but he did not. Janus had a..peculiar habit of straying off in the public. Draken suspected much of this man. If he wanted to expand his business in this area, he wanted to speak with the Count in person. If he might have a chance, it would be a great one.

A man was caught in Draken's eye, he was riding a horse, above a hill, going somewhere Draken did not really care. Draken scoffed again and marched forward, nearing the gates, not giving much attention to the man and his mount, 417 years of living in death, one thinks he has seen it all. It can be rather..boring, if not entirely upsetting, living like this. Past days there were some exasperate fellows that did not leave him alone, all this taxation and gold that had to be paid. If Draken was allowed to murder them all in one swift stroke he would of done so!. However, they serve a useful purpose, they will die sooner or later, fate allowing it.

Draken approached the gate at last, two guards standing on each side, one picking his nostrils, cleaning it of any contents and the other standing still, with a stupid look on his face. Draken raised part of his lip in annoyance, a scowl emerging from his lips.

The guard that stood still shot a glance at Draken, smiling faintly. *"Night, sir. Little late to be walking around in the wilderness?"* The guard asked.

"Never too late to walk around.." Draken barked. Avoiding eye contact with the mortal swine.

"Mmm, well, just giving a fair warning to you." He said.

"What business do you have in Skingrad?" The other guard questioned, studying Draken, eyeing his katana. The daggers in Draken's coat were not visible, especially in the darkness of night.

Draken turned to look at the 'dirty' one. *"None of yours"* He said smiling.

The guard frowned a bit, finally allowing Draken to pass within the gates, too late to be walking around and far too late to start trouble. They let Draken pass. Draken walked pass the guards and made his way towards the interior of the magnificent city. Since the

area was rumored to have vampires in them, Draken wanted to see if these tall tales had truth to them, if so only so, it would be pleasing to know that there are some vampires in Skingrad, or near it, besides Verona and Draken. Draken could earn a fair bit of gold by expanding cattle farms, or blood trading.

Thoughts of other vampires lead him to think briefly of his sister. Raven. He had not seen his ever so slightly younger sister since the Dark Brotherhood's unforgivable act of treachery had struck a dire blow to the crimson scars. Her face came to mind. Her jet black hair, and fair skin. Her feline like crimson eyes. His train of thought was broken by a glint on his kantana.

Masser and Secunda gleamed off Draken's katana. the beautiful moons stood high above the landscape, illuminating the sky and the ground. A handful of mortals walked about the streets, some talking to each other, others preparing to slumber. Draken looked for prosperous individuals, some whom may be useful to a greater cause.

Chapter Twelve

Oaks Burn

"Ale, ale, we are the kings of ale, drink it down, drink it down, everyone hail the kings of ale!" Belted Silassen, Augustus and Seris. Throwing back their heads they howled, and downed their respective cups.

It had been a few days since Silassen, Augustus, and Seris had returned from their expedition. The only remotely troublesome thing about their return journey was an extremely curious butterfly. They had returned to the Fighters Guild, and had reported the goings on from the ruins. The guild owner was impressed with their capability in battle. She had payed them gold the service of rescuing her guild members, not to mention taking out such a dangerous gang of bandits. The thought most fresh on their

minds throughout their report was sleep. They were exhausted. After they had received their gold, they used their last vestiges of energy to stumble to the Oak and Crosier inn and toss a fraction of their latest wages on the counter, and mumble good nights to one another.

Days later, they were well rested. They had recovered from their exhibition, and now it was time for the long overdue celebrations. Good food and ale were the way to celebrate a victory, and so far, the trio had neglected both. Now it was time to toast their victory. Or rather, see who could chug the most drink and stay upright.

"Another round" Roared Seris, as all three men slammed down their now empty tankards, and wiping their mouths with their sleeves, wiping away the last vestiges of the drinks they were so enjoying. The barkeep wearily obliged. She was used to such occurrences, men throwing back her ale like it was water. On the other hand, she wasn't used to their being two such groups at once. Across the room, there were a somewhat more fearsome looking group of dunmer. They were just as loud and raucous. But they were a lot more offensive. They shoved others, roared insults, acted as the tavern were theres. Seris and his friends might be just as loud, but they weren't making the tavern inhospitable.

The dunmer across the room scowled.

"SHUT UP" They roared.

Silassen turned to make a rude gesture at the the offensive dunmer, but his elbow slipped on the bar and he almost toppled, somewhat disrupting his attempt at rudeness. He laughed loudly at this, and the group of Dunmer had finally had enough. The tallest of the other group slammed down his mug, and advanced.

"Should've shut up when you had the chance whelp, now I'm going to break your jaw." He snarled, moving forwards, fists clenched. Clearly he had not had as much to drink as everyone had thought, as his stride was fairly measured, and he did not sway at all. Silassen struggled to his feet, rather contrasting to his Dunmer opponent. He raised himself off his stool, and steadied himself by clutching at the bar with one hand. He stood a little taller than his opponent, and was about as broad, and Silassen was well versed in the use of his fists. He was confident in his ability to win this fight, though he seemed to of forgotten he had been drinking. He let go of the bar, and took a clumsy swing at his grey skinned enemy. The dunmer caught his forearm, and thrust him backwards. Silassen went sprawling, and collided with a waitress carrying a large jug of water. The jug slipped off the womans tray, and spilled all over Silassens face, while the red headed woman yelped with alarm.

The icy cold water hit Silassen with force, and the cold rush brought him a little back to his senses. No amount of water can totally sober up a man, but Silassen was able to balance better than he had moments before. He scrambled to his feet as the dunmer man advanced again. This time the dark elf struck first, but Silassen side stepped the blow, and pulled hard on the mans arm, dragging him in towards him, his opponent crying out in surprise at his opponents sudden prowess, and Silassen slammed his elbow hard into the mans shoulder blade, knocking him to the floor. Silassen grinned happily, and turned to the barmaid.

"I'm sorry about that! I didn't mean to startle you. I shall pay you back with a drink far finer than wate-" He began, his drunken cheek shining through even mid battle. But before he could finish his sentence, as the rest of the dunmer group charged him, and one grabbed him around his waistline, hauled him into the air with surprising strength, and threw him down onto a wooden table, which splintered, and snapped as he landed on it. He groaned, and his vision swam in and out of focus. He could see behind him Augustus and Seris in similar brawls to himself. He looked up, and saw the dunmer grinning, as he raised a chair to slam down hard on Silassen as he lay amidst the ruins of the table.

Silassen made a grab for one of the larger bits of wood from the debris of the once upon a time table, but he needn't of bothered, before the Dunmer could strike him with the chair, another tackled the dark elf to the floor, and proceeded to level a flurry of blows at his face. Silassen groggily sat up, and progressively got to his feet. He staggered over to his saviour, who had finished beating down the bulky dunmer who had been dominating Silassen moments before. The man grinned at Silassen. He was a Breton, of average height, with fairly long blonde hair, and a recently grown stubble, probably produced from the inability to shave while travelling. His eyes were a brilliant blue, well contrasted to his hair, and despite his civilian clothing, his build suggested he was soldier, around the age of thirty.

"Thanks for that." Silassen grinned.

"It's no trouble. So who's ass did I just save?" Replied the man, stranger to Silassen.

Silassen laughed before giving his name. *"Silassen Ilden. And who might you be 'my saviour'"* Silassen replied with a laugh, a mocking tone sneaking into his voice with the last two words.

"Bethras Northwode, and those bastards have been getting on my nerves all night, if anything this brawl is something of a relief. What better way to relax after a long travel from Anvil eh?" Replied Bethras, chuckling as he did so.

On the other side of the room Augustus and Seris were engaged in similar brawls. Seris was more accomplished with his fists than Augustus, who was much more used to allowing magic to do it's work. Seris was currently ducking blows from two threatening dunmer, and throwing quick jabs in return, enraging them. Augustus, was simply darting around three others, unable to make any sort of effective offensive manoeuvre between their strikes. Two things happened at once, neither good for the duo. Seris had managed to draw one of his opponents into an arm lock, pinning it behind his back. But the other dunmer had knocked him over the bar. Seris was desperately ramming the other dunmers head into the shelf filled with bottles, while swinging a bottle of mead at the other, trying to keep him at bay.

Augustus on the other hand was being forced up the stairs, as his trio of opponents had blocked him off. He hopped up the stairs, desperately trying to avoid his adversaries, who were now grinning, a sense of victory within them. Augustus decided to even the odds, and splayed his palms in front of him, where red mist spilled from them, twisting and contorting quickly, until the mysterious red trails of smoke formed into two scamps standing beside him. The dunmers grins vanished, and their hands darted to their side, blades appearing in their arms. Between these four warriors, the battle had just escalated far beyond a barroom brawl. One dunmer however did not reach for a sword,

he brought up his hands as Augustus had, and twin jets of flame burst from his fingertips. Augustus threw himself at the door behind him, leading to the inns rooms, and flattened himself to the floor, as the fiery trails soared over his head, almost instantly igniting the wooden objects surrounding him. Augustus watched as the mage dunmer gave him a mocking salute, and slammed the door closed behind him.

Silassen, Seris and Bethras were bringing the fight downstairs to a close. They had since finished off the last three that had been brawling with them downstairs, and were now working on taking out two of those who had followed Augustus up the stairs. Silassen had ducked away, to check on Augustus, while Seris and Bethras handled the other two. He darted up the stairs, his usual speed partly hindered by the knocks he had received. He turned the corner, to the second flight of steps leading to the second floor, and was met by the large dunmer who had torched the upper building. The dunmer did not hesitate, and grabbed Silassen by the throat, and tossed him into the wall like a ragdoll, he collided with it, and roared in pain. There was a massive pain in his chest, and he believed that he might of cracked a rib in the fall. The dunmer advanced.

Bethras and Seris heard the cry of agony from below, and glanced at each other. They nodded at each other, and set about finishing their opponents with such ferocity that most grown men would of trembled if they were to behold them.

Silassen groaned with pain as the dunmer came closer, and kicked out at the approaching Dunmer, hoping to sweep his legs out from under him, but the Dunmer merely stamped down hard on his ankle, and he yelled once again.

"I'm going to break you." He growled, stepping forward to make an end of the tall redguards face, when another voice broke the tension.

"No, you're not." It was Seris. He stepped forward calmly, grabbed the Dunmer by the shoulder, and headbutted him hard in the face. The dunmer howled in anger, but shrugged off the blow, and powered his fist into Seris's gut. His eyes bulged, and the wind was knocked out of him. The dunmer wasted no time in laying into his newly injured opponent, smacking his head hard into the wall repeatedly. He was about to power his other fist into the back of Seris's head, but then he suddenly stopped. He hadn't made a roar of pain, or any other indication of pain, but his face was suddenly contorted in it. He dropped Seris, who gasped for air. Silassen looked up at the threatening dunmer bewildered, wondering if this was some sort of trick. But then he saw. Bethras was standing behind him, a triumphant grin on his face.

"If you can't handle someone in a fight, then you're supposed to kick them where the sun don't shine." He told them, wagging his finger mockingly, as he withdrew his foot back to normal position, as the dunmer collapsed, clutching at the one place his leg armour did not cover.

Chapter Thirteen

The Aftermath

Silassen groaned as he awoke. He looked around, confused as to where he was. The last he remembered was passing out in the inn after Bethras had saved them. He recognised the stone walls of the chapel, and guessed that he was in the presence of chorrols healers, or was at least here by their doing. He looked off to his right, and spotted Augustus, who was sitting on a stool.

"Morning Silassen! You've gotta try this oatmeal, it's delicious! We're quite popular by all accounts, seeing as we stopped those Dunmer burning down the WHOLE inn! By the way-" Augustus paused to swallow a mouthful of oatmeal before continuing. *"-This is for*

you. One of the healers requested I give it to you." He finished, tossing a roll of parchment to Silassen. Before resuming his breakfast.

Silassen caught the roll of paper, before setting it down, and picking up the large bowl of oatmeal which had been left by his bedroll. He sat up a little, and was about to eat it, before stopping.

"Wait. Did you say the inn was on fire?" He asked bewildered, before adding. *"Where the hell is Seris? And that Breton?"*

"I'm here. Give me some oatmeal, I've been passed out since yesterday, and I am starving." Seris replied, walking through a door from upstairs in the chapel. He had a bruise on his forehead which was already beginning to heal, thanks to the talented chapel healers. He sat down on a stool, and picked up a bowl of oatmeal and a spoon.

Silassen was now focusing resolutely on the oatmeal, eating his way through it with remarkable speed. He scooped it into his mouth, and was soon finished before either of the other two. Who looked at him with a mixture of disgust and astonishment. Augustus finally spoke.

"Silassen, you eat like a pig." He laughed. Silassen, who was on his last mouthful turned to reply.

"No I don't!" He said indignantly, an oat or two spraying from his mouth as he spoke. He paused a moment, before sheepishly finishing. *"Well maybe a little."* He said, before turning his attention to the roll of parchment.

"Silassen (Or at least that's what the third "King of Ale" was calling himself yesterday)

When you were so drunk you couldn't punch straight yesterday you offered me a drink. If you can actually figure out who I was, then I'll actually let you buy me that drink. After you and your friends actually help us rebuild the inn you sort of destroyed.

Mariane."

Silassen looked back at the others bewildered, and waited for them to finish their conversation before addressing Augustus.

"Which healer gave you this?" He asked, but before he could answer, a vision of a slender with shoulder length perfectly straight red hair. He remembered her complexion to be very pleasing, and that she was reasonably tall. *"Did she have red hair?"* He asked again.

"I think so. Why, got a secret admirer?" Augustus replied with a wink, and Seris burst out laughing. Augustus looked at him quizzically.

"Do you realise how stupid you look when you wink?" He told Augustus through fits of laughter.

The group talked awhile, before getting up, picking up their gear, and moving toward the exit. Immediately they were set upon by three healers, one for each of them, all

babbling about rest. It was an red head of average build who had set upon Silassen, and he paused a moment.

"But I really do need to leave!" He protested.

"Oh? And why is that?" She replied, hands on hips, with a glowering look.

"Because if me, and my fine friends here, don't go and help repair The Oak and Crosier, then I won't be able to buy you that drink I promised." Silassen replied with a smile. The healers features split into a grin, and she laughed.

"Fine. But I expect this drink at some point today at the latest, whether the inn's rebuilt or not."

Chapter Fourteen

Crossroads of Evil

A man, atop a wonderful horse was trotting through Skingrad. He was old. With long flowing grey hair. No one bothered the man, for he was moving with purpose, merely passing through, as many did on travels south toward Anvil or Kvatch, though most would doubt a man of such age and intelligence would travel towards Kvatch after the recent tragedy that had occurred there. Anyone who could see under the brim of the mans large hat would have seen a few minor burns on the mans wrinkled skin, slightly marring the dark wolf paw mark on the right side of his face, running the length of his cheek, and the tip of the paw touching his forehead. He yanked on the reins, and the

horse trotted a little faster. He wanted to be out of the town as soon as possible, he had business elsewhere, and what was coming was not pleasant, he knew it. It was late also, and he had no desire to deal with any petty criminals who might lurk in the darkness.

Draken sniffed as the old man passed by. It was difficult to resist, a stranger, that no one would miss. But he could not risk the horse causing a disturbance, besides which, he had picked a target already. An older Nord woman. He was waiting on a rooftop above an inn, perched in the shadows, not merely amongst them, but part of them. No guard would spot him up here, a predator of the night, waiting for his prey. He resisted the urge to lick his lips in anticipation of the upcoming feed. Five minutes or so. That was all he needed, she would leave the inn soon, he had followed her routine well. He knew where she would go. But then his ears picked up something he had not expected. Voices. Not the usual drunken rabble that one would expect at such an hour? No. They were talking purposefully, but not co-operatively. The pair, whoever they were, were clearly arguing. Their tones were filled with plot, and intrigue. He couldn't quite make out what they were saying, but his curiosity was peaked. He could vaguely make them out. One a Breton, the other a Dunmer, hard to see in the dim light. He sniffed. He did not have time to waste on these two, when his prey was so close.

"We can not just ask. Did you listen to nothing Azmodæum said? She will not give up the rings easily." Varnand hissed angrily at Adonis. He was growing impatient with his companion. He pushed open the door to the inn. Adonis followed him inside, and whispered back.

"And where do you suggest we start? We must be careful who we ask, this much is certain. But the inn keeper is a start."

Varnand scowled, and pushed his way through the drunken rabble, with little subtlety, his temper, as short as Adonis's, shining through. Most in the tavern were too drunk to care, and merely cheered at the newcomer, thrusting ales at him. Varnand ignored the plebs, and managed to struggle to the bar. The barkeep walked over, looking flustered. This was his busiest night of the week, and he was kept on his toes. Adonis smirked as he slyly wormed his way through the crowd, his anger gone in an instant, replaced with satisfaction at noting the irritation on his partner's face. He stood next to the Breton, and leaned on the bar, looking disinterested, while Varnand engaged the barkeep, who hit him with a barrage of questions, quick and blunt. Adonis frowned a little, irritated that his fellow investigator wasn't taking this seriously. Varnand noticed this and grinned, becoming louder, and more blunt with each question. Before finally levelling a threat at the inn keep.

"Look you slimy oaf, where is Else God Hater? Is she a patron here, and if she is, point her out to me, before I-" Adonis shot a warning look at Varnand, who hesitated. He knew he couldn't pursue the investigation this way. He snarled, and finished there. The barkeep looked annoyed, but noted how Adonis had stopped his companion, and turned to him to point out Else. He began to describe her, but then paused, squinted, and pointed to the door.

"Er! That Nord, going out the door now!" He said. The pair didn't thank the innkeep, they just detached themselves from the bar, and roughly shoved through the crowd. Moving quicker now and with purpose. They burst out the door, and looked both ways quickly.

"*There!*" Varnand whispered, noticing a coat trail whip around the corner.

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The old man who had been travelling through the city had passed through it's limits. He was perched on a rock. He was allowing the horse to eat out of his hand, and his throat was tight. He was biting his lip, and when the horse was done eating, he reached forward, and fumbled with the reins. He began to fumble with the brown leather, and managed to unhook it from it's catch. He stood, his eyes beginning to glisten. He patted the horse, as he unclipped, and undid the saddle. He carefully removed it, and lay it on the ground. He patted the horses neck, and whispered to it.

"*Goodbye, my dear dear friend.*" Merthierry Yvienne spoke. His voice was choked with raw emotion, and he let his tears flow freely. He withdrew a blade from it's sheath, and looked at it sadly. He raised to the horses level, and restraining a sob, swung it back, and slapped the horses behind, setting it off, trotting along the road he knew so well. His tears began to flow faster as the mare went over the hill. He had trained it, since it was a foal. To be headstrong. Proud. Everything he himself had failed to be. And without the only thing that was ever dear to him, he set off on a journey toward Kvatch, called there by a voice he did not understand. He kept his hat low, hiding his cowardly tears.

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Else God-Hater was terrified. Fear pounded in her skull like a war drum, fear that drove her mind past all reason and logic and into sheer panic. That dangerous-looking dark elf, and his Breton friend had set her on edge.

As soon as she was outside and her face hit the cool night air, she made a break for it. She veered down into the gully that seperated Castle Skingrad from the city proper, so terrified she couldn't make heads or tails of her surroundings.

Draken stepped forth from the shadows on the bridge, in front of Else God Hater, a grin on his face, opening his mouth, and allowing his fangs to show. He had minutes, plenty of time, while the guards changed watch, to deal with his opponent. He advanced, on the panicked Nord.

"*Stop. The Nord is ours. Back away Vampire, I know what you are.*" Adonis spoke clearly, and menacingly. Not a shout, but plenty loud enough to hear, and a challenging tone, almost daring the vampire to disobey him.

Draken heard the Dunmer call out to him, making a notion that he had possession of this Nord.

"No!. The Nord belongs to me!" He shouted angrily. Dunmers may be resistant to fire, but electricity is a different matter, an entirely different matter. While Raven mastered the use of Electricity, Draken was a good combatant with it, while not rising to the same level of experience with his sister on the subject, Draken was still able to make his hit count. As Draken landed on the ground, close to the Dunmer, he blasted a Immolating Blast spell at the Breton fellow.

"Ah!" Draken shouted in vigor and might. A large ball of fire emerged from Draken's single hand, one of the few spells he had time to practice on, the elemental fire was

useful for many things. Heating something, burning wood and cauterize and cremate foes. Draken's red eyes lit as the hot fire in front of him blasted towards his opponent, the Breton.

Adonis rolled swiftly to the left as the vampire fired a bolt of electricity at him. He heard it crackle with raw energy as it missed him by a centimetre. He was powerful. Adonis was not one to feel fear, as a lover of death, he had long ago embraced his own, but he knew the odds were stacked against him in this battle. He needed the Breton to work with him. Adonis came out of the roll, and ripped off his robe. He tossed down his pack, and wrenched a dagger from his bandolier of the smaller sharp throwing knives. He flicked out his wrist, into a straight position. The knife flew true, and tore through the vampires shoulder. He roared with pain, and with one hand reached out to tear the dagger from his arm, the other reaching out to the nord woman, who to Adonis's alarm had bound some sort of daedric armour to her.

Varnand meanwhile, had been forced to bring up a weak ward in time to block the vampires flame attacks. He'd managed to absorb most of the attack, but had been forced to act quicker than expected. He shot forward, angry now, and intent on drawing this fight to a conclusion before it spiralled out of control.

Adonis closed the gap inbetween him and the vampire in seconds, and he swiped with his dagger, attempting to tear open the vampires gut, but the mans eyes bulged. Adonis frowned, pulling his blade short, wary of another attack. But as his adversary fell forward, he saw why. Varnand had smacked the vampire over the head with the hilt of his heavy sword, and had Else God Hater pinned to the floor with one hand.

"Quickly. We must steal horses and ride hard for Balindrium. This quarrel may have not gone as unnoticed as we though, and the vampire will not take long to regain his conciousness. But first..." Adonis said quickly to Varnand.

He turned to the Nord, he could feel the amulets power begin to work it's way with his words, twisting them, turning them to interrogation. He knew well enough not to use his real name.

My name is Lord Vile. You are carrying items of interest to me. You will hand them over or I will cut off another limb. Growled Adonis, words dripping with venom.

He awaited Else's reply, sure that the amulets power would swing her to his way of thinking.

"Do your worst." She replied, with admirable defiance sparkling in her eyes. Adonis leant down, pulled out his knife, and began to saw his way through the flesh just below her knee. She screamed loudly, but the dunmer slammed his fist into her mouth, shutting her up, and knocking loose several teeth in the process. Despite a mouth full of blood, she managed to plead with him to stop.

"Give me the rings."

"Never." Her voice shaky now, as she trembled with pain, and fear.

Once again Adonis felt the amulets power, feeding the words into his brain, convincing him, that these words were the only words.

"Very well. But think on this. I am going to put you through an excruciating amount of pain, but if you do not comply, my torture will seem like nothing compared, to the prolonged hours of agony that Azmodæum will relentlessly torment you with. Adonis said. But if you hand them to me now, Azmodæum will need not have knowledge that you survived."

Else held Adonis's gaze for a moment, her eyes filling with understanding and now unconcealed terror. Still trembling, she raised a hand to the air, and muttered a few words. Red mist traced her wrist, locking around it like a chain, before dissipating. Two rings materialised on her fingers. She held them out to Adonis, giving him a look of thinly veiled contempt. He took the rings, examined them, and then pocketed them.

"There. Let Azmodæum-" She shivered at the sound of his name. *"-know that I am passed, and am never to trouble him again."* She finished. Varnand looked to Adonis. He looked at his companion, he turned back to Else, and grinned.

"What are you grinning about, you silly boy?" She demanded, confidence returning. He merely grinned more widely, and leant in so close that she could feel his breath on her face, and she could clearly see his threatening mismatched eyes.

"Why would I lie to my master?" He replied, in an icy tone. Else froze, and stammered...

"But...y-you said I was free..that he was not to know-"

"I lied." He interrupted her, with a tone that would make any man tremble. He raised an elbow, and smashed it down into the back of her head, knocking her unconscious.

Chapter Fifteen

Another Recruit

Darkness. That was all that happened. Everything went dark from one instant to another. He thought he was dead. As many times before him. Death, in a way, was something to wait for. It would not come so quickly unless one wants it. Immortals can afford to be eternally patient. First, feelings came to him, the touch of something. He was being carried!. Then, the smell, the scent was peculiar. Then, at last, sight returned

to Draken. Slowly it came, but fast, he looked around, immediately snarling as the mortals touched him. "Unhand me!" He growled. Draken reached for his weapon, but to his dismay, they were missing. Draken fell off the man's shoulders and to the cold ground, the icy snow in his face. He gazed at the Breton and the Dunmer, someone was missing. The Nord woman he encountered earlier, anger swelled up inside him. Why did they take him? What did they do with the Nord? Draken shot out his hands to blast them with a fire spell, but instead of engaging in a fight, he decided to take a more civilized path of negotiations.

"What do you want?" He hissed. Thirst tugging at him, hunger in his eyes. It gnawed at him, almost a day without feeding. He could control it, but he rather not..but he had to, he was a noble not a savage. Savagery only came necessary at times.

"Return to me, my weapons." He added.

"We wanted items important to our master. But you interfered. The Nord was ours. You may have marked her, but you will leave her now. Varnand wants to kill you, perhaps he is right to think so. I have other plans, you fought single-handedly against three exceptionally well skilled fighters. And you almost killed me. I respect this. I offer you a chance to continue your long life. Join us, and the army of Azmodæum, and be spared. Or speak now, and I shall slit your neck, and spill your precious blood." Adonis replied.

Draken made a sound in his throat, almost clearing it. Who in blazes was Azmodæum? Only time would explain. Draken decided to play along for now. He listened to the fellow threatening to slice his neck and spill his blood. Draken returned back in time by memory to think about how he sliced his victim's neck with the razor edged blades. *"Spill my blood? That shall not be necessary..I can do it myself since you snatched my prey from me."*

Draken thought about joining this Azmodæum character. Draken never heard of him..or perhaps he did, the name was disturbingly familiar. No matter, he would see for himself. *"I was strong enough to take on three of you mortal swines and I can try it against two..but, let us not get into a combative minutia that we encounter almost daily. The wilderness is simply no place to speak of such things. Now, if you may, return to me my weapons"* The vampire said curtly.

Adonis smiled.

"Good. I have not worked with vampires in awhile, it will be nostalgic. We can stop at Chorrol, you can quench your thirst there, and I hear there are do gooders which need trimming before we return to Azmodæum" Adonis answered, withdrawing the pale skins, kantana from his belt, and tossing it to the vampire, who caught it easily in mid air, sheathing it after.

"I assure you, there is no need to fear me. I shall not bite..much" He said, senses threatening to leave again. He felt dizzy, befuddled. Draken tried to get up but kept staggering. He touched his head slightly and looked at his hand. Bleeding..blood. While his own blood did not stimulate blood-lust, it did remind him of the warmth beneath the mortals blood, the red nectar that would rejuvenate him and heal him instantly. Draken slowly closed his eyes and opened them again, feeling more and more dazed, the blow to the head was strong, but not enough to put him down. Chorrol is where the righteous

and the devoted slumber, he would enjoy causing havoc, but from his point of view, they were decadent and blinded by fool's lies. The old days came again, it was a long time since Draken was in the Crimson Scars, years before that the Dark Brotherhood, before that, working for the Order, before that, Valenwood. Draken did see his share of glory, but these days remain a bit stable and quiet. He felt himself attenuated. diminished.

Draken had a few gold pieces on him, his katana, some of the daggers the Dunmer never returned to him. Using the weapons wisely was a strong idea. He could not bring attention to himself..but..he was not Raven, jumping into the fray was something he enjoyed. He glanced at his ring, making sure they did not take that from him. All was well, so it seemed. Draken bowed slightly, bending half his waist forward, setting his arm back while one rested in his stomach.

"Allow me to reintroduce myself. I am Draken Decimus Vladmir" He said respectfully, keeping wary of the two warm bloods in front of him.

Varnand scowled, and offered his first thoughts to the conversation.

"Chorrol? You think it wise to enter another city after the debacle in the last one? Besides, I still don't trust him, what if he runs off and alerts the guards?"

"You think he would go to the guards? Look at him. He's not an obvious vampire, but it is not worth the risk of letting them glimpse his face. I don't trust him either, but that's just my nature." Adonis retorted. He wanted to cause some havoc. He had not killed anyone in a very long time.

Chapter Sixteen

Conflict

Silassen woke to bright rays of light shining into the room. The somewhat dull drapes prevented the sunlight from flooding the room, but what light made it's way through gracefully attenuated the atmosphere of dull colours. He rubbed his eyes, and sat up, the sheets sliding off his muscled torso. He smiled as he looked out at the window. He could hear all those typical morning noises you only hear of in stories; Birds singing, children laughing. But that was not why he was smiling, he turned to his left. Sleeping

peacefully under the white sheets was a beautiful slender redhead. Her fiery red hair clashing with the drab colours of their room, and almost casting a happy glow over their surroundings. His grin grew wider, and he watched her lie there, slumbering on without a care in the world. He and Mariane had been courting for weeks now. He slipped out of the bed, as quietly as he could, though his skill in stealth was not exactly accomplished. The floorboard creaked and he winced. He hurried over to the drawers, and rummaged inside for a pair of workmans trousers, and a white shirt. He did not feel like getting fully dressed today. He would rather just spend today inside the gray mare, with Mariane, and his friends, as he had done so often these last few weeks, pausing only to help out at the smithys for a day or so, doing odd work to pay for his room.

Once dressed, he kissed Mariane on the forehead, before slipping out of the room, and heading downstairs, for his one true love, food. He skipped the stairs quickly, and ambled over to the bar. He ordered a breakfast, and was stunned when the barkeep told him it was late afternoon, he pointed to a table near the door, where both Bethras and Augustus were sitting. He chuckled, and ordered dinner instead, and walked over to his friends, pulling up a seat.

Adonis crossed into Chorrol. The amulet had brought him a vision. A man named Augustus was here. Augustus Rainor. Rainor. He shared the same name as Varnand. Adonis was happy. A perfect target. A kill. One that his master desired. He split from the others, arranging to meet back by the gate in at least an hour. Varnand disappeared to the shadows, and Draken shot off to look for new prey.

Draken mumbled to himself, the hot headed leech decided to go out on his own rather than join them. Just this once.

"Do not trail after me." Draken said also, *"Don't call me vampire either. If the Order discovers my identity has been revealed, death would come to me in swift wings"* He exclaimed. *"I will be resdevous in the location set upon us."*

Draken set off to the city. Foolish mortals did not understand the responsibility of being in the upper echelon in the vampiric hierarchy. Calling him vampire was not offensive, rather it comforted him; knowing what he was. But the fact that almost everyone else hated that, they had to keep silent about calling him vampire. Draken set out to look for prey, an easier one, a prey that would take no time in feeding. Draken would never indulge himself in the tastes of beggars and unclean folks. No, he preferred something a bit more delicious. Noble's blood. A pretty young woman as he always chose. Since the trouble makers would take no shame in destroying stuff and making mess out of things, Draken would try and bend the laws once. The tenets of the Cyrodiilic vampires never said one cant indulge in the thirst and rip throats. It is only forbidden to do so in the open, however, in a cave, a fort, the wilderness where darkness covers, then it is no problem, for the thirst is the true nature of the Creatures & children of the Night, it matters not if it is on slumbering prey or struggling ones. Draken stalked the fading night, looking for someone whom he may sink his fangs into.

An Orc passed by with heavy armor..no. Then a dunmer, no, then more arrays of breeds of beast folk. NO! disgusting dirty creatures. Only an Imperial would do! and that's exactly what Draken found with his hunter's sight. A fetching young imperial woman. Draken licked his lips and paced after her. It was a little too late for her to be out this

time of night. Never too late to drink blood..especially when it was a fresh one. Suddenly, noises was heard nearby, the trouble already started.. Blasted fools!. Draken had to quicken his pace, he walked quickly over to the Imperial woman, she must of been in her early twenties. Draken was anticipating on feeding on her. And he would do it so savagely. The vampires residing Fort Carmala were a prime scapegoat. Draken would leave, pinning the blame on the vampires there. It was perfect. He felt ill doing this to his kind but, he had to look for himself.

"Excuse me, dearest. But I am in need of some assistance."

Draken said to her, using the vampire's seduction power on her, boosting her attitude towards him. She smiled and agreed to assist him. Draken began speaking of what he needed assistance in. The Imperial woman was so intrigued with seduced by Draken, she took him to her house for a cup of wine. Indeed it was quick, the vampire's seduction came in handy, and the fact that Draken was a handsome fellow. He walked inside her house, immediately shutting the door behind her. Before she had a chance to react or say anything, Draken descended upon her, pulling her blond back and exposing her soft neck. Draken roared loudly and opened his mouth, fangs growing inches longer as they sank in, drawing blood. Draken began to drink, one hand holding her mouth, muffling the screaming, the other holding the hair back. The wound in his head began to heal almost instantly. It was ever so refreshing. While some strength left him due to the recent feeding, he was able to blend in even more with the warm blooded idiots that plague the land.

Draken dropped his prey, the corpse as white as snow, cold as the winter's chill. She fell to the ground with a thud. No one else was at home, to his advantage. Draken found a parchment on her table, he took the blank paper, using her blood(What was left of it) he wrote down a note, showing the area where Fort Carmala was, near Hackdirt. He made it plain as possible, making it look like someone would meet him there. The peasants and citizens would surely get upset and chose to kill every vampire in Fort Carmala, avenging this delicious Imperial girl, killing the wrong vampires, oh the lovely sound of that. She is good as dead, and would not be turned, she was in the brink of death and Porphyric Hemophilia took 72 hours to spread through the mortal's bloodstream, creating new parasitic organs. Draken never turned anyone unless they deserved it and they were his allies or potential lovers. This, was just another cattle, a piece of meat. Morality does not even enter it. He was above the food chain. More cunning than a wild animal, more intelligent than some Werewolves. Draken was proud to be a vampire. A shame time never permitted him to do anything else with her, but the great thing about immortality was that there was always women in Nirn.

In the final event of her death, Draken set the note with the named Fort near the door. Draken looted her gold, and a few rings that could be sold for profit. He walked away, glancing back at the twitching corpse that finally gave away its last breath and finally died out. Draken did not even give her a mental salute. Maybe later he would purchase a bottle of human blood, or make one himself so he would avoid feeding and risking exposure. Draken walked out using the backdoor, he used his hunter's sight making sure no one was on the other side. It was safe.

Adonis had since found the inn. He was contemplating how to proceed. There were three men at the table. More than he had anticipated, or would like to battle at once. One had

a soldier like build, and the other clearly possessed muscle. Augustus himself he doubted would be a walkover either, or his master would not wish him destroyed, and much as he would not like to admit it, his brother was also a fearsome combatant.

He ordered an ale, as a cover, and walked towards the table adjoining the group. They glanced at him, but paid no attention. Good. Just as he wished. He knew Augustus's face, it had been part of the vision. And at that moment he struck. He tossed the mug at Bethras, kicking out harshly at Silassens chair as he did so, knocking it away from him, and arced his knife towards his target's exposed, fleshy throat, Augustus Rainor was about to die. Or at least, that would have been the case were it not for Bethras. The Breton had reacted quickest of the trio, dodging the mug, and diving forwards, knocking Adonis off course, and giving him time to draw his sword. Adonis hissed, and whipped out his second knife, holding one in each hand, crouching, keeping his centre of gravity low. He kicked out at Augustus's chair, repeating the same move he had used on Silassen, before setting on Bethras with his knives.

Bethras backed away from the whirling flashes of steel, blocking where he could, dodging where he could not. He could not hold long against such speed, but Silassen was back on his feet, sword in hand. Lucky that he kept that with him at all times, even if his armour was in his room with Mariane. He brought his blade crashing down towards Adonis's skull, but the dunmer was quick. He twisted, pirouetting away from the blade, and kicked out, his heel streaking towards Silassens chest, but the tall redguard grabbed the dunmer's foot in mid air, and attempted to snap the ankle. Adonis was prepared however, and pushed off from the ground with his other foot. He smacked his left foot into Silassens face, causing him to drop his other limb. He regained his balance in time to leap backwards from Augustus's enchanted sword, Hellfire. He ducked under the next attack, and attempted to nick his opponent's under arm, but Augustus was no stranger to swordplay, and dodged backwards himself.

Dagon had seen enough. He had been tracking Vile since he had left skingrad, monitoring almost his every move, but always just missing him when they tried to catch him. He supposed that you didn't get to be number three on the Empire's Most Wanted List without being good at avoiding capture. Now he had him, though. He had been pouring over information about Vile in vain, just about to give up on finding him, when an exhausted soldier had burst through the door, telling him that Vile had been spotted at the Grey Mare. Considering how close he lived to the castle, it only took him five minutes to get to the guard barracks. Half of the Chorrol night shift had volunteered to help capture him, most of them just for the glory, though. An hour after he had first heard of Vile's location, he was at the door of the Grey Mare with multiple other guardsmen. He just hoped that Vile hadn't been notified. His hopes were raised, though, as no sooner had he burst through the door of the Mare than he discovered Vile fighting three men, with what looked like a vampire fighting with him. Vile didn't look like he was going down anytime soon. Too bad for Vile that Dagon arrived when he did.

"Here we go again"

Thought Dagon as the other guardsmen piled through the door around the fight.

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Draken wiped his mouth from the blood using his tongue. He continued on, whistling a sinister tune & searching for something to do. The noises grew louder and it pestered Draken so, without thinking twice, he broke in full run and made his way to the Inn. His new companions is surely in trouble, probably needing an extra hand. Now that Draken was healed, he would throw himself into the call of battle. The Hunter's sight came in use again, he was able to see everyone inside, seeing who was fighting whom. Draken darted into the inn, and looked at Adonis's three opponents.

"How do you fancy the odds now boys?" He mocked them.

A number of guards came in The Grey Mare, weapons drawn & ready as the sound of conflicts and distress summoned them. Draken stopped what he was going, switching to an immediate offense, he was caught red handed with his weapon out. There was no turning back from this one. As anger and hatred swept up in him, Draken used the raw emotions to his advantage and charged towards the Town Watch. Katan pointed behind him, he set adjusted his vision to quickly capture the individuals and objects around him. Draken noticed a Breton male running away from the battle, past the guards. The Town Watch did not see him as a threat and presumed to allow him to flee the scene. Draken ran towards the escaping breton, he leaped in the air, right foot stepping over the Breton's back, the left foot stepping in the Town Watches face, using his other leg, Draken kicked the third guard, whom fell to the ground, dropping his bulky shield, whole sword was in hand. Before both guards had time to recover from a unexpected martial arts move, Draken had his katana facing them again, thrusting his katana forward he was able to impale the guard, doing minimal damage as the armor he carried resisted most of the weapon's tip. Draken grabbed the shield from the dirty ground and held it in front of him. Anticipating an attack from his opponents. Two guards, the rest obviously going to take care of Vile and the other folks in the Inn.

Adonis swore foully. He charged, knives flashing, two guards came up to meet, him, he let them come. The two men raised their weapons simultaneously, Adonis dropped and slid along the floor, he sliced the mens legs, and then viciously backstabbed them as his skid ended. He leapt to his feet, ready for another attack, and didn't have to wait long before one came, the man drove his sword towards Adonis's stomach, Adonis twisted to the side, and then powered both knives in and out of the mans chest, the spray of blood landing on his face. He rolled to avoid another attack and stood up, he had managed to find his way to Draken.

Draken glimpsed Adonis rolling and siding near him, one quick distraction nearly claimed Draken's immortal life. A silver blade nearly sliced his throat. Almost dying the same manner his victim's use to long ago, the irony of such a destiny. Draken ducked out of the way, paying little to almost no attention to Adonis. "This is no place for a battle" Draken said loudly above the noise of strangers and items breaking.

The guards charged at Draken, thinking they had the upper hand. While one guard went after Adonis, Draken took on the remainin two that aimed for him. The vampire shoved his shield forward, blocking two attacks, then retreated back. The guard growled. *"Why wont you die!?"* He shouted.

Draken flipped the round table that was near him, creating a space and time for him to plan his next move. *"I can't"* Draken said boldly.

He smelled two imbibed individuals, one female, the other a young male going towards him. Race was not important, only Draken's victory and their defeat. By his eyes, they were the responsible folk, trying to play the "Hero". Draken thrust his fist down to the table, setting it on flames using a minor destruction spell. The round table that gaped him and the Guards was pushed by Draken's left foot. The guards jumping out of the way by the flaming table. One of the unarmored assailants came within range of Draken. A candle was set on the walls of the Inn, Draken snatched it, the flaming light object, then slammed it into the eyes of the male. The man screeched out loud in agony, Draken shoved him out of the way and charged at the responsible female who wanted to do "Good". She raised what appeared to be a table knife against him. Draken chuckled and set his katana upward, high above his head, the blade nearly touching the ceiling. The woman saw this as an opportunity to kill him and claim whatever reward or glory came with his defeat. She charged, as Draken expected. Just before she can make her hit count for something, Draken dropped his weapon, the handle rather than the blade itself. The metal handle had hit her hard on the head. The woman stumbled back, reaching for her head to ease the sudden pain. The guards leaped over the table and charged at Draken.

The vampire raised his shield again, keeping it forward, while his left foot kicked the dazed woman back a few steps. To make sure she was kept at bay, Draken threw his shield at her. Knocking her down temporarily. The two guards came again at him, pestering idiots they were. Draken lifted his katana for the first guard, but faked the attack when he twisted his body in a circular motion, slicing the guards legs, bringing him down. While the woman tried to recover, Draken rushed to her and she tried to lift up. Draken stomped on her chest & sliced her neck while she was pinned to the ground by the shield. Perhaps, if she wasn't too drunk she would be able to flee with her pathetic life. The last guard on Draken's back came at him. Draken had to finish this quickly. He reached for the shield, the guard however, was quicker without it, while Draken reached for it, the guard thrust his weapon at Draken, unlike his watch friend, the other dead guard did not have a steel sword but a silver one. This fact not noted by the attacking guard and the fact that Draken was a vampire was no never mind to him. Which only made Draken entirely a force to be feared.

The steel blade went in Draken's back, falling deep inside, nearly touching bone. To his advantage, steel weapon's weren't effective against supernatural creatures. Draken dropped his katana on impact, his weapon falling with a clank to the ground. The guard took a few seconds to realize his opponent was not truly "dead" yet. He yanked his steel sword out and attempted to behead the enemy. Draken, rolled in front of him over the dead body of the woman, reaching for the kitchens knife that rested in her cold dead hand. Without aiming, he threw it towards the guard, the blade slicing the air with a smooth sound, then hitting the guard in the nose, between the helmet's visor. The guard was not dead, but scratching his face to remove the blunted tip of the kitchens utensil stuck in his nostril. Draken grabbed hold of his famed Katana again and finally thrust it upwards, under the guards chin. The weapon's tip came at the other side, the guard falling to the floor. Dead.

Draken turned to see Adonis in combat. *"We need to leave. Now!"* he argued!

The sky went black, blotting out the rising sun. The guards and the combatants alike paused for a moment as they felt the strange energies. The sun disappeared altogether, eclipsed for just a moment, and during that eclipse two Daedroth-type daedra appeared in the center of town. One of them had glowing green eyes, and punched a guard in the chest, driving the corpse of the guard into a wall and splattering his innards along the baseboards. The sun came back out, and one Daedroth shrank in size while the other, green-eyed one, screamed valiantly. The Amulet around Vile's neck resonated during the scream and spoke aloud,
"Now is the time. Go!"

While the screaming Daedroth killed guards left and right. The sun-weakened daedroth was dispatched by the town watch, and the remaining one stood, ready to die so that its allies could escape the city.

Adonis

Vile knew the creatures were that of his master. Their design differed slightly to that of a normal daedra. He pulled Draken to his feet, and half carried the injured vampire, who was clutching where skin, bone and muscle had been moments before. Adonis Vile headed for the gates, slowed by the wounded Draken. He saw Varnand ahead, chasing down a guard, closing in on the blue clad do-gooder. Adonis glanced over his shoulder, the Daedroth was massacring the guards, but taking a beating nonetheless, and it barred the way of their pursuers. The Breton who had fought alongside his enemies in the inn amongst them. They had no hope of catching them now. Adonis roared at Varnand to steal some horses, and bring them to the gate.

Bethras froze as he watched the enormous Deadroth slaughter a guard. And another one. Then he saw Adonis, Draken and Varnand trying to escape in the corner of his eye.

He quickly took a bow from a dead guard's body and put an arrow to it, aiming at Vile's legs. Vile glanced over his shoulder, and for a short moment they looked in each others' eyes. Bethras turned around, away from them and shot the arrow at the Daedroth, trying to save a guard being attacked by the mighty beast.

Seris burst onto the scene. He had been working in the fighters guild, and had only just heard of the commotion. He cursed the guild for being empty on a day such as this. He spotted Silassen, Bethras and Augustus in the thick of the fight. He darted forward, and struck the Daedroth with incredible force. It turned with a roar, and swiped at him. Seris ducked it, and dug his sword into the monsters hip. In frustration, the other daedroth tore a guard clean in two, before throwing both separate halves at the mans comrades.

Dagon, the guard captain looked around desperately. His mind had figured out the solution. These creatures were summoned somehow. Dispel. That's what he needed. He looked around. All magically capable guards he had brought along with him lay dead now. He cursed foully, and looked around for anyone who looked vaguely capable of magic. He spotted a Breton.

"HEY! DISPEL!" He roared at Bethras. He paused, and nodded, and without a word, white light formed in his hands. Meanwhile, the Daedroth that Seris had stabbed was forcing it's way towards Bethras. Seris was constantly swiping at the beast, dripping with sweat, his eyes concentrated. The other Daedroth was otherwise engaged with Silassen, and the remainder of the guards. But the daedroth was almost upon Bethras who was not yet done charging his dispel spell. Seris drove his sword heavily into the Daedroths side, and yanked back, trying to pull it out for a second strike, but he could not. It was stuck tight. Seris, looked around. Bethras was nearly finished, but the Daedroth would be on him before he could cast the spell. So he did something of pure lunacy. He darted infront of the Daedroth..and..he...he headbutted the monster. The creature blinked dumbly, as did all around them. It was crazy, but it had worked. Bethras roared with triumph, as he sent one spell towards the other Daedroth, and prepared to fling the second at the one in front of him. But it was to quick. It grabbed Seris, lifted him up in one giant fist, and squeezed.

Seris's eyes bulged, as almost every bone in his body cracked. He felt his ribs implode in on themselves. It was one brief moment of nothing but agony, he couldn't cry out because the beast had crushed his vocal chords. His face was a look of surprise, but no one could tell from what was visible afterwards. One thing that anyone in paradise could attest to was that he had died happy. For he had been slain protecting his friends. But that was not consolation to Bethras, who with a roar of pure fury, threw the spell at the horrible monster that had just brutally ripped the life out of his friend, and murdered the good spirit of Seris Marentius.

The Daedroth screamed as the white burst of light hit it square in the chest, its hands still gripping a guard mercilessly by the torso. The green in its eyes flew out from the beast's head like noxious smoke, and the beast disappeared, the smoke wafting away. The city was a mess, and the attackers were nowhere to be found. Fully-grown guardsmen sobbed in pain and in loss, and grown men and women who witnessed the event hid in their homes or held back vomit. The battle site looked like a slaughterhouse.

Silassen stood up. The city centre was in tatters. The carnage was un-believable, many of the dead in the inn were that off the human assailants. But the daedra had left their

mark to, many guards lay dead, surrounding the inn. Silassen sheathed his sword. Citizens were peeking out of their windows, and then immediately recoiling. Those with a harder stomach came out, and looked sadly at the massacre. Some, relatives to the guards who had died, were screaming and crying. More guards were running up and roaring in anger, recognising friends.

Bethras asked about the nature of the beasts. Silassen shook his head, unable to answer, and eyes for nothing other than the horrific scene that lay in front of him.

Silassen Ilden walked over to the guards. He knew some of them. As he saw them lying there, some with wounds wrought from a blade, and some from the hands of a terrible beast, tears of sadness and rage formed in his eyes. A young man lay before him, he must of been little more than twenty. Around his own age. Silassen made a silent vow, that if he ever came across the indescribably evil beings that had caused this, they would not live to regret it.

Bethras helped a group of guards carry away the wounded. Many were wounded, but even more had died. "Who could have done such a horrible thing..." Bethras whispered to himself. The young Imperial they were carrying muttered. He was badly injured, and was not likely to survive.

Dagon spotted the man who had cast the dispel, and walked over to him. He put his hand on his shoulder.

"I think we ought to thank you, sir. Without you who knows how many may have died." Bethras nodded, saddened because of the innocent people that had died.

"We owe you our gratitude too. Without your aid and that of your brave guardsmen we would have been killed as well." he replied.

"Dagon Theranis." The captain introduced himself.

"Bethras Northwode." Replied Bethras.

Theranis nodded, and turned to his men. He made a motion with his hand, and spoke as he did so.

"Move everyone back. Clear the dead away. We'll have to burn them, the cemeteries will be overflowed." He announced. Silassen moved to pick up another man, as did Bethras, and Augustus. But Augustus froze. Bethras noticed this, and nudged Silassen, nodding to their friend. They looked at each other quizzically, and then moved over to their friend. They then froze, just as he had done.

It was a man with dark blonde hair, and green eyes. His body was horribly disfigured, and at places, you could even see bone sticking out of the scraps of metal that had once been his worn steel armour. His face was caked with a dark crimson red, and one strand of his hair fell over his eyes. He didn't look peaceful. Some people say the dead look like they're sleeping. They were wrong. Seris just looked wrong. He was so full of knife, and now it had been popped from him like a cork from a bottle.

Silassens fists clenched. Anger swelled in his heart. He had started today in a happy dream, but it had deteriorated into a nightmare. He thought the most he'd have to worry about would be Seris not turning up for drinks. He said nothing. Merely stared at his

fallen comrade. A blazing fury filled his eyes. A man robbed of all but the most basic of human emotion.

Bethras looked at Seris. He had not known him that long, but they had become fast friends. He did not cry, nor did his eyes fill with an inhuman hatred as Silassens did. He offered a prayer to arkay in his head for Seris, and was saddened by his death. He stood there, the pinnacle of calm, and watched carefully for his friends reactions.

Augustus felt like he'd been hit in the face with a warhammer. The massacre in the streets had shocked him, but Seris's lifeless body hit him through to the core. He didn't move, but it wasn't like Bethras's calm mourning. He was angry. He, like Silassen, wanted to see the bastards whose fault this was heads on a pike. A guard stepped forward, trying to take Seris from them. Augustus reacted. He stepped towards the guard. He didn't raise his fists, or move his hand for his sword, but it was an aggressive action. He stood there resolutely. Blocking the man from the body. The guard looked to Theranis.

"Stand aside." Dagon

Theranis said, stepping forwards, angry that they were delaying him. Hand on his sword hilt, ready to restrain Augustus if need be. There was a sound of scraping metal, and an sword blade was at the guard captains throat. It was Silassen. He held his arm out straight. His face was expressionless, and his tone hard edged.

"Do not touch him." He said. Theranis hesitated, then backed up a little. Silassen kept his sword steady and where it had been before. He looked at his friends. Augustus nodded, and Bethras, with more reluctance did also. He shared a look with Theranis. Letting him know it was best not to mess with those two when they were in such a foul mood. The Chorrol Three backed away, and headed for the gate. Dagon scowled.

Chapter Seventeen

Return to Balindrium

Adonis,Varnand and Draken rode hard. The horses protesting, but when they did they were beat all the harder. The horses were hardy though, although not particularly fast, they were the best to take for a harsh trip into The Jeralls. As they rode on the cold

grew, and snow blew harder. Adonis slowed his horse. The others followed his lead.

"We have to get out of the cold. A blizzard is coming. And Draken requires attention. He will not last much longer without some basic help. I have some bandages in my pack. We should find a cave and seek shelter." He announced, shivering from the cold.

The three men had to slow, the horses also. They searched for a while, before finding a small cave to use as shelter. He pulled the bandages out of his pack and set to work on Draken's stomach. He was in bad shape. He threw one of the makeshift tent canvases to Varnand, and told him to stretch it across the cave entrance, to keep out the worst of the blizzard. On one hand this blizzard was helpful, their enemies would not be able to follow them for days. On the other hand, it was going to drastically lower their chances of survival. He took out another of the makeshift canvases and layed it on Draken he called to Varnand that there was another for his use also. He covered himself with one, and awaited Varnand to come back deeper into the cave, after he was done stretching the canvas across the mouth of the cave.

Varnand worked furiously, and after fifteen minutes, he had stretched the tarp thin across the opening of the cave. It still provided heat, and also was stretched so far he could see outside. He walked down to the end of the cave, where Adonis had begun a fire.

Adonis finished the fire, it was small, but would provide enough heat to prevent death from cold. Adonis looked over to Varnand who had finished with the animal skin across the cave entrance and was making his way over to him. Adonis crouched low, and looked Varnand in the eye.

"We must reach Balindrium some time tomorrow. But if we try to move around tonight it would be nothing short of suicide. Now we should sleep. I'll keep track of the horses, although they cannot carry us much further, they will be useful for the first leg of tomorrow's journey, I will make sure they do not stray from the cave. I'll keep an eye on Draken to, we have to be careful that he does not breathe his last. You sleep, you have earned it." Adonis said.

"No. I must speak with Mephala. You sleep." Varnand replied.

"I won't breathe my last, I won't die either!" He growled. *"I am fine, I am strong and I'll live long enough to fight another century"* He said. *"You have my gratitude.."* He added, in a nice tone but his face remained angry.

One of the other went to speak with Memphala, a known Daedric Prince, the other went to rest. Draken decided to imitate the man's actions. He went to a corner to try and speak to the "Divine" Daedric princes. Molag Bal, the father of vampires. Nothing. Draken tried and tried but no answer. He could not be summoned without the proper offerings, or maybe he just did not want to talk to Draken. Did Draken ever see this Daedric Prince before? Yes, long time ago, a while after Valenwood's attack. ColdHarbour was a place Draken wanted to live if he ever died in Nirn. Draken tried speaking to the Dread Father, Sithis, but only whispers came about. In return for the sudden ignorance

of the superior beings, Draken blasted a rock out of sheer frustration. "AH!!" He shouted angrily. Suddenly, a few squeaks were heard and Draken saw a unusual moving in a empty bag nearby. There were Rats!, startled by the shout and fire Draken unleashed near them. Large ones! keeping warm inside the bag, in a crate, that was left by a traveler or an adventurer. Four large rats, bigger than the ones he saw weeks before in a dungeon. Weather this was a sign of gift from Molag Bal or just randomly placed merciful attitude of fate itself. Draken threw his hands at the crate, ripping the pieces of rotten wood off, his nails grabbing the rats and holding them, clutching them as if they were his prize. Draken held two in each hand. The clawed, they bit him, they tried to scurry away. They wasted their energy. Most rats carried diseases but Draken was naturally immune to every disease. His fangs bared down at them, he snapped their little fragile necks, three of them, the first one he left alive. Draken began to chew and suck all the blood that filled these juicy rodents. It was probably not enough to heal his wounds but it had helped a bit. The rats were so delicious, sweet, a good midnight snack. The first one was drained, Draken crunched its head in his mouth and began to drain every red nectar from the mouth, then the other one he bit down on it back, squeezing the rodents body and draining everything, almost like if a person squeezed a sponge in their mouth. The other ones he almost swallowed whole, as big as they are, a vampire's mouth is gaunt and large, able to open to unusual lenghts. Swallowing rats whole was something his sister and bride did, even his brother, Vaultren, did. As if they were small bread. Draken prefered to drink the blood.

Draken wiped his mouth and moved to a place deeper into the cave, away from Memphala's worshiper and away from Vile as well. He found a dark corner and sat there. It was night already and Draken wanted to hunt for something..badly. But he had to rest, for a few minutes to half an hour he began training with his katana and fire spells, gradually practicing his drills. Draken sat there, in the cave, thinking about all this. These new travellers, who were they? What did they really want? What would he get out of this and why was he with them? Draken never even had a chance to tell his bride back home!. While not worried sick, she did wonder where the hell he may have been. But she was just like him, power hungry and not entirely caring, she knew Draken was trust worthy and loyal, he would not be sleeping around with any of vampire. Draken on the other hand, kept everything a secret. While the other slept, Draken snuck in the night like a stalking vampire bat, sneaking around and prancing like a thief and sinister criminal. Slowly, he reached closer for the sleeping prey, they looked so appetizing and mouth watering. Just a bite, they could not notice. Draken walked closer to Vile, about to feed, but he restrained himself. They did offer to help him and somewhat did help him, they were cattle, cattle that can fight back, or maybe allies. But Draken tried to dismiss these petty thoughts of compassion..he had no allies other than his bride, his sister and his vampiric brethren. But, their master did have power, Draken witnesses that in Chorrol. Perhaps he would tolerate being with them for awhile longer, even earn their friendship..true friendship. Draken also wanted to avoid picking a fight with Vile for now. If he woke up and discovered Draken draining blood from his neck, he would surely be unforgiving. Instead, Draken snuck out into the blizzard. The snow, the icy snow, almost like needles piercing him. Draken began to create fire again to keep him warm, but it was no use, the snow and cold wind snuffed it out. Draken was use to the cold, he had been to Skyrim, Bruma(Obviously) and even the Daedric realm of his master, Coldharbour, the air was icy cold and the fire in flames. He was use to it.

Using his vampiric vision of Hunter's sight, he was able to see during the night and the

blizzard. Looking around, he smelled a warm blood!. Not a walking human or man beast but an animal. A horse, almost dying by the harsh blizzard. Draken went towards it, the horse wailing to the cold. Weak and dying, Draken had to take that suffering to end his own. Draken leaped at the horse, feeding on his warm blood before the cold. As the freezing air tickled his back, the blood heated his stomach. When the horse was drained dry, Draken moved the animal's head to the ground, the pin pricks facing the ground rather than the air. Draken grabbed a handful of snow and placed it over the animal's head to cover the fact that he had helped kill the Horse. Vile and Varnard would not be happy to discover that Draken had the munchies during the night, so he covered his tracks. Better to know the animal died of cold than the bite of a vampire. Draken was finished at last. Feeling refreshed and loving every bit of it. The cold swept over him and Draken stood there, being warmed by the fur on the sides of his burgundy outfit. Draken rushed back inside, feeling far much better than before. While not having slept the day before, Draken took the liberty to try and summon rest himself. His body was naturally used to sleeping during the day, and staying active at night. But he needed rest. By grabbing the crates and bag that he had found the rats in, Draken made a fire, burning the crate and bag, while throwing the leftover pieces of the dead rats inside the fire he created with a destruction spell. The warmth was unnecessary but soothing, it helped him sleep. A shame his deluxe warm coffin bed was not there, but Draken did not care much, he needed rest, regardless of location. Before he rested, Draken decided to continue his sword and destruction tactics and training. He set himself near the fire, but not too close, he was very vulnerable to fire, even though he could manipulate it to his own advantage.

The vampire removed his shirt, placing it near the fire on a stone that sat in the corner of the cave's wall. His arms were straight down, sparks floating up in the air, smoke invading his nostrils. Draken closed his eyes, moving his arms slowly, he threw a punch with his right hand, turning his body around, he threw another with his left. After the punch he pushed his hand firmly forward into an open palm, right hand into a fist remaining still next to the stomach. He then began doing basic lunge stretches, so his body could adapt to the stamina. Draken did a leg sweep after, then a jump spinning crescent kick, followed shortly by an inside crescent kick, after that a crossover round kick. Draken turned to grab his katana that was stuck to the cave ground. Draken grabbed his primed weapon, having it pointed forward holding it by a single hand, the other held in front of the sword into an open hand under palm (Pointing your hand forward if giving someone something). Draken broke into full attack maneuvers, swinging away at the air left right left right left left right left. Each move by the foot shadowing his hand motion. Blinding speed and fortified agility, the vampire swordsman pointed the katana's tip towards his back, hilt pointed forward, imagining himself hitting someone with the blade's handle, then he flipped the sword and had the katana pointed forward again. Draken made a rough sound in his throat as he pushed his katana forward, imagining piercing an opponent's head. His other hand into a fist touching the side farthest from his heart. Draken swung his sword horizontally and then went into a defensive stance, keeping the sword pointed forward, his other hand guiding forward as well while his head turned back, almost as if he was battling many enemies at once. Draken jumped forward, swinging upwards, as if beheading an enemy, then at once slammed his single fist into the ground, creating short flames, sword pointed forward. The vampire looked forward and kept walking back while swinging his sword all over, block parry block parry kick then parry. A series of moves and actions that often changed to confuse the enemy.

Draken rolled forward, risking his own body to the flame's attack. Draken rolled over the fire he created, the sparks and fire burning his skin. The pain was tolerated but heavy, as soon as he rolled away from the fire, he did a midair twirl with the sword as if cutting a bird in midflight. Landing on two feet, he continued again, his body bearing a few cuts from the sword's sharp edge cutting his own skin and burn marks. Draken swung right, performing another legsweep then slicing left. An imaginary opponent was ahead of him, Draken growled silently not to awaken the sleeping breton and dunmer. Draken charged forward, weapon pointed behind him. "Ahhhh!" He said silently, leaping in the air and thrusting his weapon to the ground. Draken released his sword finally, opening his arms wide as if giving a hug, then bring them down to touch the side of his body. Draken gave a long sigh, then finished his training. With his lithe but muscled build, and his eyes and face, Draken literally looks like a wolf, accentuated even more by the way he moves. So he slept, keeping his katana in hand and vampiric sensed alert for any potential danger.

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Morning came, Draken awoke, refreshed, healed and ready for battle. Having satiated the thirst hours earlier, he was more than capable of receiving a few cuts and bruises. Draken helped clear the cave of any evidence, he found it amusing a troll was killed. Hilarious and utterly comical. Draken went outside with Varnard and Vile, one of them making notice of the dead horse. Draken did not look directly at him but had hoped they did not notice he killed the animal. The blizzard's snow covered the blood, so it was all safe. Sharing a horse, Draken continued to ride towards the Balindrium he had heard about. When the horses could not endure the power of nature, Draken and the others had to rely on sheer strength and skill. The horses raw meat was stored for later and a good sum of blood was taken and drank by Draken. Now, fully able to do something, he smiled to himself. When Adonis asked Draken if he could walk and climb, Draken offered back a sarcastic yet almost friendly scoff. He nodded.

"I believe I can." He said.

Draken leaped high in the air, grabbing hold of the icy rock with his clawed like hands. This was a good training for him, nature's danger did its part. Draken lifted himself up on the rock, then continued to climb further. He paused, allowing the others to go past him, because he did not know exactly where this place was, so he allowed them to guide him for this time being.

Adonis climbed, he was used to this, although mountains were different to the rooftops of cities he usually climbed, the principal was the same. And he had no trouble finding handholds, or footholds. Draken was a fast climber, Adonis was not surprised, a vampire was perfectly designed for climbing, strength would allow them to hold for longer, and any vampire would be able to dig their nails into the rock, when lacking of a safe handhold. They made good progress, and reached the top of the ridge within the hour. Adonis although a good climber, sensed that Draken would of managed it far quicker. When Adonis hauled himself over the top of the ledge. He looked up, a plain piece of mountain presented itself to him, or at least that was how it seemed.

There was a large bank of snow in front of him, he knew it concealed the entrance to the home of his master, to Balindrium. Adonis turned to the other two men, neither had entered the same way as him, Varnand had entered via a teleporter. And Draken himself had never entered.

"The entrance to Balindrium. Follow my lead."

Adonis grinned and sprinted, leaping through the wall of snow, and heading straight for the mountain side, but he dropped, and landed in a tunnel, carved of ice and stone. The path to Balindrium lay ahead. He knew some sort of magical force had pulled him down.

The tunnel that the trio had leapt into had changed since Adonis had last seen it. In fact, a lot was different beneath Balindrium. The noise echoing down the halls had become a cacophony, beasts competing to make more noise than the other. The tunnel that they had slipped into was thick with ice, and they immediately began to slide downward. They found themselves in a dark chamber in the dungeons of Balindrium, with distant lights shining like stars down tunnels. The inhabitant of the dungeon chamber was still quite alive, and struggled against its bonds when it saw the three armored agents of his jailer. He figured them to be another torturing team sweeping the dungeons for blood for the daedric servants of Azmodæum. Draken smelled the distinct scent of an unfed and delirious vampire emanating from the chained Nord. The monster screamed in terror, knowing that there was no hope for escape or combat for him against the invaders to his dark prison cell. The amulet began to rattle, and the Nord's eyes glowed green for a moment, although the evil trio could tell that the vampire had been a powerful mage in sanity and was fighting the possession with all of his force. His voice rasped out, "The tunnels... they shift... Go forth through the dungeon... a hole to the outside... a Daedric servant... Merthierry."

The Vampire broke Azmodæum's possession and screamed again, this time for blood. His energy was spent in fighting off the powerful magic that had descended from above, and his struggle against his bonds was weak, effortless. He fell defeated to the floor, short of the trio, and shook and cried, babbling insanely.

Chapter Eighteen

Snowfall

Silassen, Bethras and Augustus were pursuing Balindriums finest, and delving deep into the Jeralls to do so. The blizzard had hit them hard. They had lost their quarry's tracks, as the snow covered them with a fresh blanket of brilliant white. Silassen and Augustus's anger had not been quite so easily wiped clean. It was still there, burning brightly in their eyes. Bethras was worried. They were not thinking clearly. They were driven by a need for revenge. He followed quietly. He couldn't control them as they were. He'd intervene only when absolutely necessary. He just hoped when that time came, he'd know it. The three of them pushed on.

It was hours later. They were in the heart of the Jeralls now. Their teeth chattering. Silassen pulled his robes closer, hoping to keep himself a little warmer. Bethras and Augustus were also making attempts to keep themselves warm. But all their efforts were about to be destroyed in dramatic fashion. They were edging along a ledge. There was a large overhang. And it just so happened, that the blizzard which had nearly claimed the lives of Varnand and Adonis, had it's own plans for The Chorrol Three.

Augustus was out in front. He was moving quickly. Edging forward as fast as possible. He seemed the most driven. Silassen was in the middle, his drive for revenge no less evident. Bethras was following behind. He looked up. They seemed to be sheltered from the blizzard under the overhang. It was piling onto the top of the overhang. Layers upon layers of it. The realisation hit him seconds before it happened.

"By the nines." He whispered, true fear in his voice. *"It's coming down! Move!"* He roared at his friends, the anxiety in his voice carrying through the howl of the blizzard. He pointed upwards, and moved back hastily as he did so. Silassen looked up, and cursed with words Bethras had no idea even existed. Augustus glanced up briefly, and shot forward, with admirable speed and calm under the circumstances. Silassen backed up as fast as he could. Bethras cleared the ledge with seconds to spare, as several tonnes of white death descended upon the them. Augustus managed to make it to the other side. Bethras's eyes widened, and Silassen looked up. He locked gazes with Bethras, and

offered his final prayer to the gods, and awaited his death.

Chapter Nineteen

Baptism of Fire

He could see the beautiful Portal in front of the Skingrad gates, engulfed with flaming red mana, circulating around the pillars and bursting out of the dimensional field. Tall it stood, proud and conquering, with sharp, curly Kris and jaw-like black stones having burst out at its side, of whom the top was shiny blood red as if it had impaled a thousand men. It was... demonic beauty, it was hell as he visualized it.

The Portal was surrounded by plentiful of scamps, and the area was polluted with Haradra growth and Bloodgrass. A handful of guards were preventing the scamps from overrunning the encampment downhill, behind a barricade of wooden spikes. The

frontman spoke as Merthierry neared, *"Curious you madman? There is nothing here. Turn back for your own good!"*. Merthierry said nothing as he stared at the portal. Merthierry Yvienne then went to run to the Portal quick-footed, his staff readying. *"By the Nine Divines!"* the frontman yelled, but did not try stop the mage. An idle Scamp was surprised by a fatal forceful ram to the head. A Scamp further ahead slung a fireball at him, which he circumvented handily. He could feel the heat on his hands and face as it buzzed by. It then leapt as he neared. He managed to parry one of the long-nailed hands that got swung to him, but the other cut him at the arm. He kicked the light-weighted beast as it landed, making room for his last meters to the Portal. Several fireballs soared past him, clashing into the strange matter of the Portal with odd, morphing thuds, sounding like underwater blasts.

It felt unnatural to just, run into that... thing, wholly against the common sense. I felt my motivation deteriorating with the last steps to go. It could kill me, turn me mad or... pain me eternally! Most likely there was not even a way out, only in. With these dreading thoughts panicking me utmost, I shouted the bravest and manliest grunt I ever would, and felt myself disappear. Just... disappear.

Merthierry stepped out of the Portal matter, onto the cracked soil of the Sphere of Mehrunes Dagon, his plane of Oblivion, the Deadlands. Although the Books were right, still he was astonished by the rich presentation of Earthy elements. A tower was to be seen from where he stood, black like the jaws he witnessed at the gate. He started out towards it, evading Harrada in such degree as if it could uproot. When he just start feeling the heat of the lake of lava he was nearing, his clothing spontaneously ignited. He yelled in terror and started ripping his clothing of his body with a beastly madness and went rolling over the ground. Then he found himself tumbling down a deep slope, and when he had finally grinded to a halt he was wholly naked.

He lay motionless and in pain, when a deep voice of that of a giant filled his head, or the sky.

Fiery cloth of linen, wood for the fire. Gah! As long as it bites, it will live, yes, it will live! But then, die out, too, like a torch perishes! But, in time, all can be relit, so as a force reunites! Another flame, the same fire, as the forge ever wroughts the iron! Pityful, I find, so close as you were. Gah! Skillful, but then, a coward to Destruct.

On one desolate island of the Deadlands, not far geographically from where the first Sigil Tower stood vigilant against the burnt-looking crimson sky, a disturbance shook the ground. Black smoke began to coalesce above the deadened ground, converging into a single point of darkness. From this point of darkness, a horned and spiked portal erupted violently from the rocky ground.

Merthierry's twisted and augmented body lay still and lifeless as the daedric metal continued to fuse itself to his body. Some part of the magical process had moved the Dunmer's body from its initial resting place to this slightly more desolate one. The entire process was taking place rather close to where the small portal had taken root and become active.

With a great whooshing sound, the portal erupted in a flash of light. Emerging from its fiery maw was a tall Altmer, with an emotionless stone-gray face and skin twisted by magic and fire. Long, perfectly straight white hair framed his face and hung down past his shoulders. He entered the realm with his almost clawed hands clutching a dusty old book with a clasped cover, his pale green eyes glowing softly without a trace of happiness or sorrow, though his mouth was twisted in a haunting smile.

He immediately opened the book and began reading furiously, almost certainly aided by magic. The speed by which the Altmer flipped through the pages, absorbing the information within, was unbelievable. Once he had found precisely what he was looking for, however, the page-flipping stopped, and the tall figure remained still, his eyes locked

on the tome.

Without breaking his concentration or even moving a muscle, the elf summoned before him a hulking Daedroth. Its skin reeked of Molag Bal's festering realm, its ferocious eyes trying to make heads or tails of its new master. The beast shook its head as it became accustomed to its surroundings.

The Elf pulled from his robes a shining and shimmering white crystal, brighter than any torch. Magical energy poured forth from it like illuminated steam. The Elf held the beautiful stone high, still reading from the book with his other hand.

Baune adabala Dagon-El, Ioria... moria an varlais!

The Daedroth screamed as crimson energy slashed across its throat, spilling its boiling blood in gallons onto the ground. The Altmer held the Varla stone in the sanguine fountain, his eyes still unflinchingly emotionless. When the beast fell dead and drained to the ground, the Elf still held the crystal in his hand. But its very essence had changed. Instead of being bright and arcane, it shone back black and red, each facet stained with the blood of the daedra and the ancient magics of some ill-fated daedra-worshipping Ayleid cult.

Azmodæum held the new stone up close to his face, inspecting it. Inside, he could see the bright light of the Varla stone slowly integrating the evil that had just been infused with it. It looked like red and black smoke was eternally rolling within the jewel. Satisfied, he slipped the stone back into his robes. Then, his wandering eyes noticed Merthierry's lifeless body. He scanned the body carefully from afar, scrutinizing the body as well as what he could discern about the mind, and then with a wave, a Dremora stood in a cloak before the Warlock. The Daedra carefully lifted Merthierry's twisted body, resting him across his broad shoulders in a fireman carry. Azmodæum led the way back through the twisting portal, and the Dremora, carrying Merthierry, followed.

It quietened out. Then, metal burst out of the ground around him, which started entwining and piercing all of his body, starting out at his ribcage. He felt ends clash and join, and fuse with his skeleton. Impaling and weaving, it slowly covered all of him in stages. He blacked out.

Merthierry woke up with his vision blackened, being the dark of the night. With his hands he reached for his face. A loud clank. His steel gauntleted hand bumped into more steel. He explored the mask, and felt it was devilish of design; his new face, ever to be. It was speckled with dozens of spikes, and on top it had two towering horns. Not ordinary Daedric design, it looked more beastly and set for war. He explored the rest of him; likewise ordinarant layers of steel, Daedric steel, weld to his skeleton. His shoulder pads were covered with ripply plate mail, each plate having inscribed a skull silhouette and a strip of minuscule symbols at the border.

He stood up unhandily, unaccustomed to his armor, and faintly perceived he was in a dead-end hall with huge gaps serving as windows. He looked down onto Cyrodiil. On what bizarre place did he find himself? This castle must have come fallen out of the sky. He went through the entering arch and walked over a cracked marble-tiled hallway with left and right endless arrays of doors, one diversing not from another. On its end, there stood tall a double door. He knocked, and waited.

The tall, ornately designed double-doors creaked open slowly, and through the gap in the door Merthierry could see that the next room was much more brightly lit than the ones he had just traversed. The change in light blinded him momentarily as the door swung open fully, revealing a long and cavernous hall with brightly burning sconces along the walls every 5 feet. The room was made of the same dark, slightly marbled stone as the rest of the fortress. Magical enchantment hung thick in the air like humidity, and the floors appeared to be shining with a protective shell of magical glass.

Tables lined the halls, some short, stubby round tables with slaves eating quietly, and taller rectangular tables sporting fresh corpses of all sorts of species in assorted states of dissection and surgery. The slaves looked utterly defeated, no spark of life, rebellion, or hope shone in their eyes. They chewed absently on their bland-looking food, and did not

turn to acknowledge the metal-plated, dark-robed figure who had just stumbled into their Hall.

Taller than the standard rectangular tables, lining the far wall of the morbid chamber, were twelve pedestals that almost looked like bedtops. Upon each pedestal lay a corpse in shining black platemail. The design of the armor was nearly the same for each corpse; the helmets were the only marked difference. Each helmet was shaped in a twisted face completely unique from the other 11, with different daedric horns and spines in different places. As Merthierry inspected the bodies from afar, he noticed that all the skin under the metal was burned to a crisp; little more than sinew holding together soot, burned fat and scorched muscle.

A Tall, twisted figure with four long, twisting horns atop its orange skull approached Merthierry. Its face was absolutely hideous, but its mouth was contorted into something which would probably qualify as a smile. It was a Morphoid Daedra, a rare and powerful creature from a faraway hell in Oblivion. Spikes protruded from his shoulders and chin, and an arrowed tail dragging behind the beast made it look all the more devilish. It looked Merthierry up and down and rattled its head in a reptilian hiss of a triumphant laugh.

"Welccccccome to Balindrium... We have been..... waittttting.... for one ssssuchhhhhh assss you."

The Morphoid Daedra turned to let Merthierry through, and signaled to him a decorative table, obviously used for when the Lord of the Castle entertains important guests. It stood ten feet above the ground, and a small winding staircase led Merthierry up. On the table he found a feast laid out, with goblets full of wine, Sujamma, and Blood all laid out perfectly as if there was an invisible dinner party. A seat to the right of the head of the table was pulled back, as if it had been awaiting Merthierry for some time.

"Pleassssse, sssssittt.... The Massssssttterr will be here ssssssooon...."

The doors opened tiresomely slow but sped up and went to a forceful swing, the tall reinforced ornate doors bashing into the walls with a dull dead wood thud. The light from the room was temporarily blinding to Merthierry. He stepped into the hall, his black robe swaying at the draught. He looked around. Masses of slaves sitting benumbed at lined up round tables, chewing on food, not talking to one another. Several rows of tables were squared, and had corpses on them.

It felt good to new Merthierr, evil and insane as he had become. From a natural wanting to grow, it had become sickening urges for domination of all and everything, he had become the ultimate state of egocentrism, caring not for suffering of others if it would get him what he wanted. He had changed from human to demon, with the terrible inability to feel emotions other than hate and bursting anger. He was a creation of an utmost intelligent but corrupt soul, one that was striving for annihilation, and preparing for war. And he, he was the Warlord.

He was ignored by the crestfallen minions as he walked between the tables, smirking at the vast slavery. He saw lined up at the wall bed-sized pedestals with on them armored corpses, the bodies crisped and skin black by violent incineration. He did not see the imperfect helmets, and made no resemblance between their armors and his, as he had not seen that of himself yet.

A tall, entailed, spiky and devilishly looking Daedra, one he had never seen, welcomed him with a smile drawn on its hideous face, hissing they had been expecting him. He was led to a platform with a small spiralling staircase. The Daedra requested him to sit down at a designated chair at a richly covered table, and hissed his master would be there soon.

The heavy doors down below, which Merthierry had walked through minutes before, slammed open loudly. Standing tall in the doorway was the Lord of the castle. He walked briskly to the staircase which led to the grand table, followed quickly by a pair of Golden Saints brandishing dangerous-looking Glass maces and tower shields. The Altmer's skin looked dead, his eyes like burning jades, his hair like the pallid cloak of death hung over his statuesque face. He approached Merthierry and made a magnificent gesture of greeting, not without a hint of dominance.

"Welcome, Chosen one, to my palace. You have seen the Failed, down below, on display

like killed animals? They are the result of some ancient incantation, set into motion once again by one of the Daedric princes. I cannot begin to speak for why this prince has chosen to do these things to mortals, but we have both seen what has tended to be the end result.

But for some reason, you have survived. It is not just fire that burns in that forsaken plate, but the very power of magic. It has burned the other afflicted ones to the very core, but as you sit here before me, I can see its fiery magics flowing through your body like blood. No longer will you know fear. Behold yourself, Merthierry, and see what happens when the planets align and the Daedra choose a mortal to enact their will!"

One of the Aureals stepped forward and presented her polished glass shield. In the green reflection, Merthierry could see how demented his permanent armor looked. Even the hell-forged armor of the Dremora did not strike fear into the heart like the horned, twisted-looking implants adorning Merthierry.

"Do you like what you see? Because it comes with great power, and under me, You can learn to harness and unleash that power as you please... Know that I have great dreams for this land, and by serving me, you will be standing to see a great deal of change occur in Dawn's Beauty."

The doors slammed open. A tall enrobed High Elf trod in, his robe sweeping by the speed he walked with. He was accompanied by Aureals, Golden Saints, marching behind him in line with reflective Glass weaponry and huge tower shields, which lit up fell by another flash, coloring the backs of the slaves bright green. The High Elf went up the platform, looked at him for a second, then bowed submissively, and spoke, welcoming him as the Chosen one.

First he told him of the streak of failures of a ceremonial incantation, of whom he knew no reason they were performed. He told he was the success of it, the survivor. He spoke greatly of it and said its Magical powers flow through its wearer like blood. He wanted Merthierry to see himself, and an Aureal presented its shield to make it serve as a mirror.

"Do you like what you see? Because it comes with great power, and under me, You can learn to harness and unleash that power as you please... Know that I have great dreams for this land, and by serving me, you will be standing to see a great deal of change occur in Dawn's Beauty."

"Yes," Merthierry retorted absently yet clear, liking what he saw utmost. He then spoke with greed, turning to Azmodæum: *"But why, why would I serve you? Do you know this what has been given to me? Tell me how to use it!"*

Azmodæum smiled a wide, wicked smile when Merthierry's cold, metallic voice rang out in pleas.

"You cannot be told how to use this power... you can only be shown, child. Red mountain's curse made you strong against the fires of Oblivion, and now your unfulfilled evil has been forged into an armor for you. The only thing remaining is to take your hatred and forge yourself a blade... Is that what you wish? Tell me... who do you hate, Merthierry? What do you despise about this world?"

As the Altmer was speaking, the table around them was disintegrating, and the pair found themselves on the balcony where Azmodæum had addressed Vile and Rainor. Azmodæum did not miss a beat in his sentence.

"If you hate what you see, if you hate seeing Humans stain our Ayleid tower with their filth, then join me."

The Warlock gestured to an open cave system, a good twenty miles out.

"There are allies of ours holed up in there. They will simply never find the entrance unaided, and I must attend to some other matters. Can I trust you to find them and aid them in their

return? When you have all three of them together, have them all grasp your fiery armor, and activate the magic within this ring," he said while holding out a beautiful enchanted ring, "and you all will return here, and we can begin our rise to power. What do you say, proud Dunmer, who has become more? The twice-changed folk stands before me, unknowing his own potential. What will you do?"

"Elf, I do not despise humans. I loathe them," he said and snatched the ring.

With greed he continued: *"If this what you say grants me more power, I will do as you wish, Elf, but I have yet to see into your plans. Now, give me a weapon and I will haste away!"*

Azmodæum nodded, and with a golden burst of energy emanating from his hand, a Winged Twilight appeared to lead him to the Armory. Her beautifully shaped body sported ankle and wrist shackles, the first of which Merthierry had seen on any of his new Lord's daedric servants. The daedra walked some of the time, floating at other times, and led the armored Dunmer through many long halls and winding spiral staircases, the walls all decorated with stunningly beautiful tapestries and trophies of war. Enchantments buzzed in the air. At last, the Twilight showed the way through a hidden door into a long, narrow hall where hundreds of Dremora, Xivilai, and Mazken yammered and bragged, picking through armor and weapons. The walls were lined with weapons of different varieties, ordered and organized by imps flittering here and there, a few of them straining with heavy Dremora battle axes.

"Select what you will, and the beautiful winged beast before you will lead you to the tunnel leading to the dungeons. Our allies have showed up a bit earlier than I expected them, and I failed to make the proper arrangements for them to arrive in the right place. You may have to fight some angry prisoners at the side of our friends." Azmodæum spoke.

erthierry was led through the stunning interior of Balindrium to a richly filled armory, a long narrow hall, with many Dremora and imp slaves labouring and maintaining the countless rows of weapons and armor. Merthierry bowed deeply to the beautiful creature that guided him.

He felt great, by the vast presence of weaponry, by the feeling of overruling the submissive souls that did what they had to do, and by the ease of obtaining and unlocking New powers he had always striven for. Soon, it would allow him to cast terrible Spells.

He picked a huge War hammer which hung at a lonely spot. It was heavy yet versatile. The long handle had interwoven all kinds of rare metals, with colors that did not fit together. The actual hammer head was made out solely of Dwarven metal. He brushed its faces and felt many dents. It proved it had been reliable to its owner. He played with its grip and swung it around, and growled quietly with satisfaction, long and deep.

He turned to the Twilight and gestured. He was ready.

Chapter Twenty

Evil Intentions

Adonis saw a massive daedra, new in design to anything he had ever seen. It was thin, with a humanoid body, although the skin was black, and cracked. Its legs were powerful, and covered in a black fur, the same shade as that of the creatures top. They looked muscular, and seemed to have a cat like balance, yet a lions power. Then with a roar the creature attacked, it covered the entire distance of the room in seconds, and leaped towards draken, and now Adonis saw, there were rows of teeth stretching back to the throat, all roughly as long as a kitchen knife. It landed hard on the vampire, who was powerless to throw it off, the creature roared. And that's what gave Adonis a chance. If it had bitten immediately the vampire would have been dead. But Adonis used

the roar to his advantage, and leapt at the creature. He landed on top of it, and furiously hacked at the creature's neck.

The diabolical creature had landed on top of him, teeth sharp as needles, drool and saliva falling on Draken's face. Draken barked back by growling, bearing his own fangs. The creature bent down to take a chunk out of him. Despite his strength, Draken was unable to push the animal off of him. His hand pinned and katana out of reach. The animal roared, but Vile's actions spoke louder as the Dunmer jumped on the back of the creature, slashing at its neck. The creature reared up, attempting to fend off its attacker. Draken grabbed his sword and furiously yelled loudly.

"I did not leave Skingrad to be something else's prey!. I am the predator!" Draken said arrogantly, thrusting his katana forward at the humanoid Daedra. Sheer anger gripping tight, the vampire hoped his attack would count for something.

Adonis was whipped across the room, as the creature's arm hit him full in the face, it's skin hard as rock. Adonis slammed into a wall, he groaned and slowly rose to his feet, the creature was pounding the floor with it's fist, Adonis saw no mark from Draken's attack on the creature's chest. But there was a small gouge on the demon's underbelly, strange, Adonis could have sworn that Draken had barely hit a glancing blow on the creature's stomach. Then it clicked.

"Aim for it's stomach Draken, that is the weak point." Adonis roared.

Draken saw as Vile was slammed across the room and into the wall. The vampire cackled sinisterly. He would not lose at the claws of a Daedra. Draken heard Adonis cry out an advice, the creature's stomach was vulnerable to an attack. With a sweeping fure, Draken lunged towards the screeching demon, blade scratching the floor, creating little sparks. As Draken lunged for the creature, the Daedra smacked him in the face before his weapon could pierce it. Blood splattered all over the air. Draken was fiercely hit back by the impact and his weapon left his grip, Draken's nose began to bleed and it only made him ever more furious. The creature grabbed Draken's katana, going to kill Draken with his own weapon. The vampire took a fighting stance and began to utilize his acrobatic Hand To Hand combat. The creature swung at him, using both claws. Draken kicked the creature in its face then rolled to the right as it tried to deliver a fatal stab. CLANK!. The weapon hit the ground and missed Draken again. Draken looked at Adonis while keeping safe distance. Giving Adonis a "You're turn" look.

Adonis groaned and stood. He cast a spell and the air seemed to close in around him. The creature heard something and looked over to him. But saw nothing, he was too far to be seen by the beast. He continued to attack Draken but Adonis quietly and swiftly darted across the room, he readied his knives, and leapt. He sailed over the creature's head, and landed in front of it, skidding slightly. The creature's eyes were clearly not very powerful, or they would have seen through the spell. He ducked as the creature swiped at Draken again, and then he dropped to one knee, and without hesitation buried his knives into the demon's gut.

Draken looked for a way out, the beast was slain at last. Draken was impressed by Adonis, a very skilled fighter. Someone to be feared. As for the other one..the other one!. Draken growled, sneaky little bastard had left. By Sithis!. If he could only be strangled by his own idiocy. Unless he knew how to get from one point to another, he was a lost individual. Selfish perhaps greedy. Draken respected him to a small extent.

Suddenly, more raging beasts came, their roars and screeched pierced Draken's ears. He grabbed his katana, ready to fight again.

"You're friend is a brave one" Draken told Adonis in a sarcastic remark.

"Aye. When I find him, he'll be oh so scared."

Adonis pulled out a bow, and stuck an arrow to the string he waited till the creature was closer. It bounded towards him, kicking up century old dust from the cave floor as it ran. It was all animalistic this one, but a more fearsome animal than anyone has ever seen. It seemed to have the body of a deadroth sort of design, but with strange markings on the skin. Its legs were undescribly powerful, as with the last beast, but they were covered in what looked like the skin of an ogre. And then it leaped, Adonis let fly with the arrow. It sailed across to where the creature was charging at him. And hit it square between the eyes. The arrow merely bounced off.

Adonis cursed, arrows would be of no use here, he pulled out his daggers once more, and met the creature mid leap, and it hit him, and carried on running. Adonis was now being carried along by the sheer momentum of the mighty beast. His daggers flashed at the creatures legs, but did no damage. The skin was tough. Adonis knew the odds were against him in this fight. A stronger weapon might damage the creature, but he had to find a weak point. Then an idea appeared in his head. What if the markings were magical, perhaps that meant the demon was vulnerable to magic. He called to the vampire.

"I think it may be vulnerable to magic" Adonis bellowed attempting to be heard above the creatures mighty roars. He yelled again, this time sure the sound would carry.

Draken allowed Vile to continue to fight the creature, staying clear of it. Vile tried arrows, later even tried his daggers but they did no damage. The animal was impervious to weapons. Vile, once more shouted out advice, Draken heard the call above the animal's fearsome roar and accepted the offer. He was vulnerable to magick. His tough skin bared magical markings, which could explain its weakness.

Draken sheathed his katana and prepared to use his signature fire spells against the creature. His magicka would be drained the first few strikes, he saved the powerful blasts for later. Only large fire balls would work. Draken charged at the creature, the animal appeared as if one of Molag Baal's creation, but had the skin of the potato thieves. Draken blasted a trio of fire balls at the creature. The harm did some damage but not much. Expected. The creature shrugged off the flames, roaring loudly and jumping at Draken. The vampire rolled to the side but was caught by the creature's claw. The animal lifted his hand and was going to unleash its power against Draken. Using one hand, Draken blasted another fire ball at its hand. The creature screeched and released Draken again. The vampire rolled off, using his back to push him to his feet. Before he looked, the creature was after him again. Draken ran fast, the animal straight on his tail. The vampire ran up the cave wall, doing a back-flip, then landing behind the creature. Using the Scorching blow, Draken touched its back, sending a heated attack. The creature bellowed in pain and smacked Draken aside the head. The vampire fell over to the ground, stunned. The animal reared up, opening his huge jaws. It charged, feet stomping the floor, getting closer and closer. Draken extended his hands forward and

used a powerful Destruction spell he was saving for later. The conflagration trailed towards the Daedric creature. The fire was large enough to hide Draken from the creature's view. The animal froze, roaring as the fire began to engulf it. But it remained strong and kept moving forward.

Draken decided to waste his magicka and use a powerful but daunting destructive spell. The immolating blast. Draken growled, breathing deeply, using all his magicka to defeat this creature. With a ferocious shout that rivaled the beast, Draken cast the spell. Fire engulf the area, his face was lit by the fire, sparks fell to his face as he clapped his hands together and shot the spell forward. The creature got closer to Draken, opening its teeth filled jaws, Draken pushed his hands down the creature's throat, shooting fire down the creature's throat and scorching it from within. Fire engulfing its organs and body parts, the creature shook as it began to broil and wither, the black smoke rising from its mouth as everything inside baked. Draken gave a mighty shout of valor as his fire spell torched the creature. The destructive power, at his finger tips..it felt good, he lost himself to it!. The creature finally fell back to the ground. Dead and ashed. Draken growled, sighing due to the extent of power used.

"Impressive" Adonis remarked.

Then roared in surprise as he was blasted back by some sort of telekenesis spell, another creature had hurled a rock at him, hard. He ducked, and charged, the creature stood their building up power for another attack, Adonis drew near but then was thrown away by another blast. He drew his bow as quick as a flash and fired at the creatures head. It hit it in the eye, he fired again, and then charged.

Draken complained. *"These things never end. Why is you're master sending these pests!. If it's a test, than I shall pass it with ease"* He said, still angry at the fact that they never ended, waves upon waves of enemy were expected.

"You lead the way, if we push forward, we can slaughter them on the way there" He said, impatiently, watching Adonis battle the other creature.

No sooner had Draken spoken the words than A loud bang rang out throughout the cavern. A wall collapsed and shattered the wall to rough rocks. Through the aroused dust a silhouette of a fearsome warrior was seen carrying a War hammer. The figure stepped in through the hole, stiff by the armor it wore, metal boot footsteps clanking. As it proceeded through the cloud and in the cave, he could be seen flaming. The armor was on fiercely lit fire. Flames burst off it to the sides, with a minority rising upward as expected. It were no usual flames, these were more short-lived, glowed reddish, and bit angry about with speed. Varnand detached himself from the shadows. He had abstained from this battle, as he thought it might have been a test. One that the survivor of would have been Azmodaeum's right hand man.

Adonis growled as Varnand returned to the scene, the traitorous wretch had returned, as if cowardice were nothing to be ashamed of. Adonis had a very low opinion of Varnand, and he had not been massivley fond of the Morag Tong cur in the first place. But he had buisness to attend to before he could rip the cowardly dog limb from limb.

Adonis turned his attention back to the matter at hand, and the utterly decimated tunnel infront of him. Something stepped forward, humanoid in shape, and the armour was incredibly well crafted, flames danced upon it, as if it were their dominion. The man, or

creature, stepped forward, wielding a golden warhammer, it was not a fancy thing, nothing special when looking at it, it was simply a blunt tool of massacre and destruction. Adonis knew that this was a being of immense power. He guessed that this was Merthierry, the one that the prisoner had screamed of, when Azmodeum robbed him of his free will.

"*You are Merthierry?*" Adonis asked bluntly. If whatever it, he or she was, did not reply, he would assume that it was merely another rogue creation, and had to be dealt with swiftly.

"*I came here, for you have rings.*" Merthierry responded firmly.

"*If you are not an affiliate of Azmodeum, then you will not get the rings. They are sorely wanted by our master, and we shall use any force necessary to get them to him.*" Varnand said calmly, despite the ugly, almost burnt look of the newcomer. "*So we'll give you another chance. Are you Merthierry, Servant of Azmodeum?*" Varnand demanded.

While Vile spoke to the rocky fellow, Draken turned and shot a sinister glance at Varnand.

"*You whining coward! A pathetic excuse for a man, bafoon!*" Draken began to angrily argue.

Adonis's fingers twitched. He itched to rip out Varnand's throat with them, he could barely stand being this close to the pathetic excuse for a man. It disgusted him, like a bad taste, the stale taste of dishonour. But he held himself, only barely.

"*I will surrender the rings to no other than Azmodeum himself. If you are Merthierry take me to your master. If not speak quickly.*" Replied Adonis.

"*Next time stick close...so I can witness you're fall*" He chuckled lightly, impossible to know if he was joking or being serious. The rock being demanded the rings, but was declined by Vile. Draken stood still and watched the speech exchanged by the two fearsome characters.

Merthierry held up the Final ring, the completing page of the chapter. "*See this, Human! Azmodæum's Gift it is. But the set is useless altogether, Gah! Gather round me, brave men of Evil, and see it can only empower me, the Unrighteous, the Chosen, the Wearer!*"

The man in the powerful armour spoke. Adonis grunted ironically and looked over at Varnand when he, she or it spoke of "brave men of evil".

Adonis hesitated, the man still wanted him to hand over the rings, speaking of power when all three were re-united. He decided to trust this thing, although he had no real reason to do so.

"*You may have the ring. But do not think for one moment, that that armour will protect you from my wrath if you lead me astray.*" Adonis said.

He handed the rings, only hesitating momentarily.

When the third ring passed into the gauntlet of Merthierry's twisted armor, they began to shine brightly. Any beasts that were nearby were driven back violently by the concussive force of the spell, but the quartet of malignant bipeds remained still. The world went black, and then white, and as the white slowly faded, the four fought with their eyes to make out the shapes of giant daedra statues encircling them. They had returned to

Balindrium, and were in the main summoning chamber which Adonis and Varnard æhad both seen before. They only remained there for a moment, all four of them silent because of the distorted feeling that teleportation gives. The teleporter pad beneath them sent them again through the darkness, a bit more gently this time, and they found themselves sitting at the raised table in the center of the great hall. The slaves bustled about no more, they were replaced with daedra. Dremora walked in rank and file lines with Golden Saint cavalry bustling about atop giant clannfear. It looked like a preparation for an invasion. The Lord and Master of the castle was seated at the end of the table, smiling wickedly.

Chapter Twenty One

Mountan Top

Bethras's hand flew out, and his hand glowed a brilliant blue. The air above Silassen shimmered, as if an invisible mirror was hovering above him. Bethras held his hand clenched, until the snow contact the mirror, and he opened his palm, splaying it flat against the air, as if pushing outwards. The onslaught of snow shot outwards, away from Silassen. Bethras's face contorted with the effort of holding off so much weight with a simple telekenisis spell. Cracks were starting to appear in Bethras's defence, and moments later, the snowfall was over. Bethras's face fell, and Silassen breathed a huge sigh of relief. He edged back along toward Bethras. They were cut off from Augustus. The snow fall had covered almost the entire ledge. It was a miracle Silassen had survived, and he clasped Bethras's shoulder for a moment as a sign of gratitude.

"*Augustus?!* " Yelled Bethras. Faintly through the wind he heard a reply.
"*Can you see that peak?!* " Augustus roared back, struggling to be heard above the howling wind. Silassen and Bethras looked up, and saw a peak, not to far away.

"*Yeah! Meet there?*" Silassen retorted. He listened carefully, and heard an affirmation from Augustus. He nodded to Bethras, and they made to head towards the mountain top

Chapter Twenty Two

Evil Assembles

The doors opened loudly and Dremora began to march into the hall in rank and file. Xivilai, Golden Saints, and Dark Seducers came in rank as well, all marching silently into the hall, led by larger and more powerful looking versions of themselves. Each contingent of daedra was led by a giant, fortified daedra whose eyes burned green, and these abominations were the only ones who dared to make a noise in the hall at this moment. The Clannfear giants who had carried the elves into the fortress made their way over to some specially-armored Golden Saints, who hopped atop them like they were riding horses.

Azmodæum laughed a terrible laugh, and it echoed long and loud throughout the hall. A few laughs returned from the lieutenants of the daedric army. Their laughter was eerily similar to his, and the whole cacophony was quite disconcerting for the elves, not only

Badras and Noele but also the other elves, who had begun to wake from their unconsciousness as well, springing away from the approaching armies moments before they were trampled. Some of them looked absolutely terrified, while others seemed delighted that their seemingly prophetic visions had brought them to this promised place. Azmodæum had been sending himself into their dreams for weeks, Badras included, and tempting them, stoking the flames of their hatred to send them into a frenzied roar and then finally gathering them all here and now for some sort of meeting.

"My name is Azmodæum, child, and I will require much of you before our goals are met. But know that we seek the same thing: The destruction of Man's false Empire. Not the slow, rusting collapse that is brought about by man's natural infinitesimally short life spans and brash lack of reason, but the violent collapse brought about by fire, bone, and steel. And that is all that you need to know for now. You, all of you," he said as he gestured to the new arrivals, "Are about to meet your mortal superiors, and you're going to help them take care of something important for our cause. Have a seat, and have your fill, for the hour draws near."

And as he said this, he turned his head to his meal, a strange bowl with glowing Withering Moon mushrooms atop some sort of strange meat, covered in Flax seeds. He ate it politely, but did not look back up at the gathered elves, one of whom was an Altmer on the verge of panic. He was wearing slightly tattered white robes and had short, upswept hair. He looked positively sick, and sat staring at his plate.

With a loud, otherworldly noise, four empty seats at the tall table were instantly filled, each with a confused and angry-looking warrior. The most visually striking was a warrior whose body was swathed in a smoldering cloak; his face and hands obscured by otherworldly metal plate which looked quite permanent. Crude daedric bolts were riveted hard into the metal, painfully fitting it to the Dunmer's bone. The cloak withheld the fires that burned from the armor's enchantment.

Next to him was a Dunmer with wildly contrasting eye colors. He was swathed in tight-fitting black armor, the Shroud of the Dark Brotherhood Assassin. Unlike Merthierry's, his face was exposed, and he looked furious, like he was in the middle of an argument when he was teleported here. Beside him was a man who was obviously a vampire. No effort was made to hide the curse marked upon this individual, and it looked as if he had been born a vampire. His hair was long, but only slightly shorter than that of the Breton seated beside him, who was extremely tan and also looked as if he had been arguing when he was called to this room. The Breton was seated next to the nervous Altmer.

The Lord of the Castle raised his head once more, with a wicked smile on his face. *"Ah... you have returned, I see... do you have what I requested of you, my lieutenants? The Twin Rings of the Deadlands?"*

Merthierry was teleported to the Hall's platform at a seat. He looked quickly about him, a furious short-lasting form of Shock mixed with fire escaping from under his fire quenching hood by the abrupt swaying, biting around before decaying almost instantly after. Decaying, as it seemed, but more correctly it had returned, to its homing shell, its master, the terrible Divine wonder.

Merthierry closed his eyes and savoured the moment, of the brutal armies daring not making a sound, the thunderstorms raging, the new magic by the Rings, the hour of the end of the old Nirn. Azmodæum laughed a terrible laugh. The power the Rings had given him was -- as a power on its own -- beyond mortal belief and apprehending. He was rarely powerful, now monstrous godlike, a forged malignant tool of a terrible wizard. And now that he had sickening levels of power, he badly wanted to put it to use.

Adonis was pulled through a world of black and white, with no colour shining through at all. There was no sensation at all, and you could feel nothing. Then his feet slammed hard into the cold stone floor of the hall of Balindrium.

He took a few moments to allow for the aftershock of the teleportation to go away, temporarily disorientated. But then he looked over at Varnand and scowled, his fingers drummed on the hilt of his blade, it was taking every last bit of self restraint to stop him from gutting the cowardly wretch where he stood.

Then Adonis was suddenly in a black chair, at a majestic table, with lavish food strewn before him, he took some, and forced into his mouth, devouring the food, anger still pulsing through him. Then his lord and master spoke. He was asking for the rings, the rings that he had been sent to retrieve from skingrad.

"I gave the rings to this one here." Adonis replied, inclining his head towards Merthierry.

Draken was in the master's quarters, or at least an important area of the castle. He glanced around, glaring angrily at the Xivilais and Dremoras..any Daedra related to Mehrune's Dagon deserved no respect from Draken. However, he was intrigued by the physical beauty and sensuality of the Dark colored female Daedra and the golden ones. While the golden ones did have a shine to them, the darker ones interested him more. Draken smiled widely, staring at their...different parts. Suddenly, the master who proclaimed himself Azmodæum cackled loudly. A laugh that was quickly followed by more laughter of the Daedra.

"Funny..I did not recall anyone ever making a humorous joke" Draken rolled his eyes and mumbled silently, hoping no one heard him. Then, in flash, blink of an eyes, he was transported to a black seat, near the table. An array of delicious looking food was in front of him, each more mouth watering than the other. Azmodæum spoke of the fall of Man's false empire. Vile began munching on the food right away before addressing to the rings and whom they were given to. Draken remained silent, not taking a bite because he was not given the order to. Manners, even in a atmosphere like this, was always needed. He was suddenly interested in this Azmodæum and his ideals. He had hoped a few rewards would come in handy for destroying things. Which was why the Daedra were so much more enjoyable than those false Nines. If he kept quiet, he could do away with these seductive and delicious Daedra without telling his bride. Oh, yes, that would be great. Daedric blood..the warmth of flesh mixed with blood. Sounds good to him. Draken day dreamed on the thought, but quickly escaped from it and returned a gaze at Azmodæum.

Merthierry presented the rings and handed them out to Azmodæum.

Varnand now directed his attention to Azmodeum. *"Master, what are our plans? An attack on the White-Gold Tower? Or will we move east to Rihad? South to Chorrol possibly?"* Varnand asked, ignoring glares from Adonis and Draken.

Azmodæum smiled wide at his guests, all enjoying meals that were specially designed for each to enjoy. He reached out and took the rings from Merthierry, and gripped them both, one in each hand. His eyes looked positively florescent green, and he smiled more ominously than he had ever before. He closed his eyes, and the lids of his eyes continued to shine.

With his eyes still closed, he spoke: *"All very good ideas, really. Humans pollute all of these places, these former strongholds of our kin. Man is a cancer which multiplies quickly, devouring all the resources it can find before dying out and leaving a husk. Our*

race is one with Tam'Riel, and has been forever, since our ancestors created this world and became one with the Earthbones, giving birth to our forefathers to bring us here. But our race can also use the powers that our other, better ancestors found on the other side of Oblivion. When they tore the veil and found their own spaces to design, each aspect of Creation got its own version of Paradise, or its very own Hell."

The table began to lower, with loud chains clinking along pulleys to slowly elevate them downwards, the floor itself moved out of their way as they descended the tower at their great feast table. The floor closed again above them, and the Daedra in the room could be heard marching into file to fill in the new space above the group's head.

After descending through many chambers, each filled with indescribable things of magick that no mortal at the table could begin to understand enough to explain again. Electricity of some sort darted from one pillar of magical stone to another, and back again, and to another, with all sorts of unusual things levitating here and there. The floor moved again, bringing the high table to the room with all the Daedra statues.

"Most Daedra Princes only visit their statues when the correct conditions are met. I have convened with each of these Princes countless times, and all know me by name. I have acquired great power from many of these Daedra Lords. And each of these statues work any day, any time, in any weather. You'll notice a few of them are turned away from the center of the room. They have done this on their own accord. Hircine, the God of the Hunt, has not responded to my calls in many moons, the last time I had spoken with the Hunter he had just been bested by his prey, a mortal, and was actually enjoying a laugh about the fact! I admonished him for his love for mortals, and told him of my plans, and he has turned his statue away from me and has been silent.

Azura, on the other hand, watches still and talks some. She has not been as... helpful... as our good friends Mehrunes Dagon, Molag Bal, Sheogorath, Sanguine, and Boethiah. Even traitors from Meridia's realm have come to join me, even as the Undead walk in my wake doing my bidding. They have joined with me to avenge their favored children, the lost Ayleids, our relatives. who were slaughtered by the human cancer. The wise Hermaeus Mora has been watching and listening to my plans intently, but has been, for the most part, eerily silent.

It is about time I let you in on what exactly it is we're doing. Mehrunes Dagon has begun invading Cyrodiil. Kvatch, far to the south in the Imperial Province, is already destroyed. It will be a long battle, for no doubt the humans and their mages will try to postpone the invasion, but it is doubtless that the Daedra will win. The Emperor is dead, and the pact that held these Daedra in Oblivion is now out of effect. Balindrium will be absolutely impenetrable until the full-scale invasion begins."

The teleporter in the center of the room slid slowly and loudly out of the way, and the group went down further still into Balindrium's mysterious recesses. Because of the way the teleporters and such worked, and the height of the front door in the mountaintops, it was confusing to try and piece together where exactly in the fortress the group was at any given time. The table finally came to rest in a room, where five giant crystals shone black and red.

"These are the Varla Stones that our Ayleid ancestors used, believing these Stones to be

pieces of the Stars of the et'Ada. They believed that the stars were the source of all magic; and were not far from correct. The stars are the faraway realms of the Daedra in Oblivion, and all of my Dark power comes from these spheres of varying light. The Deadlands, in particular, is easy to get into and out of, and I have infused these Star-Stones with the power that truly dwells within the Stars of Oblivion. These Corrupted Varla Stones are boosting my power to unbelievable levels, and are the source of our impending victory.

"When the Invasion begins, the castle will be almost emptied, as all of the dremora will be out laying waste to the province. We will use this opportunity, when mankind is weakened by this harsh blow, to push out in all directions. Dagon's army alone will not conquer Tamriel, only lay waste to it, and for us to make ourselves useful to the Prince of Destruction will do much to keep us alive for the end of the Empire. When Dagon is satisfied with his destruction of the continent, we will then strike out from our home here in Balindrium and establish dominance in all corners of Dawn's Beauty. We will control the Dunmer of Vvardenfell, the Altmer of Summurset, the Bosmer of Valenwood, and we will bring Elvish blood back to the Bretons of High Rock. The remaining provinces, those of the humans and the beasts, will be emptied of resistance and full of slaves, ready for us to establish our own race of Daedric Mer. All of us will be infused with the powers of the many Daedric spheres, and will wash ourselves in the blood of Man. Our kind will become supreme here once again, with us overseeing the fate of the world. But first, we must gather more of these crystals, so that I can expand my power."

He gripped the rings still in his hands, feeling their power surge through him. The Corrupted Varla stones, in their ebony pedestals, shimmered and shook with energy as Azmodæum squeezed the ancient jewelry.

Gears of machinery could be heard grinding as the platform sank to below floor level, descending into the tower. The floor above them closed, and troops could be heard marching over it, sand pouring down by the many feet into the filled wine goblets. They passed through a room that seemed to serve as an engine, with odd machinery that levitated, immense clockwork systems, and darting electricity in between pillars. The sounds of that room faded as they further descended down, finally halting at a room with Daedra statues. Azmodæum told what they were for.

The platform went on again and stopped in a room with Crystals. In this room, Azmodæum told them of his plans. When he had finished his long and promising plans to claim the lands, he said he needed more of these crystals, for more power. Merthierry spoke after the wizard hinted the quest.

"You are powerful as is, Elf! Gah! It is nonsense to be wanting more! Your plans are not covert, and the enemy is preparing by the hundreds! We may not delay this overtake, Elf!"

With a wide smile still drawn on his inhuman face, the Lord of Balindrium spoke again. He did not seem bothered by the outburst of his new subject, but instead invigorated by his furor. *"You three,"* he said, gesturing to all but Merthierry, *" have seen what the power of but one of these crystals has added to my strength and to Balindrium's strength. The two Bal-Daedroth that ensured your safe retreat fom Chorrol. But the power of one was not enough, and the very power of the Sun wiped the enchantment from the second beast. The fight of these Corrupted Stones is against the pillar of creation. These Corrupted Varla are pure magical energy devoted to blocking out the sun and bringing the raw power of Oblivion into Nirn. When combined with my vast magical power..."*

A lowly Hunger was led into the room in chains, fighting fruitlessly against the Dremora Caitiff who held his leash. The hideously thin creature screamed repeatedly in a Daedric tongue and hissed at Azmodæum, and he swept up his hands in a flourishing gesture to gather the attention of his subjects. Magic built up around his long, clawed hands, and the stones could be felt pulsing wildly in their pedestals. When the Altmer turned the spell onto the Hunger, its skin began to burst, stretching and rippling as it grew to nearly twice its size; its skin darkening and cracking, its screams subsiding. The new beast stood taller than a man, with two extra clawed arms, and looked quite terrifying.

Azmodæum closed his eyes for a moment, and the beast's eyes popped open instantly, as it screamed once again. Its eyes burst forth with green flame, and it screamed again, before it finally seemed to be under control. It turned and looked at Draken, then to Varnard, then to Adonis and Merthierry, and spoke in a terrible, chilling voice, but with an all-too-familiar inflection and cadence:

"Better than anything our friend Boethiah had in mind, wouldn't you say? And unlike the Daedroth that was dispelled in Chorrol, this beast will simply revert to a normal Hunger if its link with me and the Stones is severed. For now..."

The Altmer opened his eyes once more, and the Hunger fell silent, dragged out of the room by the Dremora.

"But when we have a dozen of these stones, our ability to create the Bal-Daedra will be absolute. With a dozen darkened stars, I can put a permanent army of Bal-Daedra anywhere in the province. I can darken the sky over White Gold Tower and send down legions of blackened beasts, each strong enough to kill ten of the Empire's best men. And that is why we are making the stones of the Ayleids our number one priority."

Turning to face Merthierry specifically, he spoke once more, *"It is true that our mission is not transparent. But it is far from opaque, my fiery child. The fools in Chorrol know only that a great evil is upon them... but you seem to misunderstand the scope of what Dagon is planning for this land. The Portal you walked through to find me is but the first of many. Hundreds of those will open up all over the continent, and the chaos will be great. Our ransacking of Ayleid ruins will go all but unnoticed in the coming storm. Chorrol's righteous will likely forget about our Daedric attack when the most populous race in Tamriel is the Dremora, wouldn't you say?"*

Draken nodded as the plans were spoken of. Mehrunes Dagon's ilk has invaded Cyrodiil, the gates. While Azmodæum planned something else, he even suspected Dagon would loose the war, thankfully. It was a remarkable coincidence that he is attempting to do what the Usurper wanted to do, take over Nirn. The statues of the Daedric princes were aligned in different positions. Draken pondered for a moment, ignoring Methiery for a brief moment. The thought of power..glory..the pleasure, all of it. Draken always hated mortals, humans, anyone who was not blessed by the Daedra. Draken's only friends, if he can call them that, were his own family, few of his kind and Kraven and Veronika, two Werewolves, Raven..never!. He always tolerated her and fate seemed to bind them together, however this was his chance to be better, not her. Kraven, or his companion, the insane crazy blonde one. They may enjoy being here, he may enjoy their company. They love destruction, they favor Daedric ideals and they are strong enough to do the bidding of a "Madman". Draken has been alone for most of his life, after the Crimson Scars, he would want to rekindle it all once more. Draken decided to ask Azmodæum a question..actually, a few.

"I am impressed with all of this, truly magnificent and wonderfully compelling. With you at the control, you are preeminent. However, as we are going to serve you..for now..will we be able to speak to the Daedric Princes ourselves? While I may not have spoken to all of them, I know Hircine and Kin father, Molag Bal. I have even been in a few realms" Draken said. *"Know that I do not boast, I am simply stating that I am aware of whom, what! I deal with"* He snarled, not offering aggression towards anyone, but to some Daedric Princes..such as Azura!.

"Power, without restraint is nothing, you will have to control a few others by persuasion if necessary. I know a few allies, a few friends, gifted with the blessing of Hircine, that may be of use in the future." Draken stopped, eyeing everyone, then looking at the glowing eyes of Azmodæum.

A small cog in Adonis's mind clicked, when Draken mentioned power without restraint. Would Azmodæum have need of his lieutenants when he had achieved what he wanted? He was not sure, but Adonis Vile was a greedy man, subject to dark pleasures. What did he care? Life was not indefinite, Azmodæum promised slaughter, riches and power. He nodded, to show his support for the high elf's plan. But now, now he was weary. He needed sleep. He had travelled, and fought much in the past few days, with little rest to rejuvenate him for the trials that had faced him the day after. He spoke this thought aloud.

"I am weary. I need a place to rest. I will not leave the confines of the castle until I have had at least one full nights sleep."

Draken turned his head towards Adonis, the dunmer elf was exhausted from battle and travel fatigued. It was only natural for mortals, he needed a night's rest as he said. Draken placed both arms behind his back, standing in a upper-class posture. The smell of his clothes beginning to stench..snow, mud, dirt, it was very distasteful. As a noble and a warrior, he had to learn self-discipline, it not only meant mastery and practice of skill and intelligence, but also life's habits such as hygiene. Draken wanted to clean or remove his Black & Burgundy outfit, even his gold trimmed shoes were a mess.

"I do not sleep during the night..old habits, I'm afraid. Daylight may not harm me but I

am not one to enjoy its blasted rays setting upon my skin..however, if the needs are drastically important, I am more than happy to oblige & will gladly seek out the task that has been set upon me. When something must be done at night, I am here and I am ready. As a child of night's call, my habits are strictly nocturnal." Draken said happily. "You may send me tonight if you wish" He said, partially hoping he would be able to leave the castle, to at least purchase a fair share of new clothing and jewelry. Have it stashed somewhere near the Castle until the final preparations can be made.

Azmodæum smiled. *"And why should you not have sleep? You have served your Lord well, and of course will be rewarded well. All of you should heed this well, and know that all the trials we undergo to achieve our goals... they will all bring generous rewards."*

Reaching out a closed, bony hand, the Altmer dropped a key into Adonis' hand. *"I have had time to see into your mind, child, and I like what I have seen. My servants have prepared a chamber for you, and I feel that you will like what you see within its walls; It is not far from what I have seen within the walls of your consciousness. You may rest, but in the morning you, Varnard, and.... those three,"* he said while waving dismissively to Badras, Noele, and the nervous Altmer, *"leave for Bravil. I expect you all back here as soon as you wake, and I will have more details for you then."*

He then spoke to Draken, Merthierry, and the as-of-yet nameless Altmer and Dunmer. *"Just east of Cheydinhal, on the Morrowind side of the border, is an ancient Ayleid ruin with a sealed door. Legend has it that Veloth himself tried to enter the inner sanctum of the ruin and was turned away defeated. The outer chamber lay open to the elements, but deep within lay the pulsing power of the Varlas, waiting for us to come and snatch it away. I have felt within the place, and I believe there are two within its sunken walls. Make leave for Cheydinhal, stopping in Bruma along the way... For our mortal friends' sake... and once you have reached Cheydinhal, find a Bosmer named Kellihan. He will give you a map through the mountains to the ruin. This scroll,"* he said, handing the scroll to Merthierry, *"will open the door to the inner sanctum. Take care, do not unravel it before you are within the ruin and stand before the door."*

With that, the chained Winged Twilight from before appeared to lead the first group to their rooms, while the Lord of Balindrium stood, ready to excuse himself from the table, expecting the second group to stand and leave in turn.

The Winged Twilight led Badras, Noele, and the nervous Altmer to a single room with three comfortable beds, before turning and leading Adonis down the hall to his locked door.

Chapter Twenty Three

Family Feud

Silassen shivered. He and Bethras had been making their way to the summit, but the wind and snow had proven to much for them. They had come to what looked like a climbable ridge, but the wind could of torn them from the rock had they attempted to scale it's rocky surface, and their hands were numb and useless from the cold. They had sought shelter in a nearby cave. The floor was uncomfortable, hard, cold, unforgiving. But they made do. It wasn't spacious. But it was adequate, and without it, their chances of survival were minimal. But day was dawning. The worst of the blizzard was over, and they faced a far easier climb. The cold was still fierce but the pair were determined. Augustus would hopefully of made it to the mountain top. As they had drawn closer the previous night, they believed it to be a shrine of some kind.

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Augustus had reached the top of the mountains peaks. However, his night had not been quite so uneventful. When he had reached the shrine, he was met by someone who looked all too familiar. Someone with features he knew well, that he recognised to be much like his own. He had met someone he didn't even know existed. He had seen his brother.

Varnand had not slept like his companion Adonis. He had slipped free from Balindrium, Azmodæum knew this, but allowed him to leave. He had sensed the young ex member of the morag tong had good reason to leave the safety of the fortress. Varnand was searching for a shrine to Meridia. He disliked the idea of the statues in Azmodæum's fortress. He believed, superstitious as he was, that it was wrong to have a god at your beck and call. Gods were powerful, and power should be humbling. He wished to visit a shrine he had once been to. One where Meridia could choose to answer if she so wished, and guide him upon his path.

He had quickly found his way to the summit. He had been there before, and his path there was far less treacherous than that of his brothers. However, he picked up an unlikely follower along the way. A daedra of finest gold. Majestic, and humanoid. Strong. Powerful. But not this Auroran. No. He was lying in the snow, crumpled, his armour damaged, weak, unable to move. Varnand had been tempted to finish the pitiful piece of scrap metal. But, unbeknownst to him, Meridia had stayed his hand. Moreover, she slyly weaved her thoughts into his, intertwining them. He helped the creature. Varnand knew little daedric, but he got the gist of his new companions statement after his merciful act. He was grateful. He would serve him for a time. He owed him a debt, and Varnand would have to choose when to relinquish this debt. Varnand bid the daedra return to Balindrium, he would wait for him there. He didn't need some gold plated sycophant.

But that was only the beginning of Varnands adventures that night. As previously stated, he became acquainted with a man he had long since lost, and he didn't even know it. Augustus Rainor, and his twin brother Varnand Rainor met at last. On a snowy mountain top, near dawn. And there, Augustus feet away from his allies, Varnand close still to his, they did battle.

Varnand had started it.

"You! What are you doing here?!" He had barked, as his brother had disturbed his worship. He did not turn around. But he knew that someone was there behind him. He turned. Opened his eyes, and froze. There, in front of him, stood a doppelganger. He was suddenly filled with rage. How dare the gods mock and taunt him with this spitting image of himself. He wasted no time in pulling his silver dagger hellfire and bringing it around. Augustus's eyes widened at Varnands hostility. Augustus readied his claymore, but made no aggressive advance. Varnand noticed the markings on the other mans blade. They looked much akin to those on his own dagger. This enraged him further, and he growled aloud.

"What's your name? Or did those that sent you to mock me give you none?"

"Mock you? My name is Augustus Rainor. I-" Augustus began, but before he could finish, Varnand was upon him. As far as he was concerned, if this was a trick from the gods, then they could stuff it. If it was not, then this man knew his name, and was mocking him also. Besides which, if he knew his name he was probably either Tong, or law enforcement.

Varnand swung his knife in a silver arc, the silver glittering in the early morning light, catching the rays of the sun as it dived towards Augustus's exposed throat. Augustus brought up his claymore, and kicked out for good measure. His foot connected, and Varnand was forced backwards, his knife being forced smoothly back out of harms way. Augustus wasted no time in filling his fist with searing flames. He let out a long jet of fire

with his non sword hand. It shot towards Varnand, but his brother was not so easily defeated. He darted to the left, pushed his leg off a rock, and somersaulted behind his brother. He shoved his dagger roughly forward, but Augustus was no longer there. He had avoided the impalement, but it seemed lady luck had other plans for Augustus this day. His foot snagged on a boulder, and he tripped backwards. Right over the mountain ledge.

Augustus winced. He wasn't capable of much more. Everytime he moved he encountered a wall of pain. He couldn't break it. He was lucky. He hadn't fallen far, and the blizzard had left a thick blanket of snow across the mountain range. He had taken a beating though. But he was alive. And that was what mattered. Though he doubted for much longer. He doubted his friends would find him. He was visible in the snow, but not really from a distance. They would have to practically walk on top of him to find him. He knew he had to do something. He paused, and then attempted to wiggle his wrist. He gasped, and then gritted his teeth. He slowly twisted and turned it, rotating it into position. When he was ready, he summoned up his last reserves of strength, and fired a fireball high into the air. Then he let his wrist fall once more. He hoped someone, Silassen, Bethras, anyone, spotted it. He didn't have much time. It was a fight to keep his eyes open. Maybe he should just close them.

Bethras and Silassen had been climbing when they spotted the fireball. They had glanced at each other worriedly. A signal for help. And what were the chances of someone else being out here in the freezing cold? Chances are it was Augustus. The two men nodded, and doubled their efforts on the climb, moving at a ferocious speed.

It was not long before Bethras and Silassen reached the white, snowy hell where Augustus lay. The force of nature blanketed the landscape, slipping it beneath the cover of the weather. Silassen paused a moment later he spotted a scorch mark on an overhang on the cliff. His eyes slithered downwards and passed over a small barely noticable lump in the snow. Silassen hobbled over to it, cupped his hands and scooped up a handful of snow. He looked over at Bethras, indicating help would be most welcome.

A good while later, when Silassen had lost track of time his red, numb hands struck a equally cold, yet somewhat harder surface. But not so hard that it would be rock. It was definitely a man. Silassen dug a little deeper, to get his grip underneath the man. His hands slowly burrowed through the snow, until they found a handhold on what felt like the mans shoulder. He tugged with what little strength he had left, and from head to waist the man was brought out of the snow. He lay face down in the snow at an awkward angle. For a moment Silassen feared he was dead, he hadn't moved since he had been dredged up. But then he rose and fell over so slightly.

At least he was alive. Silassen heaved and managed to pull the rest of his body clear of the snow. Panting heavily from the exertion Silassen gathered a little breath, studying the man as he did so. He was cut badly, and the mountain had clearly done a great deal of damage. Silassen breathed deeply and fitted his shoulder to the other mans, and pushed hard, the man failed to roll over, Silassen gathered all his might and then forcefully barged his shoulder into the other mans side, this time sucessfully causing him to roll over. And what little breath he had caught in his throat. It was a little difficult to tell through the many injuries, but he's recognise that face anywhere. It was Augustus.

Silassen knelt there for a while. The snow slowly building up around his knees. Augustus was out cold, but still breathing. Silassen turned to Bethras.

"He's still breathing. We need to help him regain consciousness. Please..I can't stand to lose another friend." Silassen croaked, his voice close to cracking.

Chapter Twenty Four

Beast Within

An hour had passed since Josef had left with the barmaid. He lay naked, sleeping restlessly. He was talking in his sleep, but it was all unintelligible to the barmaid, whose name was Chelsi and was a wood elf born and raised in Cyrodiil. She was awake, and frightened by the otherworldly sounds the sleeping Nord was making. She instinctively decided to clean up the room, a task that would have been hers even if it had not been her doings that caused such a mess. She tidied all of her belongings up and got dressed, and then looked back dreamily at the long Nord body sprawled across the bed.

He is probably sick... I can at least help him gather his things..., she thought. Picking up his heavy duffel-style satchel, she began to fold Josef's scattered clothing. She strung the spear through the bag's appropriate "sheath" and then reached her hand into the bag to deposit the folded clothing. Her hand hit something cold and metal, with hard ridges. She peeked into the bag and saw a beautiful set of Nordic Ringmail Armor, with

the Cuirass resting on the top, emblazoned with the a blue rune shaped in the image of a wolf's head.

She was startled at first by the armor, but now it intrigued her. This man did not seem wealthy at first, but it was plainly visible that the armor was, though old, in good condition. It was not a common metal in Cyrodiil, and her mind began racing with the greedy impulses of a sneaky Bosmer. She finished packing away the clothes in the bag, and turned away from Josef, strapping the pack around one of her shoulders. It was heavy. She turned to try to pivot the weight of the bag, so as to get her other arm through the strap. As she turned, she was startled by a noise, coming from the bed. She slowly turned, straining against the weight of the sack, to see Josef thrashing about wildly, howling and barking, as his naked body became covered in long, thick red and blonde hair. His thoroughly red beard also lengthened, and when the Werewolf rose threateningly from the bed, growling, Chelsi whimpered for a moment, struggling to hold up the bag in her panic. The werewolf, stared at Chelsi with cold, ferocious blue eyes with little trace of humanity left within. Baying, it leapt across the room.

Chelsi dropped, trying to protect herself. She let out one scream before the beast's claw caught her in the shoulder, tearing chunks of meat away from bone and causing Chelsi to shriek loudly in pain. The bag tore away from Chelsi and slid down her deadened arm, landing on the werewolf and pinning it down slightly. Chelsi dragged herself weakly across the floor, smearing blood across the wood.

Josef struggled for only a moment to get his balance, and stood again, the bag snagged on one of his shoulders instead of Chelsi's. Howling loudly, Josef tore into the barmaid's throat with his hungry jaws, tearing away her voicebox and sending her into shock. The beast stood, admiring his prey and struggling slightly to get the bag off his transformed shoulder. It was stuck, and weighed him down slightly: though his strength was surely fortified by the transformation. his range of motion was altered and the beast could not free the bag from his arm. Frustrated, he looked again to the freshly killed game that lay, gurgling in shock, unable to scream or even effectively breathe. The Wolf wanted to feast on the spoils of his kill, but his ears flicked towards the direction of the stairs and he became silent Sneaking over to the one locked window of the room, he bashed it out with one swift claw strike, and the Werewolf, with the bag snagged tightly around his right shoulder, leapt from the open window and out into the night. He tore from rooftop to rooftop, and out of Bravil, seemingly on instinct. He immediately found the Ayleid ruin known as Anutwyll, and gained entry, returning to his Dream now that he had proven himself to the one who had brought the dreams, and this new gift, upon Josef. He would wake in the morning: disoriented, naked, and covered in someone else's blood.

Chapter Twenty Five

A Red Sun Rises

Hroarez Shavir had travelled far since Bruma. He had left the snow topped log cabins with crackling fires, raucous nords, and good mead, and had instead travelled across the province of Cyrodiil, to drown himself in the darker and more sinister pleasures of county Bravil. He scarcely remembered his meeting with the redguard Silassen Ilden, and the no longer human Merthierry Yvienne. But it seems the Khajiit never had trouble finding fellow men to drink with. And it just so happened that the Khajiit had found company with a tall Nord named Josef, and a dark elf going by the name of Elrohir. He had drunk with them the night before

"One more," Hroarez said and nodded to the girl. He had no count of the amount of beers he had today, but it didn't matter. He never counted. He felt happy because of his newly acquired skooma.

Elrohir smiled to the girl and shook his head raising his bottle, signalling he didn't need anything. She smiled back and went to the bar.

Evening had passed when suddenly noises were heard on the second floor of the inn. Both the dunmer and the khajiit looked towards the stairs as the loud crash came from one of the rooms. The dunmer looked at Hroarez, *"Josef must have fallen out of his bed,"* he said and smiled. *"Come Khajiit. Let us look in on our Nord friend, he is taking his time to wake."* He added. Hroarez nodded, and downed the remainder of his drink. They moved to the staircase, passing the few morning patrons of the inn on the way. They headed upstairs, and were met with the inns owner. He was staring into a room. Elrohir walked closer, readying himself to ask which room his nordish friend had taken. But the inn keep spun round.

"Your friend!" the bartender shouted *"he was the one who took her upstairs! He did this!"* he shouted and grabbed Elrohir's shirt. Confused Elrohir did as he found was the best solution, he pushed the man into the room, but the man fell over the girls dead body and he landed in a pool of blood. Elrohir walked down the staircase with the khajiit behind him. He looked at the costumers who were all staring. The khajiit grabbed his shoulder and whispered in his ear *"Let's get out of here, eh, dunmer?"*

As they walked into the muddy dark streets of Bravil it was raining and Elrohir took a small pause to look up at the moon. He was in doubt of where he should head from here. Josef had left a bloody mess behind when he disappeared from the inn, voluntarily or by other means. Elrohir looked back at the door to the inn then at the khajiit with the bag of skooma.

"You have no history with Josef, do you?" he asked him. *"No, not before today."* the khajiit answered.

"Then I suggest you to take your leave." Elrohir said and gave him a friendly smile. The khajiit scratched his head and looked down the dark street. Hroarez had no gain of helping either of these men, but the sudden death of Rayne, and the bloody murder Josef left behind, made him feel sorry for the dunmer. The dunmer too seemed changed, or shocked, from the events inside the inn, a state of mind he did not seem to be in very often.

"If you do not mind, I would like to follow you." Hroarez said and waited for an answer. The dunmer was clearly surprised of the offer of help, but he accepted it. Together they left Bravil.

Elrohir had his doubts about the road he was taking now. He was supposed to return to Cheydinhal as soon as possible, but instead he was fleeing from another town; this time with an unknown khajiit as his partner of crime.

Hroarez could see Elrohir was having doubts about the situation. He thought for a few minutes of where to head. *"Dunmerr,"* he said to get Elrohir's attention, *"I know there is an abandoned mine, to the north. We can wait for morning there."*

Elrohir wasn't much for trusting this khajiit yet. But he agreed, and they headed towards the mine. Elrohir would not close an eye that night. The khajiit was going to be sound asleep.

Morning came, and with it, Josef awoke from his tortured dreams with more questions than answers. The blood of the girl still stained his hands and chest. He was utterly and completely confused, his head pounding and racing with questions. He stood, a bit chilly, and noticed that his bag was slung over his shoulder. He slid it down his arm and inspected it. It was slightly torn, as if someone had cut it with broken glass. All of his

key possessions, including his spear, were intact and accounted for.

"What in Oblivion happened... What in all the hells..."

His mind raced to try to piece together the events of the night. Pictures and pieces of reality hung loosely together in his head. Images of passion, heavy panting, rhythmic breathing, fingers squeezing hard against soft skin. Then the release, and the drunkenness that follows such a divine and intimate moment. Then, he had seen her stealing his belongings, but that was out of the corner of his eye. His focus... what had he been staring at?

The image replayed in his mind over and over. Repeatedly, He relived feeling himself losing control, his eyes locked furiously on... on the white...

Shaking his head, Josef stood tall and stretched. There was a small pool of clean water at the bottom of the chamber he had found himself in, and he waded into the pool to clean the blood and sweat from himself. Freshly cleaned, he regained his earlier perch and clothed himself in his dark leather, keeping his Nordic Ringmail armor tucked away safely in the bag. The sunlight was peeking through the old stone door to Anutwyll. Josef cracked through the door and emerged into the sunlight, lighting a cigarette, his eyes squinting against the glaring sunrise..

When his dark blue eyes adjusted to the glare of the Cyrodiil sun, Josef could finally make out his surroundings. Exhaling a large cloud of smoke from his nose, he scanned the horizon. He noticed immediately that his senses were still heightened, that his nightmare had been quite real. He had spoken last night to a towering figure of muscle and sinew, with the skull of a stag for a head, and the figure, though he did not identify himself, was definitely a Daedra. Josef had faced him, not as he stood now, but through the blood-seeking eyes of a Werewolf. And the Daedra had spoken to Josef... What had he said?

Irritated, confused, and slightly frightened, Josef stepped down from the stone of the ruin.

The odd company emerged from the dark flooded mine while the sun was rising. Confused on where to head now they decided to try and get some food before they left. The dunmer proposed they headed north looking for an inn, but the khajiit was sure they could head into Bravil safely this early in the morning. As they got nearer to the gate it became obvious he was wrong.

The guard had drawn his sword as he spotted the two walking towards him, but after a quick brawl the two had managed to knock the guard unconscious by continuously knocking the guard's head into a nearby wall.

"I told you this was a bad idea, Hroarez."

"It's going exactly as planned, dunmer, eat, eat." Hroarez answered with a smile. They sat inside the stable house emptying the pantry of the house. In the corner two bretons and an imperial sat tied, each with a loaf of bread stuck into their mouth. Elrohir preferred using persuasion and lies to do these kind of things, but a bit of violence did the trick too.

After an hour or two the sun was shining and Hroarez was busy selling a horse to a wood elf who paid a low price for a horse and then rode off. *"Elrohrr,"* Hroarez shouted in through the door, *"Your nordic friend be coming this way."*

Hroarez grabbed Rayne's sword and walked out and looked in the direction the khajiit

was pointing. He was right. It was Josef. Elrohir hopped the fence and came towards them, looking concerned. Josef knew immediately from the look on his friend's face that Josef's dream had not been one of idle fantasy, and that the blood that the Nord had washed from his body had likely belonged to an innocent.

"Elrohir! What in bloody Oblivion took you so long t' get here!?" he said, hiding his own concern.

Josef turned his head and lit a cigarette. He stared into the skyline, noting that there was an ominous-looking cloud approaching from the Northwest. Stepping over towards Elrohir, he spoke, a bit of a tremor in his deep Nordic voice.

"Elrohir? Wha' happened last night?" Josef began, but then halted, as it came to him.

"The barmaid..."

He turned and looked at Elrohir, looked right into his eyes. His eyes looked weary, but determined.

"I... I'm..." he started, but faltered.

Elrohir solved most problems as they presented them to him, and he decided to do so this time.

"The barmaid is fine, Josef," Elrohir said and placed a hand on his shoulder. He could see Josef was troubled by the current change in his life. *"She was the one that told us something was wrong."*

Josef stood still, and Elrohir could feel the overbearing tension in the Nord's powerful shoulder as the Dunmer gave him a sympathetic pat. Images of the Argonian innocent that he had killed in his dream flashed in his eyes, but the Argonian's face seemed to strobe, and when the strobe was out and the vision was dark, he saw the twisted, bloodied remains of the beautiful, innocent barmaid. What in the world was happening to him, he wondered silently, finishing his cigarette and tossing it carelessly to the ground, smashing it with his boot. He knew then that his friend was lying, but he also reasoned that the only reason to lie was to keep Josef sane. And so, with that thought, sanity became one of the Nord's main worries.

Chapter Twenty Six

Forth From

Balindrium

Adonis woke. He groggily raised a hand to rub his eye. When he took his hand away he could see more clearly. He pulled the rich black sheet off of the top half of his body. The shadows crept across his exposed muscular chest. He quietly watched the shadows snake across his chest, twisting and turning.

When he decided that he had had enough he slipped out from under the covers. He walked across the room, his under garments and robes, along with his dark shroud, lay,

draped over the back of a wooden chair. He slipped into his under garments, and began pulling on the shroud. Across the room a lump shifted under the covers. The daedra stood. Adonis grinned. The Dark Seducers were certainly the most attractive Daedra. His eyes cased every curve of his conquests body. Last night had been good. She had been sent to his room as a gift. Adonis was most appreciative. He was a man for simple pleasures. The Daedra stood, allowing the sheet to slide to the floor, Adonis's eyes flickered once more across her glorious form. Adonis sniffed, and continued to get changed. He was soon clad in the familiar garments. He strapped a few knives into the straps, within easy reach in case of a battle. He then reached for his robe. He quickly pulled it on over the shroud.

Adonis walked quickly to the door. He opened it and looked briefly back at the daedra. She did not show any emotion. He closed the door behind him. He walked along Balindriums vast, and grand, corridors. He walked calmly, and without urgency. He rounded a corner and saw the doors to the hall where they had mysteriously appeared the night before. He saw one of the other diners from last night's activities poking his head in the door. Another stood behind him, looking around the corridor, perhaps admiring it? Or just storing it in his memory. He walked over and stood next to the duo. And said nothing.

The dining hall was almost entirely empty. The door opening made a strange, continuing echo which filled the chamber. The only figure in the room was Azmodæum, standing tall at the bottom of the stairway that leads up to the high table. *"Ah, welcome. I trust that you all had an enjoyable night in my home?"*

He smiled, letting the sadistic grin linger on Adonis for a moment longer than the others, as he began climbing the staircase, beckoning for the group to follow him.

"Today we will begin with a history lesson. A bit of information about our ancestors when they rightfully ruled this land. Far to the south, on the other side of White Gold Tower, there lies a human town of filth and mud which they have taken to calling "Bravil." Bravil was once an Ayleid town, until Man came. Man was driven back by our ancestor's magicks twice, but on the third time our people were defeated and Bravil fell into the hands of the humans. But that was ages ago, and many years' worth of silt and sand have piled high over the old Elven architecture. The foolish men and lazy, subservient elves who reside in the city now do not even know that their town rests over a virgin Ayleid ruin, Vashamath.

When Vashamath was occupied by our ancestors, it was likely simply called "Math," which is the old Ayleid word for "Home." The Ayleids who called this place "home" were powerful in magic; in fact when the battalions of men flooded into the city they could not find any Ayleids at all until they were cut down in their sleep. Everyone in the city knew the secrets of levitation and invisibility... which leads me to believe that Vashamath is full of powerful magic left by our forefathers. And that the False Empire have not found the ruin and entered it stands to prove one thing: Our forefathers wanted us to possess this magic, and us alone. And that is why I am sending the five of you to Bravil. Once you are there, I can begin searching for the true entrance with my Third Eye.

Be wary, though. I have received whispers from Mephala; she warns that all of her Daedric brethren are loyal to our cause. Meridia, for instance, has been quite hard to get to cooperate... we simply disagree on too many points. But what troubles me is Hircine's sudden silence. With those two and Azura, that is three disloyal Daedric Princes: know that the interference of any one of these Princes can be quite fatal if underestimated. Any threat that encroaches your mission should be viewed as an Agent of one of these Daedra and eliminated without mercy. No champion of Azura, Meridia, or Hircine will stop our plans now if we stand and fight them where they appear."

"So eat your fill of breakfast, eat hearty, and make your way south. Do not stop in Chorrol, I fear they will remember you too freshly... perhaps find a cave or ruin outside of Chorrol to sleep in on your way."

Chapter Twenty Seven

Surgery

The walls. Silassen could see them. He smiled wearily. Bethras, Silassen and Augustus had been travelling a long time now. Their pace had been slow. Bethras and Silassen working to support their friend, resting as often as they dared, trying to hold a speed their friend would be able to match without further damaging himself. Yet they dared not move too slowly. Silassen was an amateur healer at best, as was Bethras, but they could do nothing for his more serious wounds. They had patched him up as best they could,

and then left for Chorrol immediately. But now he saw the majestic stone walls of where he considered home. They gave him hope. He looked to Augustus. His friend was in a bad way. He was barely conscious. Silassen looked to Bethras, and they quickened their pace.

But when they reached the gates of Chorrol, the sight that met their eyes was not the quiet beauty that they were accustomed to. It scarcely resembled a city. No. It was a fortress now. Guards lined the usually sparse walls. All were heavily armed, alert, militarily efficient in their movements. The gates had been re-enforced. He noticed with alarm, that the archers all had their bows trained on him. Silassen stepped ahead, leaving Bethras to prop up Augustus. He hailed the guard.

"Hey! What the hell is going on here?" He hollered. The garrison did not lower their weapons.

"Mr Ilden. Chorrol is in a state of high alert, as authorised by Countess Arriana Valga. While her ladyship is a little to...resilient to declare martial law, I Guard Captain, Dagon Theranis have both added responsibilities, and rights. One of those is deciding who gains entrance to this city." Dagon Theranis spoke. He was above the gate. He was perhaps too professional to smirk, but Bethras reckoned the guard captain was smug, considering the way they had parted last time. Silassen was not phased.

"If you haven't noticed, my good friend here is carrying a man knocking on death's door. So how about you stop playing god there, and let us inside our home?" Silassen answered coldly. Dagon Theranis eyed him a moment. Trying to decide whether he should be angry, or impressed with Silassen's boldness.

"I'd learn to control your tongue Ilden. It'll get you into trouble one day." Dagon replied. Silassen bubbled up, ready to open a can of rage. But Dagon nodded to the archers. They lowered their bows. *"Luckily, it seems, that day is not today."* He grinned, and called for the gate to be opened. Silassen almost laughed. But instead, he helped Bethras to support Augustus, and they carried him through the gate. They lay him on the ground, and people rushed forward with stretchers. Healers were being called, and slowly they trickled out from the chapel or their homes. Clearly Augustus was in worse shape than Bethras and Silassen had thought. They shared a worried glance, but Theranis was walking toward them. He stopped in front of them.

"Welcome back. How was your hunt?" He asked. Silassen felt a pang of guilt, remembering how he had threatened the officer of the law.

"Badly. As you can see from Augustus. From what he's told us, he found his doppelganger on the mountain top. We saw nothing of the dunmer who attacked us, or his ally." Silassen paused, before adding. *"I am sorry, for how I acted before. I was led by my emotions."*

"Don't ever try it again. But as far as the courts and the people are concerned, it never happened. Now, I think it's about time I brought you up to speed." Dagon replied, smiling as he did so. A genuine smile, not a mocking one. *"The countess is worried another attack might occur. As you can see, steps have been taken to defend the city. We are expecting a contingent of soldiers from The Legion currently. So far, we have no real evidence as to what caused the daedroth to appear in our midst, but we speculate it must be the same thing that destroyed Kvatch a few days ago."*

"What?!" Bethras exploded at the latest portion of news.

"Kvatch. It's gone dark. They say there's some sort of otherworldly cloud above the city, and that some sort of magical gate is blocking the entrance. If you ask me, it should be retaken, but that's not my place. I am here to defend Chorrol." Dagon explained.

"God, that's awful. All those people..." Bethras said, shaking his head. Silassen nodded, he shared his friends sentiments. But right now, Augustus was his priority.

"Thank you. But we must check on our friend." Silassen thanked Dagon, but the guard captain stuck out a hand. He was clasping two leather bound books. They were small, compact, and thin.

"Here. You'll need these. They dictate who enters the city. I must return to the walls." Dagon said. Silassen nodded his thanks. Bethras and Silassen hurried up the stone path to the chapel. They barely spoke a word to one another, now focused on their friend. They pushed through the heavy wooden doors of the chapel. It was strange. Hearing the chapel so alive with worried voices. Healers were in a mad rush. Darting around, snatching up potions, wet towels, bandages. Everything they could lay their hands on. Silassen and Bethras made to move forward. They were stopped by a pair of healers. The duo nodded, and took a stool as close to their friend as they were allowed, keeping quiet and calm.

Mariane was there. She had spotted Silassen almost as soon as he had entered the chapel. But she had stayed true to her job. As the most talented healer on call, and not otherwise occupied, she had been tasked with treating Augustus. She nodded to the two healers next to her. They were acting as nurses.

"Take off his shirt. We need to get a better look at the wounds." She said clearly. She knew he must be bad, there were too many healers around for it to be any ordinary war wound. But when the nurse reached forward and opened his shirt, she saw the gravity of the situation. She remained calm. She took it all in. Surveying the damage. With that, she traced her fingers alongside the cuts. Blue energy pulsed from her fingers, and seeped into the wound, a blue mist rising. She set to work. This was going to be a long one.

Chapter Twenty Eight

Morrowind

After a long time running through the dark forest and covered hills, Draken and Mertheirry had arrived closer to their destination. They had acquired a map, from an acquaintance of Azmodæum in the city of Cheydinhal. By following the map and reading it twice, Draken was able to get a clear thought of the exact location. Sure enough, Draken and Meritherry had arrived to their destination. The Ayleid ruin was dead ahead, the eerie glow was not so hard to pass by. Draken did study what these Ayleid beings were, the Ancient Ones, and their ability to create such ruin. Interesting, on what they believed. But, they are a dead race, not forgotten, but dead, extinct. Their ancient cities are dark and empty, save for the grim revenants and restless spirits condemned forever to walk the halls, keeping their melancholy vigils over bones and dust. Draken smiled to himself and looked at Merthierry, whatever was in these Ayleid ruins, Undead, bandits or better..Daedra!.

Draken took off the sheathe to his sword and held it at his shoulder. He began to smile, already anticipating the entry. *"These ruins have traps, deadly machinations. Enemies, walking bones,*

walking decaying flesh, or some foolish adventurer, or bandit, the bigger the better. Whatever is inside, they wont be coming out alive." Draken hissed.

Over the rocky faces of The Valus Mountains the two went into Morrowind. The Cliffcrackers steered clear of their path when Draken had skinned one alive. After the borders, they had traversed Blight, woods, swamps, and other varying settings.

Morrowind was, unlike Cyrodiil, rich of differing scenery and history. Morrowind, the state of Chitin and Bonemold, bestial race slavery, the Ghostgate, the Red Mountains, the ruling Great Houses, the Dark Elves nobles.

There it was, the distinctive ruins of Ayleid. They halted before its whitestone door. Merthierry stepped forward with his hammer, ready to bash himself a way in.

Morrowind at last. The native lands of the Dunmer, teeming with ashlanders. Draken had travelled there few times before on strictly on business, occasionally an expedition or adventure, long time ago. Draken's hunger began to gnaw at his stomach and throat. It was time to feed, but now that he was in Morrowind, it would have to be postponed. Unless he finds something in the Ayleid ruin to feed on. Morrowind, despite its dry climate, has a nest of different vampires all over the place. Three different known clans that share the land. Draken scoffed in his mind. We cyrodiilics do not share our land, we proved that centuries upon centuries ago. The Shadows of the Berne, the Mages of the Aundae, and the Warriors of the Quarra. Draken respects the Quarra, they are most similar to Draken himself, fight with the blade, make examples of fools and kill without sneaking or hiding. Although, he had to admit that was what kept him safe all this time. Draken looked over at Merthierry. The old aged Dunmer that proved his worth many times over for the short time he was with him, he earned the respect. Draken saw him retrieve his hammer as soon as they arrived, perhaps a conversation is reserved for another time.

Merthierry swung heavily, smashing the old stone door in with his war hammer. The point of impact crumbled to dust, and it became apparent that his Daedric power was becoming stronger. The fire beneath his cloak licked out from the sleeves and hood, casting a strange, faint red glow into the gaping hole where the door once stood.

Merthierry nodded, breathing heavily into the burning metal mask that was bonded to his face. He led the way, into a long hallway which was dark and, upon further inspection, heavily trapped. Spring plates were armed, and after avoiding them, the pair crossed into a large chamber with a strange luminescent glow.

The door stood looming before them. It shone with ancient enchantment. The Ayleids who had inhabited this secluded mountain fortress had obviously been powerful and demented magicians; the very enchantment itself looked like a shimmering mass of tortured souls swimming over and under one another, forming a protective barrier around the door. Under Merthierry's breathing, Draken could hear their otherworldly moans and screams faintly echoing through the chamber.

Merthierry remained silent, reaching into his cloak and procuring the scroll that his lord had scrawled upon. He opened it, and looked upon the words emblazoned upon the parchment. No spoken word was necessary, nor did it seem that the Dunmer was apt to provide any. The scroll burst into a blinding white flame, and the fire pierced the wall of souls, intensifying the screams of the damned from a faint whisper to a deafening wail. The door burst open violently, and Merthierry was knocked to the ground in an instant, and the wail of the door was replaced with the terrible scream of a Daedroth. Behind it was a Dremora Lord, standing in full regalia, and Draken could barely make out the magical "leash" that tied the Daedroth to its summoner.

The Dremora spoke, in a terrible and harsh voice, and the Daedroth turned to focus its attention on Draken as the Dremora strode proudly towards Merthierry's fallen form. He wound up his hand with a golden spell sparking up and down his arm, and the bolt he cast out hit Merthierry square in the chest as he turned over to stand. Merthierry immediately disappeared, as did the Dremora Lord, and Draken was left with the Daedroth, in the ancient room whose door had not been opened in countless centuries, with a terrible black archway standing tall and lifeless in the center of the room. A Gate to Oblivion, it was, but its power source had been removed. The Varla Stone cages were open, and the pedestals were empty.

Mehrunes Dagon had beaten Azmodæum to the Stones.

But more pressing at that moment to Draken was the Daedroth which was towering before him, eying him with reptilian hunger. A long piece of slobber dripped from the corner of the beast's mouth, as it made a move towards the undead Imperial...

Draken looked for clues on how to bring down this animal, the broken Oblivion gate behind it could work..but it had no power. Draken sighed and began throwing a few weak fireballs at the creature. The three flames flew at the Daedroth, hitting against its skin and scales, the fire almost seemed to be shrugged off, the creature was naturally resistant to flames. Draken removed the blade from his sheathe and held his shield. He charged at the Daedroth, holding both steel sword and shield with a heavy, tight grip. As Draken got closer, the beast only prepared, it opened its mouth, casting a fireball from its own breath. Draken stopped in his tracks and held his shield up, to hold off the fire, but the magical essence was too powerful for a shield to hold off, and Draken was pushed back by the Daedric flame.

Draken looked around, no sound aside from the Ayleid spirits and their wailing and the Daedroth roaring. Merthierry metallic breathing was no longer present and he was truly left alone to fight this beast. He got up, only smoking a bit from the flame. Draken rushed at the beast, leaping in the air, spinning his sword, ready to kill the beast. Before the beast had a chance to make a killing blow, Draken had sunk his sword in its head. Feeling slight remorse for the creature, after all, Daedroth's were Molag Bal's creation.

Draken stalked the underground passage, his rage boiling into the darkness like superheated steam. Any creature foolish enough to impede his speedy progress to the location would be sorry indeed. Even so, he realized he was letting his eagerness overcome his caution. He deliberately slowed his pace, forcing patience. It would not do to be caught in some trap deep underground, to have an old pureblood vampire's life lost due to carelessness.

Draken's enhanced hearing could pick up the sound of rat offspring scurrying, an eerie counterpoint to the sound of his boot heels striking the floor and echoing in the darkened, deserted corridors. He came to a almost hidden room on the far north, the door was slightly open, the lighting suggested there were stones in that room. Draken proceeded forward, keeping his weapon in hand, his axe in his back, his katana sheathed.

Draken saw that the room was empty, no need the use the Hunter's sight when he was sure of it. He marched forward, bending down and grabbing the stone that was carelessly left on the ground. For some strange peculiar reason, Draken sensed he was not alone, something else was nearby...a threat.

Chapter Twenty Nine

Sister

There was a screech, and Draken spun round, as a humanoid shape flung itself from the darkness toward him. The figure had drawn two twin swords, which glinted in the eerie blue light typical of Aleyeid ruins. Draken swung his Katana upwards and the two blades clashed. He pulled back his sword, and swiped at his opponent, but his sharp edged sword connected with nothing but air as his adversary rolled away. His heightened senses picked up on the subtle whistling of two blades. He ducked and kicked out, judging as best he could where his assailant was attacking from. This time, he connected. The heel of his boot slammed hard into his unknown enemy's thigh. He heard a hiss, and judged his enemy to be a woman. He turned to face her for the first time.

It was indeed a woman. She was slim, and angular. She was standing in a combat stance, legs apart, blades held ready. Draken cursed silently. This was no novice. She had garbed herself in a tight fitting black robe with wrappings along her arms and legs, clearly to allow her to be more agile. She was wearing a helmet, so he could not see her face. Jet black hair flows from beneath the helmet, but for the most part, the helmet holds it in. Her hands were uncovered, and he could see she was fair-skinned. She remained still, resolute. And Draken in his anger, hissed, and attacked.

He charged forward, shield first. The woman remained still. Clearly unphased, ready to handle such an attack. But Draken was clever. He had no intention of a head on charge. He pushed off the floor with his feet, his vampiric strength pushing him swiftly through the air. He somersaulted behind his opponents back, and shoved his Katana smoothly backwards, in an attempt to impale this pest. But the woman had neatly cartwheeled to the side, pushing off the floor with a single arm, and landing perfectly, well clear of Draken's blade. He swore. This was no ordinary enemy. No human moved that fast. She was a child of the night, among the ranks of the undead, she, like him, was a vampire. And then she was upon him.

Her blades flashed, and Draken only barely managed to divert the blows from his body. His opponent let loose a flurry of blows, her blades becoming mere blurs, even to his vampiric vision. His Katana moved swiftly, and his shield was strong, but his enemy was skilled, and was beginning to break his defence, her swords, which he now recognised as scimitars were like quicksilver. Draken snapped his fingers, and tossed a fireball at his opponent. He could not see beneath the helmet, but her eyes widened. She snatched at his shield, taking him by surprise, and tore it from his grasp, before shoving it roughly in front of her to absorb the flames. But it was not enough, she was forced backward by the force of the powerful spell. He hit the floor hard, but immediately pushed herself back up. But Draken was on her before she could fully recover. Shield laying on the floor, he hooked his foot underneath it, and kicked towards her. She saw it coming, and tensed. The heavy metal disk smashed into her abdomen, and she was knocked back, the wind temporarily knocked out of her. Draken roared with exhilaration, and pushed forward. He struck hard with the Katana, bringing it down viciously towards her skull, but she dropped to the floor. No sooner had she smoothly evaded her blow, than she pushed off with her hands, in a vicious upwards kick.

Draken snapped his head back, and leant backwards fast. She soared over behind him, and he swung backwards blindly with his Katana. Preventing her from landing a strike with her Scimitars. And finally, he felt a connection. His sword met metal, but he knew it was not her blades. It was her helm, and he knew it. It was cloven in two. It fell to the floor, utterly broken. She cried out, and collapsed to her knees, her head ringing from the force of the blow, her vision blurred. She looked upwards, fighting to refocus her vision.

Her helmet was off her face. She saw this as a finish to the fight, she did not understand why he dropped his weapon. He is unwise to lower his defenses. Finally, her opponent took off his helmet, revealing someone who she had recognized. Draken, her brother.

The woman grunted and shook her head, dispelling the morbid state she had slipped into. Standing up with a weary sigh, her mind was once more focused on the present peace. The air grew steadily cooler as his body became relaxed. He could feel a tingling in the pit of his stomach: anticipation mixing with a sick sense of dread.

Stood before him was a slim, angular girl with a well muscled body. Her features were severe and somewhat pointed, with fierce red eyes. Her face was clean, her body well built for battle. Fair skinned with jet black hair, she seemed to fit the mould of most vampires in her outward appearance. Her crimson eyes have an almost feline quality to

them. To anyone else, a beautiful woman. To him, a face he knew to well, and a mouth that mocked him to often. Raven Meridius Vladimir. His sister.

He had almost killed his sister, and she had almost destroyed him. He approached her. Beneath his hand on her shoulder, she trembled slightly, before smacking his hand away with her bloodied pale hands, the blue veins covered most of it, even around her nailed fingers.

"My sister, it is me, you're brother!. Calm yourself, listen. I am a friend." He said. In Cyrodiil, anyone part of the clan knows when to unleash the fury of vampirism, the attack and hunger, and when to hold back. Patience can be a weapon if one knows how to use it. She was still fuming with rage, but he saw something else in her expression now: a guarded curiosity. Slowly she nodded as the meaning of his words became clear, and her expression softened. Draken could still see the savage feeling in her; her hunger was still there, but she had hidden it below the surface. She was nursing it, holding it for a time when she could unleash it.

"Draken. Why am I not surprised. I see you're skills have improved much?" Raven said.

Draken sighed loudly. *"Nice to see you too"* Draken exclaimed.

Casually, Raven removed the burnt flesh from her skin and walked closer to Draken.

"We just exchanged pleasantries." She said, referring to the brief duel.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded, rather aggressively, the groaning sound of her only showed him her pain.

"Must you be so incoherent sister? It has been a long time since we last met, should you be so unforgiving, I think it is time we part again" He said purposely. She ignored him, examining her wounds. He walked closer, and examined her. He saw a small gash on her shoulder, where a shard of her shattered helmet had knicked her. He took a small dab of the blood in his fingers, and tasted it. He cringed.

"You're tasting a little bland, sister. What have you been feeding on?"

"Rats..rabbits, whatever small creature I can find, occasionally, livestock"

"Ah, the mighty Raven, who prowls the night killing animals and rodents." He chuckled to himself, then stopped when he realized the grave danger she was in.

"And where have you been? You have ignored the clans calls, while I have been slaying traitors." She retorted angrily.

"Then why are you here? If you are so busy, then why are you cowering in a cave, a ruin, rather than out there ending the clans enemies."

"I have self proclaimed myself on vacation, as of this moment. Me and you will get in touch with ourselves again. Brother & sister time. Just me and you, no competition, no arguing, nothing. Come to Skyrim with me, then Hammerfell. Come with me, Draken, let me show you some real sport, for old time's sake. Children's day on the 19th of heart-fire is not far off. We must celebrate it...our way."

"You're offer is tempting, I'm afraid I will have to decline" He lowered his head. Raven's smile went into a small frown.

"Why?"

Draken said no more than a single word. *"Azmodæum"*. With that he began to explain.

"Come, time is not to be wasted. I want you to meet a few allies of mine, along the way, you can feed and get replenished. You will need more than a few pints to get back in good shape, the more blood you drink, the faster you regenerate damaged tissue. Me & you can discuss a few things when we return to Balindrium. I am sure you will enjoy it there as I have" Draken notified her, yanking her hand towards him. *"Come, come"*

He said, after collecting all of the stones, The Ayleid ruin, so ancient, yet, so powerful, it held magic that were dormant, uncollected, unbothered. As they moved closer towards the exit, through the gleaming dark tunnels of the ruin, they began to discuss about Balindrium and everyone else involved about the plot that was already coming to fruition.

Draken had no way of communicating with his Lord now that Merthierry was gone. In fact, he hadn't even had time to consider the fact that his mission was an inglorious failure. As soon as Merthierry had disappeared, Raven had showed up. Now, the first fears of punishment from Azmodæum began to creep into Draken's mind. It took a good deal of willpower for Draken to keep the poisonous thoughts of fear from plaguing his mind. He knew that once he started moving back towards Balindrium, the Warlock would know the quest had been fruitless; Draken had seen first-hand the Altmer's skill in affecting things miles and miles away from where he was. And what of Azmodæum's little pet project, the Dunmer Merthierry, who had been transformed in the Deadlands' pools of fire? With feelings of uncertainty, Draken opened the door to the ruin, and stepped back into the mountains.

Off to the North, a Dunmer village was visible. Food would be available for the two Nosferatu... the only question now was how to go about getting it?

Chapter Thirty Before The Storm

Little more than a week after Draken and Merthierrys failure to obtain the varla stone that they had been tasked to retrieve, an incredible fury was exposed in the peaks of the jerall mountains.

An ear splitting scream of rage echoed throughout the Jeralls. The halls of Balindrium shook along with the cacophonous boom. Dark clouds formed over the castles spires, and with it came thunder, and lightning, unnatural, and daunting. The thunder like the sound of a thousand war drums, and the lightning as fearsome as the deepest and most terrifying depths of Oblivion itself. This magical storm, the inadvertent product of an incredible fury, from the depths of the blackest heart in the land of Cyrodiil. The altmer Azmodæum was angered, and such fits of rage were not to be dismissed lightly.

In his fortress, the altmer sat upon his great throne in the main hall, seething with indescribably rage. He was clutching a glass of blood red wine, brought to him by a scamp. He was staring into it, anger dancing around like flames in the reflection of his eyes in the dark crimson liquid. He smashed the goblet into the armrest, filling his palm with magical power, and disintegrating the majestic cup into dust.

The pair Badras and Noele. They had betrayed him. They had gone to the legion. They had lost the backbone lieutenants of Balindrium required. Never before had the altmer known such anger. He knew though, that his fortress was not compromised. But the annoying city of Chorrol's pleas for help would not be so lightly treated now. They would receive their aid and he knew it. He had to move quickly. But the betrayal of the two mer was of little concern, for Balindrium was experiencing something far worse.

Within the main receiving chamber of the palace of Balindrium, a great echoing noise could be heard as stone ground against stone. The few slaves attending to the room at the time glanced around terrified, knowing that their master's cruelty and creativity with magic knew no reasonable bounds. But the source of the noise, it was soon found, was not their lord Azmodæum.

The statues of the Daedra were shifting in their places, spinning slowly clockwise or counterclockwise, seemingly with no rhyme or reason. The slaves cowered, fearing that something was about to come to life, as all of them had seen occur countless times during the building of their Master's army. But then, every time the Daedra Prince had appeared, their Master was there to hold court with them proper. More than anything, these slaves were afraid to offend the Daedra that their lord consorted with.

When the noise stopped, the message was clear. , Hircine, Azura, and Meridia were facing fully away from the center of the room, tucking their likenesses into their own respective corners of the room, and the torches lighting each of those statues blew out. The remaining statues all remained focused on the center of the room, save Malacath, who was turned to the side uncertainly, and Hermaeus Mora, who seemed to be looking everywhere and nowhere at once.

The statue of Hircine, with its tall deer antlers no longer casting a long shadow across the room, cracked and shattered to the ground in several large chunks of rock. The slaves scattered, scared for their lives, and the chamber became eerily silent.

Balindrium loomed before the vampires like a stone giant. The bridge which had allowed them access before once again extended, first close into view, slowly closing the gap between them and the Castle, and then finally, with a thunderous boom, slammed into the mountainside in front of them. The bridge was of Dwemer design, colored that unique shade of bronze that natives of Morrowind and High Rock recognize so well. The Vampires crossed the bridge, silently greeted the Daedra and Undead that now guard the Ebony Gate, and entered the main hall of Balindrium, where their Master was standing, facing away from them, and seemingly caught in the grip of rage. He screamed in an Elven language that neither Imperial vampire understood, his voice sounding wholly twisted and inhuman. Three of the Daedra statues in the room were shattered, laying in heaps of rubble, their enchantments broken. Draken could feel the fury dripping from his master, even from the door.

Draken drew in a deep, long breath before clenching his fists in anger. While he may not be directly angry at his master, his own failure was the cause of his attitude, then something else made him even more aggressive..fear. Fear that his master would do something to him, fear he would be punished, fear he would be killed, perhaps even tortured. Draken used this fear to strengthen his power, to enable him him to become

angrier, that was all he knew. To purge weakness from the mind and body, filling it with a voidful, negative emotions. It always made up for something, being 'weak' was something he never tolerated, but even now, this trait seemed to escape his persona. Raven stood with her arms behind her back, smiling in sheer sarcasm, a face Draken so wanted to smack. He knew what she was thinking, or at least close to it. Both Vampires jumped a bit when the master screamed in words they could not understand.

Wont be able to talk you're way out of this one. Raven boasted in her mind. While she was partially scared at her new master, she did feel a soothing presence to know that his anger was undoubtedly directed towards Draken's failure, again, unwillingly, did she "thwart" her brother's plans and brought more problems to him. A re-assuring smile swept across her face, telling her that she has done it again. For the longest time away from her brother, she would now witness him being punished. *"Life" was good.*

Raven glanced at the broken Daedric statues, wondering the reason they were broken. Being as useful as they could be, they were destroyed by the uncontrollable fury of Azmodæum. Draken bowed respectfully, keeping his head low. Raven followed the gesture, only to hear Draken a bit closer, than to mock at his pathetic excuses.

"I have done as you commanded master. It.." His words trailed off *"It seems Dagon has reached the stone before Merthierry and I did...given a second chance, I am more than eager to oblige and venture into those damned gates to get back whatever is needed"* He said silently. Hoping for his life to be spared, and a chance to spit back into that Daedric bastard's red face.

Azmodæum whirled around on the spot, his eyes still ablaze with anger... literally. The green flames that poured forth from his eyes illuminated his slate-grey skin, and indeed the whole room, in a haunting emerald hue. The fire billowed up from his face and dissipated into the air as his eyes focused on the two vampires. He took in the words that Draken spoke, noticing immediately the smug grin on the newcomer's face.

Without responding to Draken, he looked angrily up at the four-armed statue of Mehrunes Dagon. It almost seemed to breathe ever so slightly, to watch the echoing antechamber carefully. The Altmer spread his arms wide, speaking in Daedric. The statue's face came to life right before him, laughing.

"Foolish Mortal, I have noticed your double-cross, and your thievery of magic from my realm! Did you think that you would pass on by undetected? Ha, ha, ha..... When the barrier falls, you will be as completely destroyed as the rest of your pathetic Tamriel. My Dremora will feast on your flesh the same as they will engorge themselves on Man and Mer, Beast and Land, All will be consumed by my rage! And I have your little pet, Warlock... He will break eventually. Ha, ha, h..."

Still angry, Azmodæum spit a curse at the statue and it returned to its half-lifeless form in the middle of a laugh, causing a bizarre echo to fill the dark room. The Altmer turned to once again face the Vampires.

"You will go to the Deadlands at the break of dawn. Both of you. I don't care who she is, I trust that you didn't bring her here for me to look at, Draken. It will be your reprieve for failing the last task I sent you on. Until then, we feed. All of us." He said, with a knowing look at his two companions. With a spinning move, he turned around and was headed towards the teleporter at the dead center of the room. He stood and waited for the Vampires to join him.

Draken's nostrils flared once he heard the loud voice of the Daedric Prince. Mehrunes Dagon, the Daedric Prince of Destruction, Change, Revolution, Energy, and Ambition. He is associated with natural dangers like fire, earthquakes, and floods. Draken respected

his traits, but despises the Daedric Prince with a fury that cannot be measure. Raven sneered at the mocking laughter of the Prince of Destruction. Making various, foolish claims and wishful thinking, even made a reference to the lost Dunmer that was taken to the deadlands. The shattered statue eventually silenced and Azmodæum was angrier than before. The flames and eerie illumination brought Raven's smile to a sudden vanish. Draken was right when he said Azmodæum is something to be feared and respected;. Sure enough, he didn't care who or *what* Raven was. He just wanted the job done, the mission completed, the task performed flawlessly and to the letter. Raven liked it, Draken liked it, overall, it made everyone happy. Azmodæum whirled around to the location in the center of the room, and summoned Draken and Raven to feast with him. Raven blinked a few times, before turning her head to Draken, noticing his smile to the fact that he had a reprieve was was "forgiven" for his failure, having a chance to prove himself and get back at that Daedric bastard, Dagon. Both Vampires bowed slightly before walking towards Azmodæum, to join the powerful wizard into a banquet of some sort.

Raven meditated on Dagon's words. *"When the barrier falls, you will be as completely destroyed as the rest of your pathetic Tamriel. My Dremora will feast on your flesh the same as they will engorge themselves on Man and Mer, Beast and Land, All will be consumed by my rage!"*

She only prepared herself for the inevitable, fueling her envy, her hatred. No. she didn't care for the pathetic warm bloods that walked the lands, no she didn't care for the native flora..the only reason Dagon cannot be allowed to rule is due to his nature. Nirn can be destroyed, its inhabitants permanently killed..and as she had pointed out many times, the mortals are the grass in which the vampires graze.

"Keep laughing.." Raven mumbled to herself as she stepped in closer to the master and Draken.

Draken couldn't help thinking of the others, Adonis Vile and the rest. If they outlived their purpose. *"What of the other followers, my lord?"* Draken asked.

"You will see them soon enough."

The dinner and debriefing went better than Draken expected. Azmodæum, while obviously still enraged at Mehrunes Dagon, maintained a mostly cool composure while the vampires drank glasses of hot human blood and feasted on daedra hearts and the like. He listened intently to Draken's entire story, paying special attention to Mehrunes's kidnapping of Merthierry. When he had heard enough, he turned his head down towards his meal and ate in silent contemplation. Raven and Draken exchanged glances that the Altmer didn't notice as he tore ferociously into his own plate of daedra hearts, covered in strange seasonings and garnishes that the Altmer ate all the same.

When the plate was finished, his gaze returned to his Undead guests. He thought for a long second, then spoke.

"I have been working hard at the top of the castle. There are many spires in Balindrium, some have been empty for some time. One of these empty spires has been... adapted... to serve another purpose." He said. He seemed to calculate his words more than he had before, as if the ambition he had already been fueled by had been ignited by rage. The table, and the platform it rested on, began ascending the castle. Azmodæum remained seated.

"Remain calm, and in your seat. Eat your dinner. Drink your sustenance. You will find no human blood where we are going right now, so if you have need of it now, drink your fill. When this table stops, we will be... elsewhere."

And sure enough, after they passed through several large chambers and a few long, dark elevator shafts, they saw above them a strange circle in the ceiling, as if a reflecting pool was defying gravity above them. But the reflecting pool did not show a perfect reflection; it showed a terrible Crimson citadel on the other side, rather than the dark stone they moved through now.

As the tops of their heads passed through the tear in space, they felt slightly disoriented, but any sense of dizziness was quelled as they remained in their chairs. They looked about them in wonder. The atmosphere, the temperature, reality itself felt different here; chaotic, constantly changing, and yet somehow permanent.

Around them stood a legion of undead soldiers of every kind. Liches floated above ranks of skeletons, bonewalkers, and bonelords, and Zombies shuffled around the outside of the platoon like a mindless patrol.

"And now, loyal ones, you will accompany me. Welcome to the Deadlands. Welcome to what was once known as 'The Gorepit;' I like to refer to it as 'New Balindrium.'"
Azmodæum announced with relish, grandeur, and determination.

Chapter Thirty One

The Varla Stone

He had left his pack down below, for though he was confused about what was happening to him, he knew the dream would return. The others would have his belongings when he found them. Until then, he would do whatever he could, to figure out just what in the hell WAS happening to him. Josef had not entered the chapel with his companions; he had handed Elrohir his pack and spear inside the gates of the city, telling him to "jes' look North, I'll be back, jes' go North and look."

Resignedly, he flicked his cigarette to the ground and brought his blue-eyed gaze to the moons as Secunda came fully into view. Hircine's image burned in his mind, and Josef, or the Josef that he knew himself to be, was gone again.

The beast's powerful legs hit the ground, just as he knew they would, and instantly he was running on all fours. The fur covering his powerful muscles was a slightly mottled blend of blonde, white, and red: a blur of which was all the first guardsman saw before he was slammed cruelly down onto his back. Before the guard had time to scream, he felt the strong jaws of the monster close around his throat, and he slumped, lifeless. The Werewolf relished in the kill, feeling his life force rejuvenated

through the taking of a life, and made a mad, four-legged sprint for the North Gate. An alarm was sounded throughout the city, causing Elrohir to hurry Hroarez to the Chapel door.

Elrohir was sitting in the chapel with Josef's spear leaning against a pillar next to him. He felt changed from his old self, changed towards a different approach to daily life. Instead of the cold empty soul he had been walking around with as an assassin, he now felt as if he was walking for a reason. He finally had something an objective he had reason to complete.

He knew he would never have been able to lie to Josef about what had happened to him that night, and Josef knew what his curse was.

He suddenly heard men shouting outside and looked out the tall chapel windows. He could see the moon and when he turned around Hroarez was beside him. He didn't have to say anything, Elrohir already knew Josef was the reason for the shouts. He grabbed the spear and hurried out the door to the violence. He could see the guards circling around the creature of Hircine, which only moments before had been Josef. Elrohir was about to sprint towards Josef, but hesitated. He turned around and looked at his companion. *"Hroarez,"* he said *"Grab our gear and head north."* he took a short pause. He knew he was taking charge, but he wasn't ready to discuss it. *"We're going to try and keep track of him."* he said, directed towards Hroarez.

"We have a price on our head, and now, we need to disappear from Bravil." he said as a last remark, *"Be fast, and stay in the shadows. We're both friends of the wereman."*

He then ran towards the gates, armed with Josef's spear and his pack over his shoulder.

Adonis lay on his back, his makeshift bed was hard, and itched a little, but it wasn't too bad. At least he could lie down, without the annoyance of spiders sneaking forwards. He had already slept earlier that evening, and was no longer tired. Now he was bored. He drew a dagger, and twirled it through his fingers, then he held it still and dropped it on the floor. The tip of the blade pierced the wooden floor, and quivered for a moment, before becoming still. Adonis got up to pick it up, by doing so turning to face the window.

As he did so a bell began to ring through out the city. Adonis stopped. He had heard that bell before. He had twice been the cause of it. This bell alerted all city guards to the fact that there was a major danger to the city and its people. Adonis's eyes flicked back to the window, he watched as a blur of different colours shot by, and then rose through the air, and then slammed down into a helpless man, the guard was taken by surprise but was quick to respond. He began to call out but blood spurted from his neck as the creature tore open the soft flesh of his neck. The beat resembled a wolf. But it had differences to that of a normal wolf. It was for one thing much taller, and broader. One might of missed this as the animal was hunched over. But it was definitely noticeable. Adonis watched as the animal hurried off. Screams were heard throughout the city, and angry shouts but these soon fell away as they became more distant.

The Amulet glowed brightly as Adonis's eyes locked on the werewolf. Azmodæum was watching, and the beast had gathered an emotional response of some kind from the Warlock, days away in his stronghold. The Altmer's cruel voice could be heard, first an incantation whispered under his breath, then a warning.

"You see now, the weight that our enemies carry. Behold Hircine's unwilling champion. Even now, Hircine's bloodlust draws him unknowingly towards Balindrium, while his weak Nordic mind during

the daytime tells him to retreat to Skyrim. He is not shielded from me. Know that one day we will kill the wolf, or enslave him.

But no matter, for the hour is drawing near. The clock nearly strikes eleven. When it strikes twelve, there will, for five minutes, be a passage beneath the Lucky Old Lady statue, which will lead you down to Vashamath. The guards will be spending the next hour cleaning up the remains of their friend and keeping the town quiet about the news of a werewolf attack. Use this momentum that our enemy has given us, and retrieve the Varla Stones!"

Adonis was quick to wake Varnand. The two assassins had made base in a small abandoned shack, one of the many that were dotted around Bravi. But now, adrenaline pumped through their veins. They were ready. This is what they had travelled for. All that riding for Bravil, and now they had finally reached their goal. The ruin that their master had told them of, their route to it, now revealed.

The lieutenants of Balindrium made short work of crossing the city, accomplished at stealth as the duo were, they had no trouble passing through the chaotic mess that was the town guard. The werewolf had sewn the seeds of unrest. Citizens were yelling at the guards. Guardsmen were clearing away the dead, moving the wounded, shouting down the restless residents of Bravil. Adonis and Varnand had no trouble slipping through the dark dank streets. Until at last, they had made it to the statue.

The tunnel that opened up beneath the statue led to a locked door. Just before the door, in the hallway on the ground, there was a crudely-built trapdoor with the mark of Balindrium burned into it, glowing softly in the darkness. Adonis nodded to Varnand, and they descended into the depths of the ruin that Bravil long since forgot.

The tunnel's darkness knew no equal. Eventually even the faint luminescent glow of the Ayleid's lesser magic stones were too far behind them to give them any idea of how long the tunnel was. But after about an hour of fumbling about with only one weak torch, they saw a glow in the foreground. Another ten minutes of walking and they came to a room glowing with two white stones, far more beautiful than the fakes they had seen before.

One lay to the left, the other to the right. The room did not go forward very far, but either side spanned wide, leaving the two stones quite far away from one another. The stones were raised on high platforms, and the paths to those platforms were laden with traps. One side appeared to be a no-brainer, the same style of traps they had encountered before, and either one knew they could easily be the one to claim that stone.

As they drew nearer to the two separate staircases that ascended to the trap platforms, they saw an ancient diagram etched in the stone. It appeared that when one person began their journey through the mundane traps, the other would be forced to race as fast as they could across the other path, with some sort of destruction magic coming out of the floor and walls and persisting behind the runner, damaging them as they run. The staircase leading to the Race path looked like a slick icy slope, and would remain so until the Trap-avoider had climbed his stairs and began his cross.

The amulet hummed, vibrating slightly. Their master was trying to contact them, but they were quite far underground, and his magic was having trouble reaching in its full power. They would have to decide how to go about getting both Varla stones simultaneously, and then worry about escaping from this terrible place. The two former assassins gave each other concerned looks after deciphering the wall diagram.

Varnard looked at the diagram that was etched into the thick stone pillar. Finally, he understood what would have to happen. Either him or Adonis would have to run past several Aylid Traps, while the other ran down a path, trying not to get hit by numerous types of destruction magic. "I'll go." Varnard volunteered. He knew that he could probably run faster than Adonis, plus Adonis got to kill Hetsan. "Hurry up. We need to get both these stones." Varnard said, then prepared himself for the sprint of his life.

With a synchronized nod, Varnard sprinted up the stairs and began avoiding the first trap, a simple series of obvious catchplates. When his foot stepped off the highest step, the stairs themselves turned into a slide, and the slide in front of Adonis began clicking into place as stairs. Adonis sprinted up to the top, turned left, and began running full tilt toward the other side. Varnard stepped through the catchplate trap and began narrowly weaving his way through trip-wires, arranged in a sort of complicated net. This would slow him down a bit.

Adonis took the first step forward once he reached the high platform, and felt the floor sink just an inch. He knew that it knew where he was, in fact, each step seemed to sink an inch. As soon as the second step landed, flames roared out from all directions, pelting Adonis with fire. He screamed and kept running strong through it as Varnard passed the tripwires and was beginning to crawl beneath a dangerous-looking wall of darts. More and more fire poured forth, burning Adonis but not badly. During his mad dash, he had just enough time to note how lucky the Breton was that Adonis had volunteered to take the fire blasts. The flames were hot, and only Adonis's natural resistance to fire was keeping his skin from becoming charred and blistered. Varnard finally passed the last trap, struggled tiredly to his feet, and leapt forward for his stone. Adonis, beginning to truly feel the pain caused by the fire, grabbed wildly at his stone, his clothes beginning to catch flame. As soon as Adonis's hand grasped the powerful stone, the Amulet leapt wildly on his chest and the room seemed a bit darker. In an instant, the pair were teleported, leaving them with that familiar sickening feeling in their abdomen, and found themselves at their Master's side, in a strange world with a Crimson Sky.

Chapter Thirty Two

The Varla Stone

Fire overwhelmed Merthierry, but he was quite used to the sensation by now, and he stood still before the broken archway from whence he had come. The voice seemed to be coming from all around him, but before long the source of the booming echo was apparent. The darkness, cast over the opposite side of the room like a curtain, shrouded the movement of a gigantic being seated in an immense throne of burning, crumbling magma stone. The lone chandelier in the room, casting a faint red light over Merthierry, was shaped like a terrible axe with a light enchantment. The axe was large enough for Merthierry to fit in the handle if it were hollow.

"You were a mistake, that is certain. Hefesteum will pay for his encroachment, for his trifling, for taking advantage of my favor! But you, slave... you can be of use. Tell me, your 'Master,' how does he treat you? Like a general, an advisor? Does he respect you? Or does he treat you as you treat that hammer at your side? Bashing you against his enemies until they... or you... break in the heat of battle?"

Mehrunes Dagon stood up, bringing his red-skinned face out of the shadows. He was truly terrible to behold, with fiery orange eyes, four dark horns erupting painfully from his scalp, and a dizzying, fiery flame design tattooed across his face. His mouth was wider than most humans', and four giant teeth jutted out more prominently than the other jagged teeth which filled the Daedra Prince of Destruction's maw. He stood, poised, but actually waiting for Merthierry to answer his question.

Merthierry peered around in the queer dark. He had ended up in a kingly Daedric room. He vaguely caught a certain movement at the side he was facing, the side of whom he just figured the voice had come from. It spoke again to him, as displeased as before.

Then out of the vast wall of shadow that covered its side stepped out the chief of the respective plane. It spoke of treachery, of battle and of submission.

"No. He of whom you speak is my master, and I will with no condition serve him, Always."

Dagon did not reply, but sent for two of his Dremora. He spoke to them in Daedric, the pieces Merthierry could understand all involved testing or experiments. *"Figure out why this one lives"* was the general idea. So, Merthierry reasoned, he must not be the first of his altered kind.... just the first that stood back up afterwards.

Meanwhile, across a channel of lava, Azmodæum outfitted himself with some strange Psijic-made light armor, covering it with his cloak. He presented Silver weapons to the Vampires, explaining to them that the Daedra had the same resistances as they to Iron and Steel. And after each of the trio were outfitted the way that suited them best, they made a grand procession towards the front door. A battalion of skeletons, led by a large lich, fell into place behind the Nosferatu. The great doors of the Daedric structure opened with a scream, and for the first time Raven and Draken beheld the true sublime wonder of the Deadlands. Towers stood defiant against the blood-soaked skyline in all directions. Dagon's realm was huge, and they were in one of the more metropolitan areas of it. Actual Dremora cities lay sprawled out in rigid circles around the tall obsidian-colored towers.

The realm was sublime for the Vampires because of two major factors: The lack of Sun and the intense heat from the Lava. They could walk about freely at any time of day or night, if such concepts existed here, but touching the water could prove fatal for anybody, much less a creature borne with the tendency to burn up such as they. They followed close to Azmodæum as he made his way to an ancient, crooked bridge, wide enough for the troops to follow behind them in turn.

Raven wore the black light armor, as suited for her, able to jump freely and move with ease and fatal swiftness, whereas Draken wore his heavy armor, mighty and strong. He powered up and he will come at them hard. As the great doors opened, both vampires stood speechless. The land was covered by an ocean of lava, scattered with islands. Several structures, like towers, walls, elevated pathways, and gates. Infernal slaughterhouses, they were. They are all fiery and sunless, a relief for Draken and Raven, however with large lava fields, they were equal in fate and benefit. The flora, fauna, and landscape are all dangerous, with many unpleasant traps all around.

Raven sheathed her scimitars, they were ready and able, she sharpened and fixed them days earlier. The blades were able to cut through a scamp like a fiery knife through butter. She hid her smaller daggers in her boot and in her gauntlets, her bow attached to her back, the entire armor encased the lithe figure in black.

Draken had his silver sword sheathed at his side, while his katana was rested at his back. Both vampire's boots were spiked, meaning a kick to the head could inflict serious damage. The sound of boots and footsteps marching over the bridge behind him only made Draken anticipate for battle, he was ready to jump into the fray and slay the Daedra.

Raven, kept her true intentions hidden, secret, covert, she awaited the enemy to come to her first, then to counter whatever attack they threw at her. One fatal move, one miscalculation of attack, eventually leads to a sudden demise, a good way to end an enemy's life. Unlike barging in with vigorous shouts and swears, punching and kicking wildly like a drunk elf. The dremora cities lay ahead, large and towering over the invading force. Raven barred her fangs, only slightly.

"Blasted structures should be submerged into its own damn ocean" Raven told Draken, who in turn nodded in agreement.

"I rather fight through every Daedra here, cutting down every single one of them" He said.

Even when the Undead followed behind them Azmodæum was still the leading force. Only he knew the battle formations and a way to attack. Whether or not he was going to be tactical or inadvertent.

Raven turned to Azmodæum. *"What are you're orders, sir?"* Raven asked with respect.

Draken awaited his orders rather than asking immediate questions. Only few times, back in the old wars, did he witness Raven be growled at or approached with stressful reactions by a leading commander or general. The city lay in front of him, ready to be breached, Draken didn't care if the group would be separated or a full force would just run in to wreak havoc. Despite their obvious different to the initiation and approach of the battle, there was only one thing in both of the Vampire's minds that were equally the same; *Death to the enemy.*

Azmodæum continued marching, his pale green eyes scanning the horizon back and forth. He was quiet for a long, awkward moment after Raven had asked her question, and at first it seemed he was going to ignore her completely. He then spoke. "It's beginning already. Our timing could not have been better, it's starting! The boundary is beginning to fail, there are Sigil Islands all around us..."

And their master began to laugh. His laughter sounded even more cruel, more ice-cold, devoid of any sympathy. The evil that emanated from Azmodæum seemed amplified by this terrible inferno, this space so far away from the stars. His amusement echoed back, sounding absolutely twisted. It seemed to be an omen of things to come.

"There will be almost no warrior-class Dremora left in the city. We will pierce directly into it, and burn it down to the scorched ground that lay beneath. Our forces behind us will kill every woman, every child, every Dremora that hasn't left for the invasion already, or be ground to bone while trying. In the chaos, we will be getting exactly what we want from... There," he said, pointing a finger at one of the six massive towers in the center of the large Dremora city, the second furthest tower from the group.

"Merthierry is there. Dagon hasn't killed him. I want that Dunmer alive. He has great latent power, and is fiercely loyal. I cannot afford to lose a servant with those qualities at this pivotal point in history." Azmodæum ordered, a fierce determination twinkling in his ruined emerald eyes.

The marchers grew ever closer to their destination, and the towers began to loom tall rather than forming shapes on the horizon. The closer part of the city could be seen, and indeed, it looked relatively empty considering its size. Female Dremora and recently reborn, child-like Dremora went about their daily lives, walking the blackened streets busily, unaware of the danger that awaits them.

"Just like old times" Draken said to Raven, which only smiled in response.

She prepared her arrows and her bow. Listening to the monotonous groaning of the zombies and the skeletal chuckling of the bone walkers.

Dagon spoke in Daedric to his minions, a language that Merthierry poorly mastered. The bits he perceived were enough to tell a tale, and killed his doubts of the story of himself. He lifted his hand quickly, signalling the emerging Daedra to halt at once. He had sensed a stampede, a parade of tripling feet, yet in line and file, with a certain structure like that of a marching army. Under the metal he smirked, on a way he never did before, and would never again. *"Hear, O' Dagon. And see. See, and behold!"* Merthierry turned and walked to the balcony overlooking the entire realm. From far below was seen a hostile army, a crusade of pawns on a quest to secure their King. Shrill battle horns sounded as Dagon accompanied Merthierry, standing close behind him, yet in darkness, a darkness that ever hung about him.

"Azmodæum comes" Merthierry chuckled.

The company reached the gates of the city. The tower loomed, the top of it brushing against the smoky clouds high in the sky. Azmodæum halted for a moment, taking a deep breath and seeming to savor the moment. The entire battalion of undead behind him, for the long moment, was absolutely silent.

Draken and Raven could hear Azmodæum's lone breathing against the sublime silence. His breath alone reminded them to breathe, though they didn't explicitly need to. With a grin, the Altmer waved his hands in two large swooping motions, and two Elves materialized out of thin air. They looked disoriented, indeed, one was a Dunmer whose raiments were still on fire. They each gripped a beautiful white gem, which the Altmer grabbed up quickly. He laughed again, his laugh sounding even more chilling than before, and then he spoke two lone words, pointing his right hand at the tallest Dremora building nearby.

"Raise Hell."

Forth burst an enormous thunderbolt, the likes of which none of them, the Warlock included, had ever seen. It wiped out a huge circle of the city, and the skeletons charged forth wildly.

Adonis looked quickly to his shroud, and slapped out the fires. They were all over him, and he had to spend a while quenching them. But when he had finished he looked around.

Desolated plants were nearby. They were blackened, all though some were red, to match their masters realm. Adonis watched as a skeleton got too close to the plant, and it whipped it away. The skeleton gnashed its teeth and struggled, but the plant pulled back with both branches, and the skeleton's head was separated clean from its neck. The plant released the bony warrior, and it stumbled away, swinging madly with its axe. It ran straight into a river of lava. It slowly began to sink below the surface. Every moment looked like pure agony, if you fell in there, you would be burnt, ever so slowly. Still screaming.

Adonis looked over. Azmodæum was there. His master had summoned them to this place. He relaxed slightly. He now knew that it was him who had brought them here. Not a trick of the magical stone that he had moments ago been clutching in his hand.

Merthierry saw a huge bolt pierced the clouds, its speed pulling the lot of the fog in its trail, leaving a perfect gaping hole in the thick gray mantle, and smashed into the surface amidst of the city. A bright flash of a prolonged thunderstrike lighted the inner walls of the city and the ceiling of the skies. The blinding effects were spared for most of the attacking armies. But nobody was spared of the epic deafening bang and the rain of dirt and remains.

"The battle begins. No law, no compassion. As they have set foot on our lands, we shall sweep across theirs with a fury the Dremora has never witnessed." Said a female vampire, who stood nearby to Draken. She had a similar sort of posture to Draken, so Adonis guessed she was of some relation. But that was a rough guess.

"Poetic. Are you here to talk or kill vampire." Adonis sneered.

"Glory and Victory. Now, Dagon's hordes face obliteration!". Roared Draken, and without further words he charged into the fray of battle, cutting through the Dremora almost effortlessly.

Adonis grinned and howled a simple word.

"Kill!"

Adonis was sprinting fiercely towards the Dremora ranks. Undead were following behind, swinging their weapons, or in some cases their bare hands, bringing down the Dremora before them with ease. A large blue Dremora stood in his way Adonis put on a burst of speed and sprinted straight at him. The Dremora met his charge admirably, and with honour. He held a long heavy claymore in both hands. He held the sword high and stabbed downwards fast, and with power towards Adonis. Adonis leapt up at the last moment, the sword striking the hard earth. Before his opponent could bring up his sword again Adonis brought his feet down. His right slammed into his enemies chest, and the other onto the hilt of his sword. The Dremora dropped to the ground, his weapon carelessly strewn aside. Adonis leapt upon him without hesitation. He held his daggers high above his head, and then brought them down swiftly. Hitting his mark, his knives embedded themselves in the Dremoras eyes.

As the skeletons and Undead ran forth, she did as well, accompanying them. Two children were up ahead, the women began screaming in fear and running away. She released the arrows, the silver blades flying through the air nailing both pesky little Dremora children. As the females and the males fled, few stayed back to fight off the invading force. Using the paralyse poisons she made, she was able to get them to stick in one place. Raven poured them in four of her arrows, then she began firing. A skilled assassin, trained for generations in the deadly arts.

The valiant Dremora that decided to fight back in a misplaced sense of honor, were no match for the skeletons and the invading force. While they did break a few bones and decapitated a few zombies, precisely the ones that weren't already headless, they were still being led back. None of them had time to armor up and get ready. It was a surprise attack, the odds were against them. Raven shot down the woman carrying a dremora child. The woman did not die at first, she was paralysed, falling face first to the ashy ground, the child escaping her hands and falling as well. Draken approached the woman, sparing a simple 'thanks' to Raven. He raised his katana and stabbed at the female in the ground.

The Dremora child scurried away, tripping over the rocks that lay beneath his little feet. The towering man, an Imperial, a Undead Imperial, stood above him, walking slowly towards him menacingly. He stepped forth, stomping over the rocks, the Dremora child cowered and hid his head away. Draken clenched his sword tightly and raised his boot, stepping over the child's head, pinning it against the stone until he heard a sickening crack!. More woman ran and some Dremora males also escaped. Raven paralyzed them, and Draken finished them off.

"No survivors!" Raven shouted in a boastful fashion.

"No mercy!" Draken responded.

Varnard, darted past a dremora with a claymore, whispering the words of a spell as he slipped by. It was a chameleon spell, and in this state of confusion he was as good as invisible. He stopped holding the spell once he had slipped past the servant of the daedra, and viciously stabbed him in the back, howling with delight as he yanked his dagger free from it's back.

He looked to his right. He froze. A dangerous thing to do in the heat of battle, but he did so none the less. The vampire that he and Adonis had tackled in Skingrad, was mercilessly slaughtering the daedra, but that was not something he had qualms about. What he found distaste in was the brutal murder of a child. Children of demons and unholy creatures perhaps, but children none the less. Something clicked in the back of his mind. Like a switch being pulled. The seeds of betrayal were sewn. How could he serve a side which slaughtered children? He shook his head. He would come to these questions later. For now, he must fight, and save the children.

He spotted a group of children, hovering by a door. About twelve of them. He shouted at them. Then he realised they would not understand him. They spoke a language unknown to him, daedric. He gestured with his arms. To his right was a cave. It was emblazoned with the symbol of Oblivion. He figured their best shot would be in there. He pointed at the cave with his daggers. They hesitated, and he jerked his arm more violently. They scarpered, about ten of them following his advice and rushing for the cave.

Adonis stood and took in the state of play. The Dremora were in a state of disarray. Few were armed, or armoured. Those that were were being overwhelmed by the sheer number of their enemies. Adonis swerved violently to the side as a skeleton stumbled past, groping at it's headless neck.

Draken had no time to stop Varnard as he aided the women and the children. It was disgusting, repulsive. From the start Draken always found Varnard to be a little different, axiomatic.

He turned angrily to Varnard as the last of the woman around him where being occupied by the skeletons. Draken grabbed a single skull that lay from the remains of the Lich. He raised it with his hand and threw it straight at Varnard.

Adonis then ducked as the head of the skeleton he had seen moments before, followed streaking past him, straight towards Rainor. Adonis looked for the source of the attacker, realising it was the vampire Draken.

"You have better have the will to kill older ones this time. This is another world, full of deadly enemies, if you want to survive it you better learn to kill them off!" Draken yelled to Varnard, walking away.

Adonis watched as the two servants of Azmodæum exchange petty insults.

"Now is a time of battle, not words. Channel your anger to your blades, and direct them somewhere else where the may be of use." Adonis roared at the bickering pair.

Draken looked at Adonis. He had respect for the dunmer, and knew his words rang true. Their fight was with the daedra. He turned and headed towards the tower. The other female vampire had done so also. Adonis followed, beckoning at Varnard to follow.

Adonis came to the door leading into the tower. It was made of blood red metal. It was jagged and uneven. Yet it seemed perfectly shaped for where it lead. Adonis looked at the female vampire. He had watched her during the battle. She was a skilled warrior to be sure. Not to mention her seductive beauty had probably won her many battles.

"You are strong." Adonis said simply.

The battle was going wonderfully, as wonderfully as any of the group would have expected. While the liutenants cut swaths of Dremora down, Azmodæum stood still where he had summoned the bolt of energy. His eyes were closed, and he was focusing on the Varla stones. They started to dim, then an inky substance began spinning around within its faceted surface, before finally they each turned a dark crimson in his hands. With a scream, his eyes opened, and the stones fused into the palms of his hands and disappeared, red lightning arcing through the Warlock's arms.

He began striding forward through the carnage, watching as the skeletons slaughtered the Dremora civilians by the hundreds, his trusted agents carving through them even more efficiently. They made a path of destruction directly up to the base of the tower. The door was closed.

Azmodæum breathed in, the deepest breath he could muster, and screamed in a preternaturally loud voice up to the top of the tower. It was obvious that the language was Daedric, and an insult. The returning screams sounded even more steeped in chaos and evil than the Altmer's, as Mehrunes Dagon himself traded words with the Warlock.

Up at the top of the tower, Mehrunes Dagon was standing on a dangerous, unrailed balcony with Merthierry standing close beside. The Daedric Prince heard Azmodæum's voice calling up from the ground, and he became absolutely infuriated, screaming down at the ground so powerfully that massive chunks of spittle flew forth from his mouth. He looked angrily at Merthierry, cursed, and with a powerful swing of his arm, knocked him deftly from the balcony.

Down he plummeted, reeling from the terrible blow. He became visible to the group below, amassed by the door. With a cold look on his face, the Altmer sent a ball of violet magic hurling upwards, slowing Merthierry's descent. He shook his head.

Adonis laughed at this. Dagon's plan for Merthierrys death had been thwarted, and it must of been a sure pain to be humiliated by a mortal, even one as powerful as his master.

"That's not enough. I want those damned stones."

"YOU HAVE YOUR PAWN, MORTAL, BUT IT WILL DO YOU NO GOOD. I HAVE A BATTALION OF TROOPS MARCHING IN FROM RESERVE. YOUR CHANCES OF ESCAPE, OF EVER SEEING YOUR PATHETIC NIRN AGAIN, ARE SLIM."

Azmodæum tried the door with a simple unlock spell, but it backfired, sending electric waves up his arms and visibly shaking him. He cursed, then said, *"I know how to get inside. They're sending in massive waves of troops. Protect me while I channel this door. It will take a few minutes, and we are being quickly surrounded."*

The company looked around, noticing their skeleton army had become spread quite thin in the chaos. Arms of the undead force were halfway across the city, slaughtering young and old alike, but would do little good when it came to defending the master. On the horizon, in every direction where there wasn't an ocean of lava, the heads of marching Dremora could be seen in rank and file. Dagon had most definitely not been bluffing.

Azmodæum began channeling ancient magicks, focusing on Dagon's castle's giant Daedric Steel door. The mark of Oblivion was burned into its face, with magic shining off every inch of the stone.

Adonis did not answer his master, but instead looked around. He spotted a group of skeleton archers nearby. While the undead army was no longer unified, they were a sizable group. He rallied them to him.

"Hold the line, fire on my order."

The dremora drew closer, and the vampires adopted a defensive stance, one that he had never seen before. He supposed it must be older than he, one they had picked up centuries ago. He turned back towards the oncoming swarm of Daedra, he howled with an almost demonic glee.

"Volley!" He roared. The skeletons let loose a hail of arrows, a glorious shower of black death. The rush of projectiles smacked into the front line of the advancing Daedra forces. Many fell, and others were knocked back.

"Hit them again!" He howled. More fell to the rain of death. He sheathed his bow. Drew his daggers, and then they were upon them.

Chapter Thirty Three

Dancing With The Daedra

Adonis violently sliced off the fingers of his newest opponent, forcing him to lose his hold on his weapon. Adonis took advantage of the Dremoras temporary distraction, and made a series of quick, yet powerful jabs to the mans stomach. He tore through the daedric flesh, and opened up the demons gut. Adonis roared in delight, and then leapt back quickly, as his dying opponent made a final sweeping arc with a dagger, before falling dead. Adonis looked at his enemies lifeless hands. One of his daggers had been lost, kicked away by the many scuttling feet. But the other remained tightly in his grasp. Adonis swooped down and picked it up. It was made of Daedric metal. He slid into a strap on his leg. Saving it for later, when he would have time to study the blade.

Adonis ordered another volley, and another group of Dremora fell, those behind cursing as they tripped over their allies thrashing arms and legs. Adonis watched as one of the skeletons with a sword and shield was overrun, two Daedroths tackling it and bringing it to the ground. This fight could not go on much longer.

Then Adonis remembered Merthierry. He would be useful in a fight such as this. Adonis scoured the heads of his allies searching for the armoured servant of Azmodæum. He rolled to the side as a Dremora attempted to bring him down, a skeleton behind neatly finished him before he could cause anymore damage.

The encroaching first wave had been pushed back, delaying the second wave from moving in any further. The right door began to crack, and then opened enough for a person to get through, single-file. Azmodæum seemed pleased with this development, ceasing his channeling. He then turned, looking out over the wide, blackened horizon of Dremora warrior-class troops. For a long, awkward moment, all was still. Then, the already dark sky seemed a shade dimmer. Arrows were flying at the group in every direction, a mass so great that they would surely decimate the entire group. The Warlock screamed for his lieutenants to get inside, and his hands became covered in white-hot fire. As the biting end of the arrows began to plummet in towards the group, and as Adonis helped Merthierry to his feet, Azmodæum let loose the flaming magick. A pillar of flame tore up from the group, scorching the arrows before they had a chance to reach their marks. In the second's reprieve this gave them, they began slipping their bodies one-by-one through the crack in the heavy door. The Dremora outside could be heard giving a battle charge, a rallying cry to retake their own capital.

Inside, the first room was vast and cavernous, with a similar design to the Sigil Towers, yet much larger and with more doors, hallways, and rooms. The first room, however, was strangely empty.

"They're going to try and ambush us at every chance they get. And the Dremora in here are going to be Markynaz and Valkynaz classes. Any one of them can kill any one of us if left to their own devices. We will have to move, and fight, as a unit. We're headed towards the top."

Outside, the door began to slam shut as the wave of warriors splashed against it like water against a cliff-face. The fiercer warriors outside screamed curses and threats inside to the intruders. Their concepts of love and loss were far different from the mortals', but their rage sounded identical. These mortal intruders had just sneak-attacked their wives, destroyed their homes, left them with nothing to return to while they were out doing their unholy Lord's bidding, preparing for the Grand Invasion that their master had promised them.

The Altmer had a proud look on his face. Conquest was in his nature, but it had been so long, centuries it seemed, of just theorizing and planning and preparing. And now, as never before, a Mortal had punished a Daedra Lord.

Azmodæum nodded towards the winding staircase, signalling for one of his warriors to take up the lead.

Merthierry moved out immediately to Azmodæum's signals, being the shield and the flaming torch that lit the way before them.

Raven was quiet. Now that the group was settled, she had a better chance to study their behavior, to see what their reactions are, to use their own nature against them to serve her will, if necessary.

The ones that Raven did not trust were Varnard and Vile. While Vile did display some cold and mean manner, the one she distrusted most of all Varnard who aided the enemy..what could stop him from doing it again?. Everyone had a story and everyone

had a different reason why they served under a powerful ruler. She had to keep weary and keep watch. The group began walking.

The group moved as one, a mass of bodies walking confidently through the dark hallways. Motion could be heard on the other side of nearly every wall. Danger lurked around absolutely every corner, it seemed, but the Dremora themselves seemed to be making themselves scarce. The group moved unabated through the first half of the citadel, marveling at its architecture.

Azmodæum had his face set in a grim, nearly emotionless frown. Adrenaline pumped through everyone else's veins, but the Altmer seemed as if every movement had been calculated, as if being in the heart of the Prince of Chaos' world was wholly unfrightening. Outside, down below the group now, the heavy door could be heard being slammed against by wave after wave of Dremora footsoldiers, struggling frantically to regain control of their Capital City and their unpredictable master's tower. It would buy them a few minutes, at least.

The group found themselves before a large, closed chamber door, serrated at the center and wrought of black. The Altmer nodded for Merthierry to open it, and as soon as it was opened, Atronaches began pelting the door with balls of explosive elemental energy. Merthierry was knocked back by the surprise of the first one, but luckily, it was a fire-based attack and acted upon the Dunmer like a drop of water hitting the ocean. It did manage to drive the group back through the door, where they stood waiting for the first outpouring of Daedra into the hallway. It did not come; Clearly the daedra were planning to hold down the remainder of the Palace whatever the cost.

"What we're after must be close. We must find a way through." Azmodæum commanded.

Adonis nodded, and fitted an arrow to the string. He whirled around the corner and fired. He darted back, and a glancing fireball hit his shoulder. The arrow had been caught in one of the many projectiles that had been hurled at him. Adonis thought that if he tried with more than one arrow he may be able to penetrate the volley of magic thrown at them.

He notched two arrows to the string, making sure that arrows were the correct distance apart, he once more whirled around the corner, loosing off both arrows. He heard a screech. He must have hit one of the beasts. A blue ball of magic struck him in the chest. He dropped back to the corridor, cursing as ice began to work its way into his blood, chilling him. Luckily it had only been a glancing blow, and a weak one at that.

Varnand grinned.

"My turn."

He rolled out of the safety of the doorway, and swiped up a pile of firesalts near the door. Clearly the atronach Adonis had hit had been nearer than they had imagined. He grabbed a spare dagger that he carried, and brushed it against Merthierry's armour, flames catching onto the blade, he tossed the firesalts into the air, and hurled the fiery dagger at them. He dived to the side, as the room before them became an inferno.

The group slipped through the doorway again, less cautiously this time, and made a quick check of all the piles of elemental salt to ensure that there was no spark of life left within them. The next door led to another staircase, which brought them up into a grand chamber. It was not Mehrunes Dagon's throne room, but a smaller, differently decorated one. At the end of the hall were two tall pedestals holding the Varla stones, already darkened by Dremora Magic. Between the two pedestals, a tall Xivilai stood, holding a

claymore in each hand, dressed in full regalia of armor. Behind the Xivilai, a Dremora sat, in full heavy armor, with a bemused look on his face. It was apparent that the group would have to fight both of these demons in order to retrieve the stones.

Azmodæum looked lustfully after the two Darkened Varla Stones, but then realized with horror that the Dremora Lord held the power of those very stones. He sent a burst of Cold across the hall, and the Dremora formed a shield for just long enough to disperse the cold harmlessly. The Altmer cursed, and then sent magical fire, a roaring inferno shot out from his outstretched hands, dancing along the floor of the well-appointed Daedric Throne Room, and blasted into the Xivilai, once again harmlessly. It would have to be a physical battle for the Stones, and these ancient demons were far more powerful than any of the Mundane intruders from Balindrium.

The Dremora clapped his gauntleted hands in mockery, and stood. *"Welcome to the Hall of Magas Volar. I am Dregas Volar, and I will be ending your pathetic lives in the very near future. Tell me, Mortals, do you know what happens when you die?"* he said, with a terrible croaking voice. He reached down to the side of his throne, wielding the Daedric Crescent.

"It's not the same as when we die, you know. You die forever. Forever and ever! You struggle and scream and cry and then you die forever. Prepare for it."

And the Xivilai charged the group, swinging both Claymores wildly.

Adonis watched as his master attempted to attack their enemies through magical means. Varying forms of magicka springing from his fingertips. Streaking towards the daedric guards. They laughed, and boasted of their superiority in this realm. They charged at the group from Balindrium.

Holding two heavy claymores in each hand, swinging them with ease. They crossed the room in a matter of seconds. Adonis met their oncoming charge. He ducked under the blade of one enemy, to be met with the next, he jabbed out with his dagger, forcing his enemy to defend himself. He then aimed a kick behind him, but the first Xivilai was faster, and brought both claymores swiftly towards Adonis's hip. Adonis rolled in the only direction available, into the other Daedra. He was met by the hilt of the blade, slamming into his shoulder, he roared in pain, the hilt was heavy and piece of jagged daedric metal dug in.

He channeled the fury into rage, and let of a flurry of attacks. But the Xivilai lifted him up, and slammed him into the ground. The wind was driven out of him, but he managed to bring a foot up to his enemies head. Pushing him back while he rolled into the cover of his allies.

Varnand pulled out four daggers, one being Hellfire, two more being Iron ones that he took from dead skeletons, then the last one being a daedric dagger he has stolen from a dead churl. Holding two in each hand, he attempted to jab them into his opponents thigh. He was suprised when the xilavi brought down his claymores, pushing away the daggers with ease, then held them close to Varnands head, attempting to decapitate him.

He ducked just in time, causing the claymores to hit eachother and spark. Varnand attempted to jump up behind and stab his adversary, only to be hit hard in the back by a powerful dremora fire spell, causing him to collapse down to the ground.

Azmodæum moved, stepping forward and using his own heightened powers to create a protective shield in front of himself, repelling the Xivilai's second charge towards Adonis and Varnard. The shield, though made of Aethereal magic, visibly cracked from the beast's attack, and Azmodæum's mind seemed to be affected by the strike. His magical

energy lessened, faded for just a moment, and the Xivilai took advantage of the fact by making a return slash at the Warlock. The Shield became opaque again just in time, and shattered in place of the Altmer's skull. He was knocked back, barely missing Adonis as he rolled behind. The Warlock looked at Adonis with a weak fire glowing in his eyes, and telepathically and unmistakably commanded, *"THE STONES."*

Lifting up his head, he saw the armored dremora near the varla stones smiling. Smoke emanated from the spot on his palms where he had fired the spell from. Looking up, Varnand saw a heavy daedric claymore, preparing to fall down and crush his skull. He kicked up at the Daedra, and his aim was diverted. The sword smashed into the pillar, collapsing it, and burying Varnand under the rubble.

The Xivilai immediately stepped forward into the space where Azmodæum had stood and took two huge sweeping strikes, starting from the center of his chest and swinging his claymores outwards. The huge creature stood nearly twelve feet tall, and his blades threatened the necks of both Vampires, though their speed did not match that of the furious strikes he had used to put their master on the ground. The swings were still fast enough, however, that one who was not preternaturally fast might have lost their heads.

The twelve-foot Xivilai now faced Adonis, Raven and Draken, as well as the master. Whatever this beast weakness was, the best odds were to fight him in range. Draken looked at Raven, but noticed she was out of arrows. Raven returned a frown to Draken and Vile, her hands lighting up with blue energy and sparks.

The Xivilai roared and swung its claymore again, Raven stood there, waiting for the beast to come to her. Her hands waved back and forth, creating a blue arc in the air and finally, the ground went blue when Raven unleashed her lightning towards the Xivilai. *"Ha!"* She barked as the lightning flew towards it. Draken smiled and charged as well, while the beast aimed for Raven, Draken also used his destruction spells. The Immolating blast. With a quick, fearsome inhale of the breath, Draken used both of his hands to send a surging flame towards the Xivilai, only to waste all of his magicka at the moment.

The Xivilai charged at Raven, barely getting damaged from the lightning. Raven's red eyes widened in sheer surprise as the beast was closer than she expected. It rammed into her with all of his might, his strength, his power. Its horns had pierced her skin and send her sprawling to the ground, she slid and smacked against a chair in the corner. The Xivilai avoided Draken's fire blast with a quick move of his footing that made the male Vampire growl. Draken looked at Adonis and nodded. He turned back to the Daedra.

"Bring it on beastie, you can't kill me, I'm already dead." He grinned, and bared his fangs, rushing to engage him in combat, while Adonis made the final move of the battle. He rushed to the wall. Pushing himself off of it. He landed on the Xivilai's shoulder, and pushed outward. But it was ready for him. It reached up with one massive arm, and grabbed his leg. It threw him across the room with ease, and he smacked into the throne. He yelled in pain, as his shoulder was forced from its socket, and dislocated. But he wasn't down or out yet, not by a long shot. He reached up with his good arm, and snatched the varla stones. He tossed the stones to his master.

Before entering the chamber Merthierry had put on his robe to render himself insignificant. He had sensed a great evil awaited them there, and he planned to be the last to fight it whatever it was. He informed the group not of his sensing; it would have proven useless, if not unwise, to lower morale of the brave fellowship. Finishing the stairs, the group was immediately presented to an open chamber, with seated in a throne at its far end an important Dremora. Merthierry walked to a side so not to be involved in the fight that was coming.

Azmodæum did not hesitate at the sighting of the Dremora and sent forth some of his most powerful spells, whom were shielded with seeming ease. The Dremora applauded the attempts of the wizard and progress of the band with ridicule, then rose from its spiky throne and began speaking. He welcomed the lot to the hall of *Magas Volar*. And he was *Dregas Volar*. When it had then finished some dull words about death it charged selectively towards an idling warrior.

The fight took long, but surprisingly no fatal injuries were caused by the dualwielding berserker. Numerous times had Merthierry needed to evade a Claymore, but was luckily to his plan not involved in combat. After some time the Dremora got noticeably slower and seemed to be getting heavily fatigued by his efforts to slay the warriors. Merthierry awaited his turn patiently in the shade of a pillar collapsing as the fight continued. Then, in a slight moment of inattention from Dregas Volar, Merthierry emerged from his spot and struck it at its back with his Warhammer. The big Dremora was rammed to the ground, disarmed of his huge blades, and disabled for a small moment.

The Xivilai, having been disarmed of his claymores, became enraged and leapt forward at Merthierry with his bare hands twisted into terrible claws. He was ancient, and powerful, strong enough that he would retain his consciousness and personality beyond death. And thus, he had no fear of death. The Warhammer shined in the black orbs of his eyes, reflected in its glory. At the same time, Draken slid sideways on his feet in a way that only a Bosmer or a vampire could accomplish, his katana braced by both of his pale hands and cocked in the direction in which he slid. In the same moment, Adonis reached the stones and sent them flying off towards his Master.

As the tall beast moved to try and block Merthierry's heavy hammer strike, Draken's katana slid between his ribs, freezing him in place as the Warhammer smashed his skull in. His face made a gurgling sound as he tried desperately to scream. Utterly destroyed, the beast slumped to the side, as Azmodæum grasped the stones in mid-air. He turned, a deliberate look on his face, and looked at the pile of rubble which held the ancient Dremora Lord and his servant. As he looked upon it, the Dremora burst forth from the rubble, holding Varnard's head in one hand, his body swinging half-lifeless from it still. The Breton was in extremely rough shape, and his life was near forfeit at this point. Azmodæum's eyes narrowed into slits, and he channeled the power within the stones, calling forth violet energy.

"FOOLS! YOU WILL NOT ESCAPE THAT EASILY! THIS IS MY REALM! I MAKE THE RULES, MORTALS! YOU CANNOT RECALL YOURSELF TO NIRN!"

Continuing the spell, Azmodæum smiled, his face contorting to do so, his smile sending chills down the spines of the mortals in view. He called out, in a similarly booming voice,

"Be quiet, weak old God."

And with that, the entire group was shifted, not into Balindrium, but into another part of the Deadlands. Everyone felt a twinge of panic as they felt that Dagon's words had rung true. But before them was a black-and-orange sphere, levitating in a pillar of flame. Azmodæum gripped it, and the world fell into pieces around them.

The familiar, unfriendly feeling of being sucked through the void overwhelmed the group. Oblivion had shattered around them, reality breaking like fragile glass. The only traveller who hadn't witnessed the shift was the unconscious Varnard, but he too was shifted into his proper reality when the time came. Time seemed to be nothing more than a concept, an idea, for however long the party spiralled through the endless nothing, the body of Sithis which separates Nirn from Oblivion.

When Azmodæum's verdant eyes opened, he beheld the multifaceted sky of a Dawning Hour in Tamriel. The wind blew harshly, and the sun was quite far to the southeast. Snow howled through over the permafrost where the group now stood, Varnard laying face-down in the snow.

"Skyrim." was all the Altmer said.

Chapter Thirty Four

Skyrim

Behind them, a great cracking noise shot out and rang across the plain. They whirled around to see a giant Oblivion gate, its red fires smoldering out, and its black daedric steel breaking and falling to pieces on the ground. The very earth itself was scorched by the heat that the unholy portal had emanated. Indeed, the very shock of the temperature change was jarring to the mortals that travelled with Azmodæum.

Far to the Southwest, barely visible against the fading violet of the dying night sky, Balindrium loomed tall. The Nordic city of Falkreath was directly in the way of the Citadel.

Azmodæum looked at all of his subjects, and gestured at Varnard. *"Someone see if he's alive."* He said as he began scouting ahead.

The Sun began to truly show its face, threatening Raven and Draken with its harmful fire.

Draken had thought of biting him, but what would that do? Maybe Azmodæum needed him now instead of three days later. Draken searched for his pockets and belt compartments but found nothing of use, then he remembered Raven looting a few health potions for her.

Draken looked at his sister. *"Rav, you have potions"*

Raven snorted her contempt. *"I need them"*

"He needs it more than you do" Draken countered.

Raven tilted her head only slightly, as if she had not heard him correctly. Was he really wanting to help the man who caused far too much trouble?..Raven tried to study him, and felt it was for a completely selfish reason that he wanted to help Varnard. Raven snatched the minor health potion and tossed it to the ground where Varnard was.

"Drink up, your no good to us dead" She spat, looking at the sky again. Everything went from bad to worse.

"Not what I would've done." Adonis coldy remarks.

"See, now the Dunmer votes against it..so should you" Raven told Draken, who rolled his eyes to her and started to twitch a bit, due to the sun's rays begin to slowly burn his flesh.

"I-.." he paused. *"It is not our decision. If Azmodæum needs him dead, then we wait for his command"*

Both Vampires secretly hoping the Altmer would vote against Varnard and allow Draken and Raven to feed on him..if not, then skill is all they had to survive.

As the group pulled themselves up and dusted the black charred ash and soot from their clothes, they got a better look at the nearby city of Falkreath. Many lay dead or dying in the streets. Buildings still smoldered from recent fires. Mehrunes Dagon's invasion had begun, and the Balindrium party had unwittingly cut off the flow of troops from the Deadlands into Falkreath.

"We haven't the time to rush in and step on these dying Nords. They are all doomed anyway. We must hurry to the castle. Our enemies cannot catch us out here on this killing field, or we will be as doomed as these pathetic humans ourselves." Azmodæum stated, ignoring the petty argument. He would not show compassion to the wretch Rainor, but nor would he sacrifice him for an act that had not affected his plans at all.

Adonis followed silently. His master had commanded that they press on. Thought's swirled around his mind. He was not pleased. The breton had betrayed them. He had attacked their own troops, willingly, and what is more, is that he did it to protect the enemy. His hands twitched.

What is more Adonis was confused. Why had the vampires helped Rainor? He offered no tactical advantage, and he had got himself into the mess he was in. Therefore he should have to face the consequences of his actions.

Dark thoughts continued to build in Adonis's mind. He had left Varnands life intact. But he did not intend to do so again. Adonis would be watching. Waiting for him to slip up. If he even thinks of any other acts of betrayal, then he would be in far more pain than he had been when he was lying in the snow.

Varnand followed closely. He was silent. He could feel the potion working it's magic. His wounds were closing, the pain was dulling, he felt the flow of blood halting. But he was not happy. The scenes of carnage he could see from their lofty perch above Falkreath gave him far less pleasure than they once would have. If anything, he disliked them. He frowned. This wasn't him. He loved death. At least, that is what he was now trying to convince himself.

Raven bared her sharp teeth and licked the smooth countours Of her fangs, eyeing the dying Nords and the injured ones. Ready to leap forward, knowing they were all doomed anyways, she charged, until Draken pulled her shoulder back and held her. Then the Altmer had spoken. Raven lowered her head in disapointment. But she did agree to one thing, they had to reach Balindrium as quick as possible.

"Disgusting, wouldn't feed on them if they were the last warm blooded humans on Nirn"
Draken spat at the carnage.

"Yes, you would" Raven teased. *"Remember that one time that you fed on that old beggar lady down that creek in Hammerfell?"*

Draken wasted a few seconds and then smiled. "At least she was near a creek" He countered.

Draken looked at the injured Breton and smiled, midly...he already had an idea of what would happen next, but he said nothing. If anyone was going to betray the master, they were bold to sign the death warrant...it wouldn't apply for Raven and Draken, since their death sentence is insignificant.

As the group pressed on closer, passing Falkreath's smoldering remains and trudging through the deep snow, the situation at Balindrium began to be clear. On the ramparts, on the mountains, even on the ground, there were explosions, bursts of magic. The castle itself remained unharmed, but the implications were clear: It would be a full day of travel and Balindrium was at war.

Azmodæum cursed loudly, his magicka reserves drained. He stomped through the snow as if each flake were insulting him.

"Teleporting all of us to the top of that Sigil Tower has left me absolutely worthless." He said aloud angrily as his feet stamped down into the whirling white powder. *"We need a faster way to get to the tower. From there we can deal with whatever trifling matter has arisen in my absence."*

He glanced back at his subjects, realizing that none of them were particularly magical in nature, and sighed impatiently as the group pressed forward over the frozen plains.

Merthierry could not help thinking they were a weird party, unstable in relation and full of personal conflicts. They weren't much of a team. Yet though each one of the men were skilled fighters, and the trades as a collective formed an effective squad none the less.

The snow around Mertheirry melted, Adonis clutched his daggers as if something or someone was about to do something..disgraceful. Raven marched forward as if she was still going to battle, Azmodæum cursed loudly and impatiently complained. Now something had happened, since the Altmer mentioned a "Trifling matter that has risen in my absence".

Draken looked to Varnand, and grinned.

"You seem to be regaining your health quicker than I expected. This is good." he said in a sarcastic tone.

His red eyes ran across the dark blade and studies the black hilt that bore the red inscriptions *Death to the living* and some other words that were covered by the snow.

"This weapon is as old as I am. For over four hundred centuries, I guided it, and it brought me victory and power. The countless enemies I have slain with this weapon.." He raised his voice and his head, as if he was gazing on the sky.

"The first lives I took with this sword, the first blood I have spilled and in some cases, drank" he snickered.

"Were traitors".

"Interesting thing about treachery, is that no matter how different forms of betrayal there is, it always starts somewhere..and that beginning is the mind." Draken swung his sword back and forth, cutting the air and the snowflakes.

"The only way to stop a traitor...is by cutting off its head".

Raven let out a sinister giggle as she kept on walking. Draken sighed, flicking off the snow off of his shoulder and black armor. Raven looked up in the white sky and glimpsed the magnificent Balindrium. Raven couldn't lie, she missed her lair. Dark, macabre and creepy..she lived blissfully in death. There were many times where she enjoyed other activities besides fighting and killing. Slumbering in a nice cozy Coffin, or reading and writing a journal on a cold comfortable stone slab. Yes, she missed it all. The torches that decorate the dark halls are kept lit, and they symbolize the beacon to all the children of the night. There are many other creatures of darkness in the world and Raven was always looking for new servants, as the Altmer was.

"After this comes to an end, you all may visit me. Come, be our guests...I trust you're presence will be much more admirable than the others. For years peasants and self proclaimed heroes have searched and tried in vain to destroy me. They were not treated as delicately as you." Draken said mainly to Adonis Vile rather than Varnard. he was also speaking to Merthierry, but the Dunmer was always silent and rather grumpy, like Draken, but he was still always uptight. SO Draken kept silent about him.

Raven smiled, butting in the boring conversation if invitation. "You will see some of my statues. Perfectly charming...traitors..most of them. Sentenced to spend eternity as trophies to my grandeur. Or crumble as their bones turn into the dust that fuels my torches. As you see, everyone is useful in the end" Raven said bitterly. Gazing at Balindrium again, she was able to see the strange magical bolts that were fired at each other. She supposed this was what the Almtier was talking about.

"Remarkable" Raven whispered.

The large impenetrable fortress was breached and Raven was dying to know what was going on. Draken looked over at Adonis Vile and decided to speak to him to kill the time as they traveled to Balindrium. The trip was boring and unproductive, it will all pay off when they return to Balindrium.

As the battle raged on in Balindrium, the group walked below the mountains. Looking up at the battle far off, Draken glanced at Vile. *"A pity our moment of triumph is being spoiled over a little thing like an invasion"*

Azmodæum came to an abrupt halt. He turned, with the usual flourish, and faced his subjects. He sized them up, one after the other, and smiled, nodding. Pointing at

Merthierry with one hand and Draken with the other, he beckoned the two to approach him. A gleam of intrigue flashed from his verdant eyes. When the lieutenants came close, he spoke, *"Leave your weapons."*

Merthierry dropped the heavy hammer to the ground with a thud at once and stepped close to his master.

All sorts of thoughts ran across Drakens mind, did the Altmer want to kill him? Bestow him power? Or was he simply as paranoid as the damnation that live under the haunted lakes..so paranoid that he has to keep weary of his fellow servants.

Draken grabbed his katana from his back and tossed it to Raven, who caught it and held it firmly in her cold hands. Draken removed his daggers and also gave it to her. Both shared a look that only brother & sister would know, before Draken walked towards his master.

"Yes, my lord. What is it that you wish to be done?" Draken asked, slightly bowing his head.

His hands twitching and fingers moving rather quicker as he prepared himself if anything would happen.

Standing this close to the Altmer, Draken could see the full effects of the twisted magicka on his master. His very veins pulsed a bright green lightly through his somewhat transparent grey skin, which did not have the texture of skin at all, but perhaps a rough granite or unpolished white marble. He did not look too different at all from an Altmer vampire, though he most definitely was not of Draken and Raven's kind. The evil that coursed through the old Elf's veins was different, more sinister and less animalistic.

The Master spoke. His teeth were like porcelain, and the weak Skyrim sun glinted off of them. They, unlike his facial features, were perfectly straight and decidedly merlike.

"I want the two of you to use your strongest damaging spells on me, right now. Spare no magicka. Burn me, Freeze me, Do what you will. If you have poisoning spells, use them. I want you to, at the same time, expend every last iota of magicka within yourselves into my chest."

From behind his hot steel mask, Merthierry looked from his Master to Draken, and then back, outstretching his hand towards Azmodæum's chest.

From behind the group, Raven felt like smiling, the Altmer has gone mad. It is no surprise, as that is what happens to those who often make deals with Daedric Princes..at least he did not need to require two hundred "uncorrupted" soul in less than a month. Raven's dark heart began to beat faster.

The beautiful pale vampire watched what was going to unfold before her. Part of her wishes the Altmer vanquished, but the other part of her said it is not yet time. Now she would witness something different. Was Azmodaem really going to drain their magic and use it for himself, it sure appeared that way, but Raven did as she always did. Waiting and watching.

Draken looked at Merthierry. Then slowly, very slowly, held up his palms, and followed Merthierrys lead, allowing flame to streak from his fingertips.

At first, the group noticed the skin of the Altmer beginning to smoke up, and his face contorted into one of inexorable effort and agony combined. In a flash, however, his eyes burst open and his composure returned, but the flames continued to pour forth from his vassals' hands. His eyes were burning with a green flame that burned brighter

even than the orange heat that washed over him. Calling upon the Star that heralded his birth, Azmodæum channeled the hostile magicks into himself. His own magicka reserves, drained as they were, were enormous. Slowly but surely, he absorbed the magicka and made it his own.

When it was over, the smell of burning flesh and material was great, and even the winds of Skyrim could not blow it away fast enough to keep it from being chokingly thick for a long, hanging minute. Azmodæum was badly burned, but he once again shimmered with the Altmer pride and arcane energies that were so familiar around him.

He cast a spell, and the deformities caused by the burns were washed away in a bathing green cloud of smoke. He then turned to his followers.

"I'm going to teleport into the tower. I will return for you fully energized, and we will march to Balindrium and reclaim it properly."

Merthierry spoke up. *"Master, teleport us with you. We do not know what awaits us in the castle."*

The Warlock smiled. "I will not be noticed. I know more about the ins and outs of that place than any could hope to. Besides, I have need of you, all of you, right here."

Turning back towards the ruined city of Falkreath, Azmodæum gestured and spoke cruelly.

"Every one of those pathetic humans had better be dead by the time I get back. We will have need of an army, and I don't believe any of you are going to convince those humans to stand up and fight for us of their own accord."

And with a wicked grin, Azmodæum vanished in a burst of violet light.

Chapter Thirty Five

Falkreath Burns

Merthierry turned, picked up his warhammer, and began marching towards the smoldering remains of Falkreath.

The group set off towards the city, Adonis moved quietly, his robe covering his shroud. He stalked through the streets calmly. Guards were rushing to and fro, yelling, attempting to repair the chaos that Mehrunes Dagon's invasion had brought. Citizens ran by, some screaming, others carrying bags and hurrying for safety. Fleeing the city.

A woman stood in the street weeping. Adonis grinned, taking in the woman's despair and wringing as much pleasure from it as was possible. He walked up to the woman.

"It is all right. Come, I will protect you." Adonis spoke, with mock kindness.

The woman shambled over to Adonis, weeping. She reached out to hug him, to thank him for his kindness. Adonis let her come closer, to within arms reach, she reached out to embrace him, and he shot forward, and stuck a knife in between her ribs. She didn't even have time to cry out in surprise. Blood caught in her throat, and she crumpled to

the floor. He took in the pleasure of the kill and continued.

Adonis quietly made his way to the gate house, the gates were closed, and the guards were attempting to force back the crowds attempting to flee the city. The citizens looked worried, but none were prepared to move forward against the guards. Adonis moved through the crowd like a wraith. Inciting a riot. The people began to murmur angrily. Then shouting. They surged forward at the guards. Adonis slipped away, as carnage unfolded. He slipped into the gate house, and jammed the opening mechanism. None would escape.

Now he reached his final destination. He was loving every moment of this. Subterfuge and sabotage was one of his strong points. He stood in front of the guard house. A man stood by the door. He stepped forward as Adonis approached.

"Stand back citizen. The guard will hold the city together. Please leave." The guard said firmly.

"There is a riot at the gates! Please help! My family are in there!" Adonis cried.

The guard wavered, unsure of himself. Adonis took out a knife during the man's confusion, and stuck it between his eyes. He smiled to himself, and dragged the man into the cover of the bushes. He was soon dressed in the guard's uniform. He entered the guard house, and headed into a secluded room. The men there were yelling orders to one another, not noticing the guard who had just entered. He stood in the supply room, and pulled out a timber box. He struck it several times before a nearby sack caught fire. He left the building as it began to smell of smoke.

He wandered into the street, and dropped the guard's uniform. He had done enough. While there were plenty more guardhouses throughout the city, he was rather pleased with himself. He hurried away, in search of his allies.

Brilliant" Raven whispered at the sight of rioting individuals. Everywhere, the citizens began chanting and shouting in despair to flee the city, probably wanting to find refuge in a safer haven. Just then, another building caught on fire, it was madness!

"We will not even need to move a finger, they will kill each other off. The guards cannot maintain stability for long" Raven smiled.

Raven smiled. *"I think we already have the plan set out"*

Raven said pointing at Adonis who was walking with a very confident manner, he was dressed in a guard outfit. Draken looked at him and stared, Raven was the one to chase after him, Draken followed.

Raven stopped Adonis by clearing her throat. *"I admire the way you fight. Cunning, secretive, fast..unseen"* Raven said.

She was more than certain Adonis would not wear a guard's outfit for fashion.

"I would of thought of that." she teased.

Raven looked at Draken and Vile, then searched for Merthierry who was nowhere to be seen.

Draken looked at Adonis and approached him. *"What is your plan?"* he asked. Requesting an opinion.

"We must sow more confusion. I am dressed in a guard's uniform. It is the guards we wish to take the fall here. I shall kill a citizen in plain view. They will believe me a guard"

and this will send them over the edge. They will do all in their power to kill all guards. I can easily direct them to the main guard outpost. Then slip away." Adonis finished. He looked at the vampires, awaiting their response.

They agreed. Then split. Moving to slaughter those that lived here.

She stopped by the old shop where Varnard sat, the quiet Breton seemed distraught and..different, sitting motionless on the slightly burned chair. Varnard is brown, having semi-long natural hair. Brown eyes, small nose, very different from her indeed. Raven approached the breton male, snickering as she came closer. Anyones blood could chill just be feeling her presence.

"Those who do 'good' see the truth of their enslavement. Some of us recognize the chains that bind us and hold us back." Raven spoke.

Raven placed her pale hand at the table where he sat and spoke softly, listening to the screams outside.

"Chaos. That is all that is there. Dont you want to do something..good?..remove pain from their paths..one killing strike, a quick pain and they will not feel anymore." Raven said a bit louder.

She walked around the table with a malignant grace. *"I saw the way you helped our enemies earlier back in Dagon's realm. My brother informed me you also had left them to die."*

Raven barked out a laugh, turning her head and craning her neck to glare at him contemptuously. *"Morag Tong agent, am I right?. I know you're kind. I fought Morag Tong agents earlier when I was in the Dark Brotherhood. I always thought when one served Sithis and went into darkness, they would never go back to what they were before, but you never served Sithis, did you?"*

Raven leaned closer, baring her fangs, large canines dropping down from her mouth. *"You killed, you murdered. Why do you lack the courage to do so now?. Perhaps you are too weak to do anything, perhaps you have a misplaced sense of honor, a petty sentiment has gotten the best of you?. If you want to leave, you may go now. No one is stopping you."*

"I can already see the remorse you have for them. Azmodæum is gone...you have a chance to escape and leave it all behind this moment. All that awaits you if you stand with Azmodæum is death, not for yourself, but others as well." Raven told him, staring him down with her bright sulfuric eyes, opened wide with passion and dark ambition.

Chapter Thirty Six

Riot

A group of four or so guards are pushing back the crowd with their shields. Battering them away, not so hard that they would do serious harm. But enough to deter them from acting too rashly.

Adonis smirked. He would soon change that. He took in the distressed, and angry, calls of the crowd. He sighed in pleasure, enjoying their despair. He removed the Ebony bow from his back. And pulls an arrow from his quiver. He notches it to the bow. And Aims it squarely at the crowd. A woman turns and screams.

"Hey! What the hell are you doing! The guards are threa-" She begins to roar.

But she is cut short as an arrow embeds itself into her chest. She stares down at it dumbly, watching the blood steadily seep across her tunic. Slowly the woman slumps to the ground, and twitches a few more times. Before lying still. The crimson pool beneath

her slowly staining the cobblestones of the road beneath her a dark red.

The crowd stare dumbstruck at the woman. They murmur angrily, which turns to indecipherable shouts of pure undiluted rage. They all lurch forward for Adonis fear and anger taking over, as they push their way toward him and give chase. Some fall over, and are immediately trampled under the mob. Adonis sprints away.

A short while later Adonis ducks into an alley. Panting. He is not used to this running. It is not in his strong point. He had lost most of the crowd awhile ago. But a few had followed him for longer. None the less he thought he had lost them all now. Just then someone shouts.

"There he is. Kill the cur!" A burly man with a beard yells. Swinging a heavy club above his head.

Adonis scowls and draws himself up to his full height. Four men stand there. All are Nords, and of a similar build. One wields a club, and the other a jagged wooden board, the other two are holding battle axes. From the look of them iron. Adonis pulls out his knives, and waits for them to make the first move.

The man with the wooden board charges wildly at him. Adonis neatly sidesteps, and curses as the man wildly swings the board, and by pure luck, it comes close to his head, and he has to tilt his head to escape it. He steps forward so he is positioned behind his opponent, and buries his dagger into the mans back. He kicks out backwards, freeing his kinfe.

The other three advance as a group.

"Xhuth" Adonis swears under his breath. Three on one is a difficult situation. He has to think with a clear head.

These men are angry, he must use that to his advantage.

"What chance do you mangy animals believe you have? We have permission to slaughter you all. God. I have listened to you people whine for years. I relish the chance to cut you down." Adonis taunts them. They don't take the bait. It seems that the luck of his tongue had run out. Pure skill is what matters now.

The man with the club steps slightly ahead of the other two. He swings it precisely. It slams hard into Adonis's shoulder. He roars in pain as he feels the wood slam into the bone. But he is careful not to lose it. He merely repays the sentiment by lashing out at his weapon arm as he begins to draw it out of range. It tears through the flesh of his forearm. He screams in pain and drops the club. Adonis kicks it behind him. And delivers a blow to the mans jaw. He grunts and reels away.

The two with the axes come at him next. Adonis rolls away from them as both axes swing at him. He grunts in pain as he rolls onto his now injured shoulder. But the Nords do not relent. They swing, and swing. Not giving Adonis a chance to attack. One of the Nords feints the blow, an impressive feint with an axe, and twists his wrist to change it's direction. It cuts deep into Adonis's thigh. Adonis roars in pure agony, and buries his dagger in the Nords eye. But the other Nord continues his attack, now with a glint of fury in his eye. Adonis moves backwards and grabs the club. He lobs it at the man, and darts away, gritting his teeth against the pain. He mutters a few words, and his chameleon spell takes effect. The two Nords runs past, if he had been more in control then he would have noticed him. But in the confusion he missed him. Adonis breathes a sigh of relief. That was a close call.

Adonis roughly bandages his leg with a scrap of cloth, taken from the shirt of one of the

men he killed. He has his hood down on his robe, and he limps to the chapel. A frantic healer is there. Adonis quietly offers him a bag of gold, which quickly calms him down. The healer works magic on the wounds, which are soon no longer life threatening, yet no less painful. Adonis thanks him. Before sliding his knife in and out of his guts. He retakes his gold, and hurries out of the chapel.

He looks toward the main guard house. Citizens are battering it's doors, and eventually break the door down. Adonis smiles, and hobbles away wearily. Heading towards the place where the Breton had been sitting.

"Personally, I don't know what side I'm on anymore. Azmodeums cause seems everything but noble, but as does that of civilization and their 'gods'." Varnand sighed. Paused, and then continued, his voice stronger.

"Azmodeum lives only for the cause of evil, while the rest of Nirn works towards good. I refuse to kill those who do not deserve to die, but I will gladly slaughter those who attack me. It seems strange, ever since I killed that man, my doppleganger, back in the mountains, everything seems to have changed. I think differently, I see differently, I live differently." Varnand vented all the dark thoughts that had been twisting in his mind, like restrained serpents for many days now. Then he added, decisively.

"Sithis and Mephala no longer influence my decisions. You say we are all enslaved. That is not true. I am independent." Varnand said. *"I will not leave this cause. Yet."* He muttered after he finished.

Chapter Thirty Seven

The Champions of Cyrodiil

Augustus feels his head seem to become lighter. For an instant, he sees the familiar multifaceted walls of the realm he had been pulled into once. And in that realm, for only a split second, he saw the image of two Dunmer, a Khajiit, and an Argonian trudging over the grassland.

Augustus knew immediately that these were his allies, but he didn't know how he knew that. Then, as quickly as it came, the vision passed, and Augustus found himself in the exact same moment of time. The warm, gentle voice washed through his ears, but it only made a hushing sound, as if not to mention what had happened.

Augustus shook his head, freeing himself from all these thoughts, bringing him back to the the present. He and his friends, Silassen, Bethras and Mariane were all sitting around a fire. Mariane had used her skills as a cook and an alchemist to cook up a sort of stew. Augustus was much recovered since his return to Chorrol. Mariane had done her best to fix what she could immediately. After that, all they could do was wait. Healers had kept

an eye on him for days. Silassen and Bethras had not left his side. They had sat there, on stools, on the floor, whichever was available at the time. Mariane had stayed with Silassen when her duties allowed. Eventually Augustus had opened his eyes.

Since then the four of them had been inseparable. And now, late at night, they were sitting in the forest, just outside of Chorrol. Mariane was tucked up next to Silassen, and they all sat there talking, eating, whatever caught their fancy.

Tonight, they had chosen to sleep out, in the wilds. When the night truly took hold, the four said their goodnights, and separated. They had sleeping rolls, and were tucked up next to some felled logs. Mariane and Silassen were tucked up next to each other.

Just to the south, a terrible howl permeated the landscape. It was not the howl of the local wolves at all, but something otherworldly and cacophonous. The animals of the dusk all fell silent as it washed over the rolling hills.

A chilling howl ripped through the night air. It was enough to make a grown man cower in fear. Silassen bolted upright. He whipped out his sword, and scanned the clearing. The water from the pond which had looked so appealing during the day now looked murky and uninviting. The tree's leered over them, creaking in the dark.

"What in the divines was that?" Silassen asks. He stands protectively by Mariane, covering her from the front. Whatever had just awakened them, was not getting its hands, or its claws on her.

"That was no wolf." Mariane muttered. Visibly shaken. She mutters a few words, and a ring of light surrounds her. So that Silassen may see. The back of her remains dark, and un-noticed.

Bethras did not bolt up as Silassen had. He opened his eyes. He lay there for a moment, waiting, listening. He could hear nothing other than his friends hushed conversation. He stood, disentangling himself from the rough bedding he had been sleeping on. He tossed a fireball at the dying embers of their fire, which had flickered into nothingness hours ago.

Augustus awoke also, and edged near to Bethras. Nodding at him. He was tense. He grasped a hold of his sword, ready for whatever beast had made the unnatural howl to show itself.

For what seems like an eternity, the landscape was entirely silent. Before long, footfalls could be heard, but seemingly from every direction. The heavy footsteps on the grass came furious and rapid, and before the group had time to determine the source, it seemed the beast was upon them.

Josef's mind scrambled against his body, against his drives and urges, but he knew that just like yesterday it would mean nothing. When he was one with the beast, as he had taken to calling it, he was driven by a higher force, an Antlered spirit who often spoke to Josef by name. The spirit had laid out before him a very clear path on this night, and he followed the scent trail through the rolling foothills to the North.

His heart began to pump vigorously, adrenaline surging through every pore of his body. He ran fast through the countryside, his azure eyes scanning the horizon with hunger and determination.

Finally, he saw a peaceful little grove with a small pond nearby. Before him stood a group of people, pushed together by the darkness and confused and frightened from the demoralizing howl that he had uttered only moments ago. The scent of his prey filled his

nostrils and sent him into a fury. He felt his handhold on his consciousness fade, and existence became nothing more than a dream of animal ecstasy.

Silassen heard soft padding of footprints. Then the terrible sounds began to rapidly increase. They became like thunder, you could practically hear the vegetation screaming in protest as the heavy footfalls crushed them out of existence.

The silence was shattered into a thousand violent pieces. Marianne shrieked in terror as she was slammed down into the dirt face-first. Where she had stood, the edges of the light spell illuminated the source of the chaos. Standing over two meters tall, panting and growling, was a creature, wolfish in features but shaped like a heavily muscled man. Dark blond fur covered the beast's body, with patches of mottled red blended within. Blood brought out the red on his frontside, especially beneath his jaw, where saliva was beginning to hang in tendrils from his sharp, jagged teeth.

Roaring, the beast dug his foot-claws a bit into the soft part of Marianne's shoulder, tearing a bit of flesh away as he leapt from her back, directly at Bethras. The dim lighting made it hard to dodge effectively, and Bethras was knocked back, but not over. The wolf bounced back, a few feet outside of the sphere of light, and bayed angrily at the group, moving blindingly fast.

As Augustus looked into the beast's eyes furiously, he became temporarily lost in the deep, unending blue. Within the cascading blues of the Werewolf's eyes, Augustus saw the distinct guiding touch of the Colored Rooms. He fought furiously against a vision that was threatening to overtake his mind once again, at the most inopportune of times.

Silassen roared as the beast came fully into the light. For a moment his call caught in his throat, as he took in the terrifying shape of the beast. It was covered in a layer of dark blonde fur. Dark stains brown stains, which Silassen was sure would have once been red, were dotted around the creature's body. Red nectar, and droplets of drool were forming from the beast's large, yellow, and terrifying fangs.

The creature roared, it was deafening, as if war drums were being beaten right by their ears. It bent down and clasped his claws around her left shoulder, tearing a chunk loose. Mariane lay there, unknowing of the wound, as she lay unconscious.

Silassen roared in utter fury at the assault of his friends, and his lover. He leapt full force at the werewolf, using all his weight, and landing on the werewolves back in attempt to wrench him away from his friends.

Augustus's vision, for once, was perfectly lucid. He saw, for the first time, the Colored Rooms in their full glory. The edges, the definition, the glory of the absolutely vivid plane of existence was intoxicating and beautiful. In his vision, Meridia appeared before him in all her splendor. She was the picture of life's curiosities, of the bright and beautiful side of Padomay.

She spoke to Augustus without any words, and yet he gathered every piece of information she wanted him to have. She never said, but he *knew*, that the city was attacked by a Warlock who had troubled Meridia for centuries; an Altmer who was obsessed with the Daedra and with the Walking Dead.

The Altmer was the cause of all of their problems, he had attacked the city before with the Bal-Daedra. He had set the people of the city against each other to recover their losses, driving normal men to become bandits and thieves. It was HIS fault, Meridia insisted, that Marianne was attacked. It was HIS fault that Seris Marentius met his fate.

Upon hearing that name, Augustus felt himself bristle, his upset mind fighting the vision, desperate to get back to reality, where a very real problem was more urgently calling for his attention. But Meridia, stubborn in her liveliness, kept Rainor in her realm long enough to fill his ear a bit more. The Wolf would lead the way, Meridia insisted, and the wolf must too pay for its actions. And then Meridia shouted the name "Azmodæum" and everything went black.

The Werewolf howled, furiously shaking like a wet dog, trying to get Silassen from his shoulders. The Redguard's valiant struggle became a rodeo ride from hell, the beast making terrible noises and squealing, its powerful muscles rippling with every movement. Just as the beast was about to buck Silassen off, Bethras kicked out viciously, his boot smashing into the wolf's chin.

The werewolf reeled, if only for a second, and noted that Bethras's hand-to-hand combat could hurt him. He lunged at him, with the Redguard still on his back. The beast was so strong, so quick, that if it wasn't for Silassen's distracting weight on its back, it would have surely connected with the Breton. Instead, it was slowed down enough for Bethras to roll backwards out of the way.

Silassen clung onto the beast's broad shoulders for dear life. The world was violently swinging around, but he kept his grip, his hands gripping firmly on whatever he could get a hold of.

After the failed attack, the Werewolf once again turned its attention to the Redguard on his back. It somersaulted, pressing for a second all of its weight onto Silassen. The beast was massive, and Silassen found himself on his back on the ground, with the wind knocked out of him. Fury and adrenaline forced him back to his feet, in enough time to notice the Lycanthrope was bounding towards Marianne, who struggled to support her weight on her badly injured shoulder.

His head collided so hard with the ground beneath him that he felt as if he had been smacked with a warhammer. He was temporarily disorientated, his vision swam, and was blurred, for only a few seconds. He stood up, the adrenaline pulsing through his veins.

Silassen roared and sprinted towards the werewolf. He was howling as madly as the creature had been moments ago. But he was doing it out of fear for Mariane, and anger at the pain this creature had caused. He was moving at incredible speed, his natural gift, his years of learning how to best master athletics, and sheer desperation propelling him forward.

Mariane screamed silently inside as the wolf came upon her. She managed to shakily stand up and was immediately knocked down again by the beast. It was strong, and burly, and had her pinned down easily. She flicked her hand, survival instincts kicking in, and a bowl from the picnic flew over and hit the werewolf in the head, it wasn't much but it was a momentary distraction, and that is all that Silassen needed.

Silassen began to draw his sword, but knew that it would be useless against a creature such as this, he would have to rely on the fighting ability of his hands. Against a werewolf that wasn't much. But he had to save Mariane. No questions asked. He braced himself for the inevitable impact, and threw himself at the werewolf. His arms wrapped themselves above the Werewolf's midriff, bringing him down in a vicious tackle, pulling him off of Mariane. The werewolf howled, and bent his head towards Silassen's midriff, jaws agape.

Mariane lay unconscious nearby. The werewolf had left her a glancing blow as he had been knocked off, the last thing she had seen was Silassen diving at the Werewolf. She had slipped into the dark nothingness that was the realm of unconsciousness.

Silassen began beating the creature with his fists. His knuckles began to bruise slightly, but he was relentless, he knew the damned beast had to be driven off. Or it would do worse than wound, it would kill. Silassen was not about to let what happened to Seris, happen to Augustus, and was certainly not letting anything happen to Mariane.

Bethras saw Silassen trying to fight the wolf with his bare hands. He threw himself at the mighty creature in an attempt to disrupt its balance.

As Silassen and Bethras both went down to assault the lycanthrope, Augustus remained close by, ready to aid the others if needed. Closing one eye and pointing his finger forward, it would begin to have a small flame flicking from her fingers tip, the Breton was attempting to prepare, but not use quite yet, his most powerful flame spell. He knew he would only have enough strength to use it once for now, and if he needed to cast the spell he hoped his aim was keen.

The combined effort of the fighters seemed at first like it would not be enough. The mottled creature fought back violently, but Bethras and Silassen's new tactic of each distracting one of his arms was leaving him painfully susceptible, and he seemed aware of his odds.

When Augustus began to threaten him with fire, he reached both of his arms out, stretching wide, and closed his hands suddenly on the wrists of his attackers, clutching them painfully hard and swinging the pair towards each other, releasing their wrists before springing backwards in a primal acrobatic leap, emitting sounds of anger and frustration.

Silassen didn't even have time to utter a roar of surprise as he was swung towards Bethras as if he were a bag of flour instead of a fully grown man. Their bodies collided and the force of it sent Silassen sprawling. He was dazed, but fought to his feet, fiery determination in his eyes. He wavered, as his head swam, but he brought himself back under control.

He stood there sneering at the werewolf. He was injured, bruises dotted his body, and there were several small cuts. His bones and joints ached slightly, dulled by the sweet relief of the adrenaline pulsing through his veins. He was trying to stare the werewolf down, trying to show the beast that he would never give up. That it should run as fast as it could. Silassen knew that it wouldn't work. But it was worth a try.

Bethras fell onto the ground with great force after the creature had slammed him at his friend and rolled over several times before stopping.

He felt a soaring pain in his arm and wrist, and heard the wolf growl full of anger, just before his vision blurred. Staring at the mighty beast, he slipped into unconsciousness for a short moment.

As Bethras regained consciousness, he saw that Silassen had gotten back on his feet. He tried to get up, but when he moved his arm the pain rushed back in and he fell to the ground again.

He tried to pull himself up again, and succeeded this time. He tested his arm, causing his

vision to blur again, but at least it didn't seem to be broken.

He looked up, and saw Silassen standing there motionless, staring at the werewolf.

Elrohir, and Hroarez were sprinting as fast as their legs would carry them. Elrohir had a small pouch slung across his back. It was filled with stamina potions. He knew they would need them for tracking. But the two were silent now. Focused. They had heard Josefs howl, and they were nearing the sounds of more.

As the group breaks through the wilderness and into the gang of strangers fighting Josef there's a slight exchange of confused looks between them. Fighting hand to hand with a werewolf isn't exactly something you see every day.

Elrohir sees one of the strangers standing in front of Josef and quickly runs towards the two. He points Josef's spear at the cursed creature and once again mimics the battle stance Josef had used before.

"No one got hurt yet, eh?" Elrohir asks, but since there's no pool of bloods anywhere he figures the answer is negative, *"Josef!"* he shouts, *"Get out of here!"* he shouts again, well-knowing it probably won't work.

Josef turned, bounding towards Elrohir with a howl. In three giant leaps, the gap between the two had vanished. The beast angrily grabbed Elrohir, snatching him up and leaping away. The werewolf stood there, only a few meters Hroarez, holding Elrohir's feet almost a meter above the ground.

Being so close to the monster while it stood still, the Khajiit caught a rare chance to see what Josef became when night fell. The small beast that had bitten Josef before looked like a totally different breed. Josef stood much taller, with mottled patches of fur, and his eyes shone blue. The hair below his jaw stuck out straight and long, cutting an imposing figure as the face remained focused into Elrohir's.

Without words, the werewolf grabbed the spear from Elrohir's hand, held it out to the side, and dropped Elrohir to the ground without warning. Clutching the spear, the beast leapt backwards, howling, and bounded into the treeline. He scrambled Northwest, where Silassen heard the beast rustle bushes and clumsily knock the butt of the spear into the trees as he fled.

Silassen immediately darts over to Mariane. He's not the world's greatest healer, and his hands are shaking from the wounds they received after fighting the werewolf. Luckily he could see the slow, steady, rise and fall of her chest. But then his eyes flickered to the wound on her shoulder, it was horrible and savage. Anger grew within him. Anger directed purely at the now named werewolf, Josef.

He stormed over to the group, both of his friends, and strangers. He stands there for a moment. Then breaks into a flow of words.

"I am going after the werewolf. It must pay for the hurt it caused Mariane. And.." He paused for a moment, staring at the Khajiit. *"Olavs tap and Tack? Do you remember the fire man?"*

Silassen trailed off, a hint of a smile tracing his features. But it was soon swept away by his anger.

Tears of anger, were slowly trickling down his face. It was clear he was acting irrationally, but none the less he had a fiery determination in his eyes.

"The beast must pay." The single thought coursed through his mind like wildfire. He looked over at Augustus and Bethras, to see what their reactions would be.

Silassen stood there. Augustus joined him, standing by him. He had obviously heard him when he said he was going after the wolf, as soon after joining the group, he announced, in a weak tone, that he was coming with him.

"Then I'm coming with you."

Silassen looked at his friend, a mixture of sadness, and anger, in Silassens eyes. He can see his friend is in pain, and as a result the anger which was already rising within him, reached boiling point.

It took over, what little shadow of reluctance to follow the werewolf, due to the fact that the wolf is also a man, was brushed aside. His anger controlled his actions now, and it gave him strength.

"Please. If you value our friendship, you will take Mariane to Chorrol. She saved your life, repay the favour. Please." Silassen implored. *"I will leave a trail for you."*

Without another word, he tenses his legs and speeds off into the tree's. His powerful legs carrying him away at speed, his unusual quickness was faster than normal, yet he was easy to track, was fuelled by anger, and the single word pulsating through his mind, egging him, and his anger, on.

"Josef"

Chapter Thirty Eight

Balindrium Bound

Elrohir nodded respectfully, considering none of them really had much reason to risk their lives chasing down a werewolf. He turned around and walked towards the group.

"I am Bethras. Are you following the creature? If so, could my friend, Augustus, and I tag along?" Bethras asked boldly.

"My name is Elrohir, chaser of the werewolf, known to us as Josef by day. He's a friend of ours, cursed." he said to quickly summarize their situation,

"We're going to join your friend. We've been chasing him for days now, and have avoided any deaths or serious injury. We hope to keep it that way. Are you wounded? Can you run? We need to get going to catch up with the rest." He finished, hurriedly.

Mariane could hear muffled voices. But she could not pierce the veils of blackness that consumed her. The voices were growing fainter. Then a familiar one burst out at her, as if it was being screamed at her. The words meant little, and were still vague. But after a long time she placed the voice. It was that of Silassens friend Bethras. Inside she

smiled, but then she noticed that she could not hear Silassen's voice amongst the throng of conversation. She slipped away into a depressing vision of nothingness.

Bethras listened intently. The Dark elf currently speaking to him, seemed to be the leader of the group, or at least he was currently taking charge. As soon as the man began asking him questions, he nodded furiously in agreement.

"I can manage. I am ready when you are." Bethras replied in agreement. The thought of pursuing his friends was heavy in his mind.

He turned to Augustus.

"My friend. Return Mariane to Chorrol. Then head North, that is where we are headed, correct?" He spoke first to Augustus, then turned inquisitively to Elrohir.

Silassen was panting heavily. A drop of sweat dropped from his forehead, which was now glistening with beads of perspiration glinting in the light of the moon. He didn't care. He wouldn't stop until he'd caught the werewolf. He howled in anger, the sound eerily like the beast that he was pursuing through the dense wood. Then he was running again, his powerful legs propelling him forward, spurred on by the name pulsing through his brain.

Marianes dreams were filled with Silassen. She'd woken up in his arms, and he'd smiled and asked why she'd been so afraid when she'd woken. She was about to reply but his body rippled and he transformed into a wolf, and then the dream ended. Nothingness.

Silassen's breath was beginning to become raspy. His eyes had a yellowish tinge. But he took no such notice of such petty changes. All he cared about was revenge on the werewolf.

Mariane began muttering. Although she was unaware of it, she kept repeating the same words, muttering them as if through a fever, but in an eerie tone none the less. Something beyond the interpretation of man, of the wisest scholar, or the most knowledgeable priest, was working through Marianes mouth. The words coming out as a dreadful hiss. It was not her speaking. But the words were not uttered with malice. It was clearly a warning. Not a threat, or a mocking message from the daedric princes.

"He is dangerous." Mariane muttered darkly.

Bethras focused on the run. He needed to conserve his energy. There wasn't much chance of outpacing Silassen, and he knew it. But they had to catch him, before he reacted rashly or out of turn. He wondered how the Augustus and Mariane were. He hoped she was ok.

He could of sworn he heard her mutter something before she left. Bethras shook his head, and cleared thoughts of his friend from his mind. He had to focus on Silassen, a friend who needed his help now. He turned to the other two, panting slightly, he asked between heavy breaths.

"How do you..." Bethras paused for a breath, gulping in the cold night air, letting it fill his lungs. *"...know the werewolf? Are you it's friend or foe?"* Bethras finished.

Elrohir jumped over a fallen tree and tried to talk as loudly as his lungs would allow him to. *"Friends.. He's cursed..."* He panted and pulled down a web between two trees with

his hand. *"We're trying to get ... get hold of him at day!"* he said and looked ahead to see if they were closing in on the rest.

Josef felt his panting slow, felt his ribs breaking and adjusting, felt his wounds healing. He grabbed the spear with both hands, gripping it tightly. The only thing that could possibly save him now was to keep the spear. He had repeated that thought over and over again like a mantra the entire night, in his own voice, while the rest of his mind was focused on the simpler things. Primal thought began to subside, though it was not obliterated. He could still see and smell things that he shouldn't be able to see or smell, and he still thought he smelled blood everywhere he went, and the taste of it hitting the back of his nostrils still made him salivate like a dog. But the important part was that he felt his rationality return, his wit, his cunning.

"Damn!" he yelled loudly as the reality of his surroundings sank into him. The cold mountain winds muffled the noise, making it a private curse. The snow whipped into his naked skin, stinging him instantly.

"Never thought I'd be sayin' this since I left home, but it's too damn cold out 'fer even a Nord!" he complained, testing his weight on the butt of the spear. He looked around, fighting against his own mind to remember all that had happened while he was transformed. He was standing on a high mountain cliff, probably near the border of Skyrim and Cyrodiil. Some hundred meters off was a huge Dwarven-looking bridge, covered in a thick sheet of ice, and it seemed to stretch out into nowhere. The clouds, snow, and fog were too thick, and whatever was on the other side of the bridge was, at the moment, a mystery.

Behind him, where his paw prints still lay fresh, the mountains sloped downwards to the South. He could still barely see Chorrol from his high vantage point; a sight which seemed to flip a switch in his mind, opening a floodgate of blood-soaked memories. The Father had set a mark upon those people, and Josef fulfilled his orders to the letter. The girl was hurt, the man was unharmed, and Josef had led them to where the Father had seen fit... Which was here... Where in Oblivion is 'here,' anyway?

Josef peered down the cliff and sniffed in deep. They were following him. They weren't together. The Redguard was close, very close, and behind him, some sort of Elf, but not Elrohir. That wasn't good. Elrohir had to come. Josef didn't know why, but he knew that Elrohir had to come.

Josef turned around again, the cold beginning to really bother his naked body. He shrugged, jogged towards the bridge, and began to cross into the fog. As soon as he disappeared into the unending white, Silassen's head peeked over the crest of the cliff.

Silassen hand connected with the top of the cliff. Panting, he pulled himself over the edge of the rock face. His hand was immediately immersed in a thick powdery snow. Once he had hauled himself over the cliff, he shivered. The cold was working its magic quickly. Silassen didn't care. Even though sweat had frozen to his forehead he had no time for such petty disturbances. The werewolf was near. There were tracks in the snow. But they were fading fast as the snow fell.

Silassen gasped as burning sensation filled his body. It spread through him, it felt like he was engulfed in flame, he wanted to scream but he was terrified the fire would shoot down his throat and burn him from the inside out. He collapsed into the snow silently.

He found himself in a black space. It stretched for miles, and never ended. He was standing on nothing. He yelped, convinced he would fall into the nothingness that was the abyss below. But he realised that he would have fallen already. Suddenly a voice shattered the silence.

"I am Meridia. I have information for you child."

Images flashed through Silassens mind. A tavern in Chorrol. A Dunmer striking out and him and his friends. The word Adonis Vile slithered through his mind, and then the image changed. It was like a projection, and Silassen was sure that the events were real. A towering castle stood. It resonated evil magnificence, and pulsed with magical energy. The image flickered, and changed again. A humongous bridge, stretching across a gargantuan chasm. The image faded out, but then sprung back more vivid than ever before. The Dunmer he now knew as Adonis Vile was battling inside the castle.

One final image was spun through the intricate web of Silassens mind. It was strangely tinted in blue. Instinctively he knew that this was a future image. A possible fate. Adonis Vile was battling Augustus. No. Wait. It looked like Augustus, but there were differences. His weapons, and fighting style. Perhaps it was Augustus. Who knew. They battled on a tower. But Silassen did not see the duel conclude.

"You cannot see that battle finish because the outcome is undecided. The battle itself may never come to pass. I give you these images so that you might defeat a common enemy. Azmodeum is his name. Find him. Destroy him." Meridia spoke once more. Before falling silent.

Silassen woke. He gasped, as he felt the paranormal presence leave his body. The heat withdrew, and he looked around. Virtually no time had passed between Meridia invading and withdrawing from his mind. He stood up. He was filled with rage now. Adonis Vile must die. Azmodeum also. The werewolf Josef. Anger was his sole driver now. He pressed on at speed which he did not know he possessed and sprinted in the direction of the castle.

Chapter Thirty Nine

The Battle for Balindrium Begins

The sun began to set on the cold, windswept town of Falkreath. The people were all dead, dying, or fled long ago. Nobody would remain to tell the tale of how the city defended itself against the Oblivion Crisis, and then fell shortly after the Gate fell silent. It would be lost, forever, in history.

Merthierry appeared shortly after the group decided to look for him. His hammer was bloodied, as was his armor and robe. The fires that had once blazed brightly forth from him had begun to burn noticeably dimmer. He did not voice any concern, only nodded to the group that his mission was complete.

As the sun disappeared over the horizon, the Altmer appeared in a burst of magic. The wounds that had afflicted him before were gone, and his very form hummed with

teeming magic energies. Smiling at his minions, he raised his arms, boomed forth an incantation, and began to channel the magicka required for such an unholy spell.

In every direction, the dead began to stand, their eyes beginning to shine green like their master's. It was not like the regular control a Necromancer held over their victims; Azmodæum played puppetmaster for each abomination he raised. Before long, the group was completely encircled by throngs of shambling zombies and charred skeletons. Each of them brandished some sort of weapon, some with salvaged swords and axes, others with jagged pieces of timber salvaged from the intricate woodwork of the native Nords.

The eerie moaning and creaking of the undead became an overwhelming roar, as if a crowd of the damned was cheering lifelessly before a battle. It was a pale, chilling sound, an imitation of humanity and fierceness that had burned brightly within these Nords in life.

When it was complete, Azmodæum smiled and let his arms fall to his sides. He cast a short, strange spell of the destruction school, but it seemed to have no target. Shortly afterwards, the magic hummed and glowed around his body once more, and he turned to his lieutenants.

"Vile, I want you and Merthierry to take the Skeletons and lead the charge. You, Nosferatu, you will each take a regiment of Zombies and march to either side of Vile's forces, like a wedge. The remainder of us, with the Bonewalkers, will be behind your wedge. We will charge down into the caverns of Balindrium and clean it from the ground up."

Merthierry nodded silently, bracing his hammer and walking to Vile's side. Emotionless as always behind the charred steel of his demented-looking mask, he said nothing.

The Undead surrounding the group began to automatically file into their proper positions, each of them regarding their superiors in a proper fashion.

Under his breath, Merthierry whispered to Adonis.

"The ways of the Altmer can be so superfluous. Why are we having our skeletal soldiers pay us respect?" He said, then shook his head, emitting a noise that could only pass as a laugh for someone as twisted as the Dunmer.

The two Dunmer's were commanded to lead the attack, while the two vampires were assigned to the zombies. The undead went into an official position, each regarding their commanding officer with respect.

Raven, still with her hood raised up, began to stare at each of the zombies with her cold red eyes. Walking and inspecting each of them, holding her arms behind her back and eyeing each one. Draken stood behind her with his arms crossed as always, thinking as always. Lost in his thoughts. Draken slowly pulled out his katana, sliding it away from its cloth and pointed it at the largest zombie, the strange looking one with half a jaw, then the other with his tongue sticking below his mouth. Rotten, dead..and worth something. Raven smiled upon them, as the Altmer had smiled upon her and the rest. These were her true allies, loyal and fierce.

Raven bared her fangs and smiled *"Dying is the day worth living for"*

The Pure-blooded Nosferatu awaited the first wave to be sent, which was Adonis and Merthierry's group. Then they would attack as a second wave. Raven reached for her bow and prepared a few arrows for launch. Draken as always, readied his katana and straightened his pony-tail. For a moment, Raven considered Adonis as a capable ally,

however past events on Dunmer allies have proven to be mistakes, namely the cur, Silarian!. Raven little to no trust on Dunmers. A nice joke summed it all up.

"How can you tell if a Dunmer is lying?" Raven asked, with a near innocent tone.

Draken heard the joke before and decided to reply to it, he saw it as the truth rather than a humorous thing.

"When it's mouth is open" He barked. Both Vampires purposely said that towards Merthierry and Adonis.

Especially towards the mismatched eyed one, Adonis. Raven studied him closely, she was willing to bet the reason he was quiet and not particularly social was because he was mistreated when young or something rather dramatic happened in his lifetime.

By her time there, she witness his cruel actions against many of his victims. Vile takes pleasure in the suffering of others. Sadistic pleasure in the suffering of others is an anathema to Raven. Raven only killed when she could somehow profit from their deaths and suffering, meaningless deaths are..meaningless.

"I suspect those who have mental instability and the inefficiency of discerning how and when to carry out a sudden act should not be fit to lead at all" Raven stressed, speaking loud and clear towards Adonis Vile.

"Someone like Varnard should perhaps be able to lead, if his mind is set on what and how he will do such things that needs to be done" Raven smiled to the Breton.

Adonis almost laughed. That cur lead the assault? Something was going on. He was no simpleton. Before, that vampire, Raven, had been all for letting Rainor bleed out on the mountain top, and here now she was saying he was fit to lead? As far as Adonis was concerned, she just as much traitor as the Breton was.

Every fibre of his being screamed at him to kill her. While his cold calculating eyes gave away nothing, the intent to kill her was strong. He resisted, and ignored the jibe. He turned back to his forces. He turned his head to the Daedric servant Merthierry, nodded, and advanced.

Adonis burst into an adjoining cavern. A large group of thirty or so Dremora were standing there, they did not look surprised. They must have heard the crack. They merely grinned at the sight of fresh prey. After all, there was only one of him. They charged, running at speed.

Adonis whistled, and a group of undead rounded the corner. They formed a phalanx, and dropped into position. Holding their spears, outwards. Clumsily wielded, but they still performed their jobs. The Dremora at the front were forced forwards by those behind and impaled, and Adonis hopped back, behind them.

He clapped his hands twice, and a group of swordsmen rounded the corner. The spearmen fell back, and those wielding the swords finished off the second round of attackers, Adonis gleefully cut down an opponent, with a quick strike to the stomach, before redirecting and cutting a crimson scar across the throat. He growled and then clapped again, once this time. A group of archers rounded the corner and let fly. A couple of undead swordsmen fell, but mostly the dremora took the losses.

Soon the ranks of Dremora were depleted, those left fled, and the others lay dead. A smaller group of undead lay by the Dremora's forces. But the damage was minimal. He

drew his other forces into the cave. Re inforcements for the Dremora could be heard moving towards the cave.

He waited for the others to join him in the cave before fortifying his position.

Raven was careful, all to careful. *I need to preserve my wits if I am to survive another century.* She told herself.

Draken marched forward behind Adonis's forces. The dead Dremora cluttered the ground, a single Dremora was still alive, twitching in agony, a lance clenched in its fist. Draken stomped on its dark hand and retrieved the lance, before impaling it again.

The vampire noble tilted the lance upward, inspecting the skewered Dremora as he might a morsel of meat at a banquet. *"If this wretch is what passes for a soldier around here,"* Draken remarked, *"then tonight's outing is going to be even more of a slaughter than I imagined."*

He casually tossed the lance, along with its victim, into the ground of the cavern before him. Whimpers of pain reached Raven's pale ears, suggesting that the dying Dremora still clung to life. More fool he. Behind her were the zombies, the rotten corpses, the smelly fleshy individuals once living.

"Gather you're flesh, collect you're bones, move you're carcasses!" Raven shouted, her voice echoing throughout the darkness in an eerie tone that suggested she was upset. Raven allowed the first wave of zombies to pass her by, and to follow Adonis Vile, while Draken kept at her side. Raven yawned, from boredom and from being tired. *Just let the zombies do all the work.* She reminded herself. *If they fail, I come in.*

Raven brushed her shoulders against Draken's shoulder. As if trying to tell him something, but she held her tongue for the time being. Raven even stopped teasing the Dunmer. She was willing to bet he wanted to kill her, but a Dunmer was hard to read. Raven knew if she did anything traitorous, he would surely act against her and would not hold back from ending her immortal life.

Raven had to calculate her moves carefully, not even Draken could suspect her true intentions. It was all part of the game. The Dremora piled down in numbers as the Dunmer's forces kept going at them. Draken looked down at Raven again, holding his bloodlust thoughts away and concentrating on his distressed sibling. He gazed at her, and a gentle smile softened his fearsome visage.

Raven's beautiful yellow eyes gazed up to meet his, however they betrayed her, something that her eyes told him without ever saying a word; Raven was going to do the unthinkable.

Chapter Forty

The Caverns

As Adonis and the vampires ran off with their forces, Varnand looked around for a place to hide. He'd seen too much death for one day. He first thought of the passages that led under Balindrium, but then realized that they were probaly swarming with daedra by now. He looked toward the tower itself, along with its smaller towers that surrounded it.

He fingered his knives, then looked towards on of the smaller, older towers. Some of its outer sides were crumbling, and several footholds could be seen. Seeing that this would be the only way in, Varnand snaked his way around, reaching the base of the tower a few moments later.

First, he plunged one knife into the stone. Then, he used the other one to pull himself up. Sticking his feet into the foothold, he pushed. It was much like climbing a moutain, but harder and more steep. Finally though, he reached the top. He walked into the dark

interior. *'At least the Dremora haven't got up here yet...'* Varnand thought to himself. Sitting down on the floor, he wondered if anyone would come looking for him...

Raven looked around and tried to find the Breton. His lack of presence was annoying, he was the only one that had reason in this entire plot. The zombies marched forth behind Adonis and his other companion.

Damned Dunmers and their loyalty. It was only ironic that Raven had hated Dunmers for being traitors, but she was well on her way of being on, at least she was not a loyal dog!. Whatever the Altmer's lordship demands, he can rely on both Adonis's obedience and discretion.

Adonis's forces formed a solid wall against the Dremora forces. Pushing them back with their shields, and then spearing them when they charged back, with rage as their inspiration, before realising it would also be their downfall.

A Dremora roared. It was a low, and cacophonous sound. It resonated through the wide chamber, the volume higher still than that of battle. Some forces even stopped their petty skirmishes to gaze in awe, or horror, depending on where their allegiances lay.

It was a gargantuan thing. A towering giant, ten foot at least. It grasped a war hammer, proportionate to it's size. It was clad in daedric armour. The dremora howled in response to the creatures war cry, and attacked with renewed vigour, eager to impress. Adonis grimaced, and howled for a volley. A hail of arrows toar across the room with frightening speed, and accuracy. A large portion of the deadly missiles hit the weaker points of the dremora warlord, but whether they hit the neck, or the shin bones, they still rebounded off of his thick hide. Adonis sighed, and pulled out the Daedric dagger that he had salvaged while in Dagon's realm. He prepared to meet the towering foe's charge.

Merthierry had been standing between the shields at the front line, casting spells about the perimeter. At each, often would the hall lit in a flash, painting lifted dancing spears and swords hacking about on the walls. The Dremoras fought ferociously, anger had blinded them, and like beasts did they cut through of what were once their family.

The Dremora that towered over the sea of battle roared again, swinging his hammer and crushing several skeletons in one swing. The larger wave of troops filled in the gaps between the armies, and with a jarring collision, the battle was on in full force. Skeletons, Zombies, and Dremora tear each other limb from limb on the front lines, while archers and mages combat the whirlwind of Destruction spells that tore forth from the Bonewalkers and Bonelords that Azmodæum had ripped forth from Falkreath.

Indeed, the spells being conjured by the Altmer himself were impressive, and it looked like he was conducting an orchestra from the back line, firing spells of harm and spells of healing, raising the bones up from Zombies whose flesh had been ripped asunder. His eyes danced with a furious glee as his hands moved rhythmically and seperately, firing different colors of energy like laser beams around the cavernous mountain tunnels.

The Giant Dremora bashed forward through the front, stampeding in a straight line for Adonis and Merthierry. As he came nearer, they could see the source of his gigantism: a Dark Varla stone was fused into the center of his chest, burning with its thick red smoke through the Daedra's armor. He swung his hammer furiously, knocking several bodies backwards and toppling over a group of people, sending zombies and skeletons crashing into Merthierry and Adonis. The beast then turned, charging again through the onslaught of attacking skeletons and zombies, and aimed his attack this time for the arm of the batallion that was supposed to be being led by Varnard Rainor. Their leader had

apparently sneaked off somehow, and they fought mindlessly, being crushed underneath the very feet of the gargantuan monster.

The Altmer Warlock powered up his magic for a moment, and then sent a dark bolt of energy at the Dremora from afar. The demon turned, absorbing the evil energy and growing another foot, its horns on its head beginning to take real shape similar to a Xivilai's.

"Bal-Dremora..." Azmodæum whispered under his breath, cursing. He turned, and motioned to Draken, Adonis, and Merthierry. *"LET THE DEAD PUSH FORWARD! COME, AND KEEP THIS THING BUSY!"* he commanded in his terrible voice, echoing above the din of the battle.

Adonis was about to push forward and attack the monstrous beast, trying to push through both allied, and enemy forces, but then through the screams and roars of battle a familiar voice, amplified to ten times its normal volume echoed across the chamber, inspiring those whom were its friends, and instilling fear in those that opposed it. The voice of their creator, Azmodæum.

Adonis rallied to his masters call, squeezing through the ranks, knocking a few dremora aside as he pushed to reach his master. Before he could reach the warlock the warlord, somehow larger than before, picked him up in a massive fist, and lifted him high into the air.

Before bringing him down, slamming him into the floor. Adonis roared in agony, once again he was lifted into the air. But Adonis would not sit by idly, and wait for death to claim him. As the creature raised him, he pinpointed his strike point, and embedded his dagger into the beasts chest, just above the charred varla stone. Adonis grimaced with pain, and then levered the dagger, half squeezing the stone from his enemies chest. The creature roared, and seemed to shrink a little.

With a bellow of evil fury, he tossed Adonis away like a ragdoll. Adonis cried out in pain as he slammed into a rocky wall. He slumped, and his head drooped. He wrenched it upwards, and stood up shakily.

He was on the opposite side of the room. Amidst the dremora. He drew his knife, but was immediately set upon by a group of nearby Dremora. He was piled on, and buried beneath a sea of writhing Dremora. There were so many that they had trouble getting at him. Their numbers worked against them for a short while. He jabbed, and ripped at underbellies. Doing what he could.

Suddenly he heard yelps, and the twenty or so dremora that had been smothering him were thrown off. He quickly stood, and looked for his saviour. A group of three or so lich's were blasting off spells. They must have sent a blast this way. Perhaps they were from his group. A clanfear launched itself at Adonis, who grabbed it by the neck midair, and swung it face first into the wall, before swinging his dagger round in arc, and burying it in his head. He roared with delight at the savage kill, and continued to battle back towards the liches, relying on the temporary blindness that Merthierry had sewn.

He reached the group of liches, and slipped through them. Bloodied, bruised, but very much alive. He spotted the gargantuan dremora attempting to physically push the stone back into the half filled hole in his chest. It was still embedded enough for him to be a major threat, but he was certainly less powerful than before. He had reached his master, and he quickly told him of what he had achieved.

"I managed to partially remove the stone." Adonis gasped. He gritted his teeth from the pain in his wounds.

Draken headbutted against a Dremora and impaled it with his katana, he was already tired and already injured at his legs and arms. Obviously, he was not the only one injured. Adonis Vile, had his share of pain as he experienced the monstrous beast that flung across the room. The master had also fought bravely and darkly against the Daedric foes. Flesh of both ally and enemy littered the ground.

That was it, the weakness. The stone had to be removed. And it had to be done in teamwork.

"Merthierry!" Draken called over the battle. "Use the hammer" He screeched, rushing into the fray with the will of iron. They all had to take down the beast, unless one of them had the power to do it alone.

Merthierry stood still as bones smashed into his armor with thuddy clanks. The more agile Adonis jumped over a skeleton and ducked for another two. In an act of heroism and for the safety of all, he ran into the Bal-Dremora. Merthierry refocused on the battle before him.

A Dremora with a big sword rushed in, using the space the Giant had made, and took a slash at Merthierry, whom was quick enough to fend it. The sword left a deep carve in his gauntlet. Merthierry grabbed the blade and twisted it, disarming its gripping owner, then smashed his pointy knuckles into the awed fighter, sending him flying to land into the spears of an advancing unit.

Merthierry greeted more advancing Dremora with a fire attack. Only some were lucky enough to carry tower shields. Merthierry took steps back as skeletons rushed past left and right of him.

Adonis watched as Draken dispatched a large dremora warrior, Adonis suspected that he would've relished the victory, but there was little time to do so. Adonis darted across the battlefield, his arms outstretched, knives like talons, slicing, and opening wounds, from all he went past. Until eventually he arrived at his destination. Draken.

Adonis watched as the creature rushed towards them. Patiently. The beast howled with delight. Perhaps it had gathered from their immobility, that they had given in. Not so. Adonis met its charge. He slid under the beast's legs, it roared and whipped around. Now focused on him. Leaving Draken a gap to exploit.

Adonis jumped, and latched onto the creature's stomach with his knives. He managed to scuttle up onto the creature's chest, he aimed a careful shot at the varla stone, and then roared as the dremora took a strike at him, his blade went wide as the fist the size of a spade slammed into him.

Adonis could see the creature bucking. No longer the pinnacle of evil it had been before. The creature raised its head and turned to face me, and I could see what had brought on the frantic bucking movements. Where one of its eyes had been, all that remained was a goopy mess.

That was all Adonis was able to see before a large dremora warrior leapt upon him and attempted to jab at him. He opened up a wound on his thigh and Adonis grunted. He was wounded, but it wasn't over yet. He grasped the Dremora's arms, and held them tight. He was disarmed as his arms had no where other than to wrestle Adonis in return. The two rolled away in the direction of Merthierry.

Undead forces filled the empty space that lied before Yvienne like water. He was too late in realizing their human friends were in severe trouble. He noticed a flash of the hopeless scene between the darting skeletons, eager to be at the front. He set to rush

rapidly to their aid, bumping undead aside. As he neared the lines of battle, a Dremora took a jab at him with a spear. Merthierry was too late to see it coming and would have been pierced, but the attack never landed. A bright blue flash as the Dremora got blasted away. The Wizard's handiwork. Merthierry rushed on until he got to the men.

He kicked his spiky boot into the Dremora's stomach, tumbling him off Adonis, whom he then lifted to his feet. The Bal-dremora seemed to be clumsy both about the loss of his eye and his shrinking. It swayed where it stood like it was smashed drunk. Another bright blast, this time at the beast. It toppled down onto its army.

Chapter Forty One

They're Here

As the team of wrongdoers crossed the threshold of Balindrium, fighting the last remaining stragglers of Dagon's strong foothold in Balindrium, Azmodæum paused. The undead legions that remained continued on for a few steps, then stopped with their unholy maker.

"It has begun. The Daedra Lords have begun their bid to end us," the Altmer said gravely, but without a hint of fear in his voice. He turned and met the surprised looks of his agents, and then he spoke again to quell their puzzled expressions.

"As you know, much of my power comes from Oblivion. I have a close relationship with the Daedric Princes. But they are finicky, opinionated deities, the Daedra. A handful of them have taken an affront to our... rise to power. Meridia and Azura, to name two, and the two most understandable of the bunch. Those two have always been more worried about one crying mortal than the entire thread of fate, as far as I'm concerned..."

"But, the betrayal of the Hunter, Hircine, I cannot figure out so easily. In any rate, even in these dark times, they only have so much power here on the Mundus. They have sent agents of their will; pawns barely guided by their distant hands. In the last few hours, I have seen visions of these Daedric tools. It looks like they chose a group of bandits! A Dunmer and a Khajiit come from the Dusk Goddess, and our traitorous Breton friend himself appears to be the Agent of Meridia. The ever-so-unoriginal Prince of the Hunt sent a Lycanthrope to try and stop us. Obviously, these Daedric princes lack knowledge of our Elven superiority. This hodgepodged group of beasts and traitors will not expect our power. We must continue our eradication of the Dremora invaders, however, if we are to truly call ourselves victorious."

"We must go into this castle... OUR castle... and eradicate all who dare trespass within it. Daedra, Beast, Man, or Mer. We must kill them all."

Silassen rounded a corner. Sword drawn. He was worried. This place just felt wrong. He could feel it's magical properties. But it just felt like a place of evil. He shivered, and it wasn't from the cold. He pressed forward, satisfied that this corridor was deserted of Dremora.

He rounded another corner, and he found a Nord. He was dressed in a nobleman's clothes, which hung from him unnaturally, like they didn't suit his rough nature. He was clutching his spear. He seemed as unsure of his surroundings as Silassen was.

Anger flooded back through him at the sight of the Nord. He was positive this was the werewolf. The spear was the same as the one from the woods near Chorrol. He just knew. His rage was reaching boiling point. But slowly it died down. This wasn't the creature that had harmed Mariane. No. He just shared the same body. He wasn't to blame. The foul spawn of Hircine was. Silassen decided he would speak to the Nord. Make an ally out of him. He paused, unsure of what to say. Then pushed forward.

"Josef?" Silassen called, a nervous edge to his voice, repeating the name he had heard back near Chorrol.

Josef faltered at the sound of his first name being spoken. He had been trying his best to sneak through the silent, echoing halls, but it had been an inglorious failure. The fancy shoes and swishy, loose clothes had made sneaking a disaster, and his first instinct was to prepare for combat.

In his mind, he was launched backwards, back to the time when he was young and hunting humanity was his life. If you were discovered and you weren't ready to kill, you were dead. Visions of Dunmeth Pass flashed before his mind, elves and men alike dying at the angry point of a long spear.

But he shook his head and cleared his mind of some of the adrenaline's fuzziness when his eyes met the Redguard's. He jumped back quickly, creating a gap between the two men and turning his spear to solidify the divide. He did not speak at first, waiting for the Redguard to state his intentions.

The Castle creaked from the chaotic battle that was occurring in its foundation. The clangs and clashes of war could be heard drawing closer, and finally the Dremora fell back into the foot of the Castle proper. Josef and Silassen could hear them just below their feet, cursing loudly at some unknown foes as they were pressed back. Whoever had fought the Dremora had finally breached Balindrium itself.

Azmodæum spoke, his voice still and without fear. It seems that there were more enemies than these lesser Daedra. Mortals also jumped into the battle.

"It has begun. The Daedra Lords have begun their bid to end us,"

Raven's face scrunched up to a scowl. *Already? So quickly they made up their minds?..* This would be a problem that will not be forgotten easily.

"As you know, much of my power comes from Oblivion. I have a close relationship with the Daedric Princes. But they are finicky, opinionated deities, the Daedra. A handful of them have taken an affront to our... rise to power. Meridia and Azura, to name two, and the two most understandable of the bunch. Those two have always been more worried about one crying mortal than the entire thread of fate, as far as I'm concerned..."

If Meridia and Azura has qualms about the ever rising Balindrium group, the other ones will also have their little opinions changed. What made Raven fear was Molag Bal. What if he does not stay true to his word?. It was a risk she was willing to take. Raven stared at the Altmer and imagined the world ruled by Daedra...it only made her quiver in anger. *Yes, there is much that I would do otherwise—were I ever insane enough to side with such rabble against the Order!.*

now, the Altmer had also spoken of a revelation. The Breton was undoubtedly a traitor working with Meridia. The most hated Daedric Prince, in Draken and Raven's eyes. The two vampiric siblings shared a disgusted look. The Werewolf was here alright, sent by Hircine, the Daedric Prince of the hunt. And they have invaded the castle.

"Their gullibility knows no bounds, it would seem. You have the proper strength to confront with the Werewolf. Regardless of what you might think of them, they are an infectious breed and must be exterminated before they can create more. We are nature's top predator and we must see to it that it remains that way, either it or us. Extinction is a way of nature, weaker species are stomped by stronger ones. Your ubiety at the higher levels would be most efficacious to our present needs, Draken. If the complacent hound

who call itself gifted or cursed flees, do not allow it. You have heard the orders he gave us, now it is time to carry it out."

Draken accepted the heavy weapon into his hand. The sword had blood all over it, dried and some still wet. Draken stared at Raven and simply nodded. He had wondered why he was the one to kill the Werewolf. Perhaps she was scared to fight it or perhaps...she had something planned. "You have a hint of impatience in your brow. Distraught and thoughtful. I know you since you were a bloodsponge" Draken chuckled "What bothers you?".

"A great many things. This entire thing bothers me"

Draken grinned. His voice took on a wheedling tone as he craftily tried to turn Raven's shattered illusions to his advantage. *"You know, I tried to warn you about joining."* He feigned a shudder of repulsion. *"A pity you do not have the prowess to fight"*

Raven was not in the mood, not when something had to be done. Draken got ready and went after the known location of the Werewolf. *"As long as we get to kill everything that is a threat"* Raven whispered and turned back to the Altmer and the Dunmer duo.

"Draken went to deal with the Lycanthrope. I trust him enough to allow him to take care of the situation himself."

Raven turned to Adonis Vile and Merthierry, forgetting about what she had said about them and the insults she hurled at Adonis.

"The plan, what is it?" Asked Raven, to Merthierry and Adonis. What targets were they aiming for and how would they approach the fight?.

Draken wasted no time in walking, he ran upstairs, leaping to abnormal heights with a vampiric leap. Avoiding the Daedra, he wanted to face the Werewolf now, for so long had he faced a Werewolf, the predatory rival to the vampire. A righteous fury rose up inside him like a gathering storm.

His eyes flashed red. An angry heart pumped the sacred blood of vampirism through his body, infusing him with strength worthy of an Ancient. Draken followed the tainted scent of Lycanthrope, such an amazing creature, the brutal strenght, the power...it was outstanding.

Yet, it was a shame they were savages, answerable to an orgiastic abandon that took over their minds. Draken persued it until he finally got closer. There!. A heavily muscled Nord male, Lycan blood rushing through his veins, he seemed to be wearing a noble's outfit. Very humorous in contrast to his true nature. Also, he was in a defensive position towards a tanned redguard.

Draken made himself known, with only a rusty shortsword and his prowess, he was confident he was able to fight them.

"What's all this commotion?" a sardonic voice interrupted. *"Tresspassing is such a horrid thing. You 'gentlemen' seem lost."* Draken said venomously. His gaze fixed towards the Nord.

"And who might this sorry specimen be?" Draken asked the Werewolf wearing noble's attire. *"Beast, I am sure Hircine would not approve such a creature as yourself wearing a fine clothing such as that"*. Draken chuckled before turning to the Redguard and staring him with his red, hungry eyes.

No problem in revealing his true nature now, since there was so much that the mortals had experienced all at once. And they would soon be dead anyway. Draken readied his shortsword and approached the two individuals, but with caution.

Silassen saw someone coming. A man! Silassen's heart jumped. Another lost soul. Maybe he could help them to. He looked like an imperial. Moving at speed. That's what made Silassen frown. He was moving quickly. Too quickly. Silassen would have a lot of trouble matching that speed, and Silassen was very swift footed.

The man reached them. All though, Silassen could see now that this was no man. It was a vampire. A bastion of the undead. His hungry red eyes, fixed on him, and Josef. Silassen wouldn't of known his nature normally. But it was clear he was making no effort to hide it.

The vampire started talking. He had a cocky accent. He was cool and confident. Perhaps that is why he had made no effort to conceal his true colours. Maybe he thought that the fight was as good as over?.

"Good. His confidence gives him false hope. It will be his downfall." Silassen thought to himself, surprised at his unusually analytical view of the situation.

He brought up his sword in a defensive stance. He didn't step forward. But he taunted the vampire.

"You talk finely sir. There aren't many noble families left in Cyrodiil. Inbred I suppose?" Silassen jeered. Still keeping his footing firm.

It appears Good had finally found its Evil.

Merthierry noticed Draken's sudden focusing. He had caught the strong smell of foe, one that interested him particularly. The hunter moved out in a rush, rather foolishly overexcited by his finding. But who is careful when he just fought a battle, and won?

Merthierry soon heard a man speak out to him on a taunting voice. Draken had caught one. Or more.

WHAT FOOLS HAVE COME TO US?!

Merthierry grunted, his metallic voice causing a shrill concussion.

Draken smiled *"You are correct. There are few left. Nobles who do not deserve what they have, disingenuous aristocrats everywhere. Scratch a sophisticated mortal urbanite and you'll usually find a superstitious peasant underneath."* Draken stared at Josef.

"Inbred? No, I don't think so. The only similar blending in my conceiving is the gift..the dark gift. Something you would not understand. Neither will you have a future to."

A look of grim resolution hardened on his face as he stood high to his feet and charged. The Imperial vampire jumped high into the air and started with an *Immolating blast*. The heat of the fire burning Draken's face as it flew to its primary target. The Redguard. When Draken landed on the floor, he extended his arm forth and shot forth a large spiral wall fire towards the Werewolf. He had to be cautious now that two of his enemies were skilled.

Redguards were naturally talented warriors, quick with the blade and very fast. The Werewolf..obviously had supernatural abilities even in human form that matched a vampire's power.

Raven looked at Merthierry. Responding to his different voice tone.

"They have come to us." Raven confirmed. "I just hope Draken doesn't fails" Raven spat, knowing he has few overconfidence problems and lacks proper finery. Should of seen him centuries ago, the child was a mess. Now, he matured a little, thankfully. Raven was tempted into helping him, but other things had to be done. Raven looked at Adonis Vile.

"The Breton, Varnard, still breathes. You may want to dispose of him now before he finds the aid of our enemies. I know you will have pleasure in taking his life" Raven smiled.

"You have seen that very well," Merthierry answered in reply, just as he finished off a moaning Dremora. It seemed to the eye that there was some morality in him left, some willingness to bring an end to someone that was suffering. In truth, he just enjoyed the taking of lives. In the end, it made little difference to him whether those could resist it, or want it.

He continued: *" , but you see, my Lady, I have mistakenly not brought my hammer with me"*.

He smiled, but found himself disappointed by the fact that that smile was unperceivable.

Raven clasped her pale hands together and stood there, smiling sinisterly.

"Do not bring shame to Azmodæum or his plans. Otherwise you shall contemplate your uselessness as a warrior of this order" Raven chuckled sinisterly.

"We find ourselves in a rather distasteful situation. You feel the power, you crave it, you want to crush the Breton with the hammer, feel his bones grind to pieces." Raven growled.

Raven turned her eyes to Vile.

"You, Adonis, rend his flesh, cut him open with your daggers. Make him feel pain prior to leaving this realm, send him to the void, to a place of eternal damnation, it does not matter, you wish to see him dead." Raven paused, continuing with her hands rubbing against each other in a sudden anxiousness.

Merthierry frowned. The female vampire came off as insulting, and was doubting his loyalty to Him. What puny creature dared questioning him? Merthierry stepped forward at once and grabbed her by the neck fiercely.

"You have absolutely no idea what you talk of, and whom you confront, hunter of the night."

Being preternaturally quick and unburdened by any armor, Josef had just enough time to react the the spiralling, wildly moving giant disc of flame. Rather than dodging to the side or bracing himself for the blast, the Nord took his spear up in his hands, the point facing up, and took three great strides towards the oncoming wall of flame. The butt of his spear hit the ground hard, the sharp notch on the bottom catching a crack in the old stone, and the oversized Nord pole vaulted.

Sailing through the air, just barely clearing the wall of flame, Josef landed on the other side, near Draken. He swung his spear back to his side, feinted as if he were going to impale the vampire, and then spun the still-lit wooden end of his spear, hurtling the dangerous orange flames towards the pureblood's face..

Raven was surprised by the sudden act of the metallic Dunmer, he clenched her neck. A sudden choke escaped her neck but she kept herself bitter and angry, keeping the pain at bay, for there is no pain were anger and power lies. Raven stared darkly at the aggressive Dunmer, and listen to his threats. The mark of the club wound on her face was still bleeding, it tickled down her face down to her lips. Raven licked it slightly and stared at the Dunmer.

"I know who I confront and I know what I speak. You know what the Breton, Varnard told me? He plans to kill our master, he plans to use the power to free the prisoners here and follow his foolish crusade for the 'good' of mankind. He is a threat and must be destroyed before any damage can be done to our plans". Raven barked, hands rested at her side, she made no attempt to grasp his hard hands that clenched her throat.

"Unhand me..or I shall peel the flesh off your bones!"

Raven choked a bit as the tight on her neck got a bit stronger. *Enough* Raven thought. Lightning sprung from her hands and it made its way to the closest target. Merthierry. Without warning, she attacked, only to keep him at bay.

Merthierry's muscles spasmed by the shock, but he did not in firm grip. He managed to ram his free hand into the vampire, and hurled her tens of yards away. A few more nasty shivers and he felt sane again. It had hurt immensely, and it seemed his armour negatively affected his sensitivity for Shock.

He lit up more severely. His flames danced a dance of hatred, and bit out towards the vampire. He raised his hands and started crafting. A vortex between his fingertips sucked in all of the raw power of the Incineration. Merthierry ceased glowing. Instead the fireball-like creation was now the sun. He doubted sending it off. This was enough to kill a dragon. And maybe himself.

Draken observed the speed of the Lycanthropic man. He was as quicker than a mountain lion, it was impressive. As the Werewolf landed, it used his spear to fling the burning flame back to Draken. Having a weakness to fire, Draken was vulnerable to death.

Before the fire made a contact to his skin, Draken rolled out of the way before the fire could hit him. The fire flew past him, the heat of it touching Draken's head and neck, if he wasn't careful, he would of tasted his own devastating power.

Draken rolled off the the cold ground, skin being scratched by the cold ground, he was caught off guard and underestimated the speed of the Werewolf, he should of known better. Years of resting in a underground lair with no fighting does that to a man. Draken had to reconnect with his true spirit of violence and war, so he did so. Still on the ground, the vampire began a second wave of attacks. He had to get balance, but there was one thing that compromised it. Kicking. Putting all his weight on one leg puts him in conditional stability.

Draken used his back to push him up, immediately he shot another fire ball from his hands, a powerful blast that depleted half of his magical stamina. The moment the fire was out of his hands and flaming towards Josef, Draken got on his foot and lunged after the trail of smoke towards the same target, only to stop the Werewolf from sending the fire back to the Undead Imperial.

The vampire leapt into the air, and Silassen began to prepare a defence with his sword, readying a blocking stance. But then he once again surprised himself with such an analytical view of the situation. The vampire was too far away for a melee attack. He couldn't be striking from above with his weapon. He was carrying no bow, which left him with magic. Silassen started backing up. Ready to dodge whatever projectile the vampire was about to hurl at him.

His eyes widened as he saw the numerous fireballs screeching through the halls of Balindrium. He cursed and rolled sideways, his natural agility helping him evade two of the searing projectiles. He leapt over another, and ducked the final assault. Silassen took one hand off the hilt of his sword, and slapped at the flames which had caught on his cloak. Then he turned back to the vampire, he snarled.

That had angered Silassen. But that attack must have used a lot of magicka. He could not have many more of those in him.

Silassen darted forwards, watching as the Nord feinted an attack before twisting the blunt end of his spear, which Silassen only just realised was still flaming, at the hunters face. The Nord was clearly skilled. Silassen darted forwards himself, he jabbed at the vampires left hip, before darting to the right, and aiming a strike at the shoulder of his immortal opponent.

Elrohir passed another fallen tree, but continued to make steady progression forward. Bethras and Leyam were running beside him and none of them had talked for the last few minutes. Slowly Elrohir stopped and looked around, he could hear whispering. The whisper of a woman, his prince, his love, his master. He started turning around looking for her, but all he could see was Bethras' and Leyam's confused faces. They heard nothing and didn't understand the sudden halt. Elrohir suddenly felt Azura's hand on his back but as he turned around she was gone and instead a bright blue flash came towards them. It was like a wall of light passing through the trees and coming closer to them. Dust flew around them, as they felt the strength of the wind. Any scream was silenced by the strong force that lifted them from the forest and into the air.

In front of them they could see Silassen and Augustus flying north, each carried by a blue spirit. Elrohir looked at his friends floating beside him, and for a mere second he believed they were all scared as the wind and light disappeared. The darkness of the sky became touched with the sunlight as the group rose, and in an instant, the landscape had changed. The Twilights had crossed over to Moonshadow, carrying the Mortals with them.

As they were just about to fall towards the ground they were caught by three spirits like the rest and they flew north. Behind them roads and trees passed, even towns, and soon they could see where they were all heading; a large archway in front of them came closer. The spirits gently put them down on a landing, twenty meters from the doorway. Then they each smiled to their voyager and gave him an intimate kiss on the cheek. As Bethras felt her soft lips on his cheek he felt his wounds heal, his thirst settle as well as his hunger being satisfied.

This they all felt and when the spirits gave them a last smile and flew into the air all of the fighters felt well rested and ready for the greatest challenge they had ever been faced with. One remained behind, intent on showing the newcomers how to use the portal. She said no words.

"A kiss of good luck..." Elrohir heard his prince whisper in his ear.

Josef kept up with the vampire, but only just enough. Without being transformed, Josef still had many formidable preternatural abilities, but the Vampire had been studying his swordcraft since before Josef's father was born, and it showed. The Vampire feinted, ducked, and weaved to the best of his ability to match every move Josef made. Becoming frustrated at the futility of a one-on-one stalemate between professional killers, Josef made a bid to separate the Redguard from the accursed wight.

Putting himself between the Imperial and the Redguard, he moved slowly backwards down the hallway, using the extreme length of his spear to keep the Nosferatu at bay. The slightest advance was met with a lightning-fast jab, and so the stalemate was not truly over, but now mobile.

Silassen was the first to cross the threshold. He didn't realize at first that he was stepping back through a door, but his foot crossed it and, just like that, he disappeared. Vanished into thin air. Josef did not notice at first, edging backwards with both his azure eyes locked ferociously on the Vampire's crimson ones.

The hair stood up on the back of Josef's neck as the scent of his "ally" was cut short. He did not dare turn his back on the dangerous foe before him, but he knew that behind him, something was amiss. His face twisted into a snarl.

"I need a damned smoke." he growled gruffly. He then swung his spear wide, attempting to slash at the creature with the bladed edge of the spear point from afar. It was a last ditch effort, and he feared he would soon have to fall back into the unknown behind him unless the vampire relented.

Silassen's foot felt grass. It seemed all wrong. At once, he was ripped from the dark stone halls of Balindrium, plucked into a violet realm where the domed sky was streaked with oranges and blues. The room that he had stepped into had taken him, by some strange means, into a realm of Oblivion. He was confused, but everything was blindingly beautiful and pleasant, and the contrast from the dusty maze fight with the undead man was pleasing as well.

Draken's eyes turned a bit more red as he used his Hunter's sight to look for the Redguard, suspiciously wondering if he was using some sort of magic trick of invisibility, but he was nowhere to be seen.

It was the door he stepped into, Draken finally realized. It was the Altmer's magic portal or something, Draken was too busy to go off wandering into the room.

The Nord began to make his attempts to slash at Draken with his unique spear and eventually, after a few evasions and dodges, Josef did manage to pierce Draken in the hip when he slashed again. Draken stepped back a few feet, listening to the Werewolf complain about having a smoke.

Draken bared his teeth and his hiss grew into a manly growl. His face twitched in revulsion before congealing into a grave and rigid expression. When he spoke again, his voice was as hard and unbending as steel. Maybe now the Werewolf could get the smoke he wanted.

"You want my opinion? You need to lighten up, allow me to brighten your day" Draken barked.

Gathering all the magic he had left, the warrior vampire summoned his last bit of fire, the red-orange flames growing up from the ground to his chest, then Draken extended his arms and pushed his created flame forward, pushing his left leg back to get space away from the flames. The fire flew forward, the sound of cracking flames spread to the halls and went straight for the Werewolf. Draken braced himself for any chances of the Werewolf escaping the flames to attack him.

Unbearable heat. Josef hated the heat. It blasted him directly in the chest, igniting the silk shirt which hung loosely from his overstretched frame. The concussion of the blast knocked Josef backwards into the door, and he was swallowed up by the curious door as the Redguard was.

Feeling curiosity itching in the back of his mind, Vampire could not help but come close and peek into the room. He had already devised much of the problem... the Daedra Statue room was acting strangely. His adversaries had slipped away, no doubt into some Daedric trap. Through the shimmering enchantment which draped the archway, Draken could see the tiniest bit of what he imagined to be Coldharbour itself.

The magical curtain in front of him began to ripple, and the Lycanthrope burst forth from the door, seemingly out of thin air, and accidentally collided with Draken, sending the pair rolling. The weight of the beast was immense when compared to his human form, and Draken found himself pushing his preternatural speed to its very limits in order to avoid getting trapped beneath the tumbling beast. Saliva dripped from Josef's open mouth, exposing his huge, sharp teeth, all hooked slightly backwards to maximize his grip. Eventually Draken escaped from beneath the Werewolf, and it regained its balance. The Immortals squared off once again, the torchlight casting terrifying shadows all around the beast.

Draken's curiosity nearly got him killed, although he glimpsed the beautiful distant peak of Coldharbour, the view was shortlived as the same individual came back through the portal as if spat out. The change happened at a phenomenal rate. The shadow expanded in size as the Werewolf gained weight and stature by the second he stood out. The frenzied Werewolf collided with Draken, sending him on the other side. Draken rolled safely and was back on his feet, maximizing his original speed. The Werewolf showed his teeth, canines looking like hooks. Draken returned a similar gesture by opening wide and baring his fangs and sharp teeth in the back of his mouth. The Vampire's nails extended, to aid in his punches. Werewolves, nothing but a pack of ignorant beasts. Draken wanted to say, but he himself succumbed to his own predatory nature, did not matter if he was of Cyrodiilic bloodline, all vampires have the Dark Gift, the hunter's nature. Draken blasted the torches in the walls with his own flare, adding and overloading them until they burst, making very small explosions.

A good skill he used over the years. The typical magic user, Warrior or mage, gathers the magicka within their bodies, forcing it out typically through their hand. Before doing so however, they would have to manipulate the magical threads in the environment around them to create a sort of focused 'freeway' upon which their magical spell could ride forward. This focused threaded pathway also holds the spell together on its journey.

Because this type of spell requires manipulation of both the magicka within the caster and the magicka of the environment, it is more complicated to cast.

As the flames surrounded the hall, Draken had no other option, he would not run and hide like a coward, or get a weapon, he was not a dependant weakling. It was a fight, muscle against muscle, claw against claw and immortal against immortal. Draken always wanted this to happen sooner or later, he longed for a Werewolf to be in his team, but if they were not friends, then they are enemies. The halls was lit with the flames and Draken charged against the Werewolf, using whatever stamina and fatigue he had left. The Vampire ran and dived, rearing his legs in the air and stretching his body forth through the fire. The flames burning his skin, Draken's vulnerability to fire increased 40% of what he had earlier. It burned, badly, but the Undead Imperial used his own natural race power. *Star of the West*. To get back any lost fatigue from the Werewolf and pass it on to him. Draken did not know if he touched the Werewolf or not, the flame's heat caused him to close his eyes. Draken's skin burned much, causing the vampire to grunt in pain and to roar in frustration as his skin lit up as he dived into what could be certain death.

Almost a half hour since their arrival in the castle, Augustus and Talon found themselves standing in front of a great vaulted door. Talon, who was in the lead, looked back to Augustus and motioned for him to help push the door open. As a streak of light flooded into the dark room, Varnand looked up.

He silently swore as he saw a mirror image of himself in the doorway. *"By the Nine, I'm losing it!"* He muttered, lifting himself up.

As the figure neared, Augustus saw that he was not exactly like him, with fresh scars all over his face. His hair was ruffled and dirty, unlike Varnand's straight and light hair. *"Varnand, listen. I'm not here to hurt you!"* The man said.

Varnand opened his mouth to speak, but was cut off as Mephala's familiar voice cried out, *"Varnand, he speaks the truth."* This didn't convince the old Tong operative though.

He put his hands behind him, gripping his knives. This caught Augustus' eye. *"Varnand, I really don't want to fight you."* He began. *"But I will do what I must, even with family."*

Varnand spat at the ground. *"Family?"* He said with a chuckle. *"My 'Family' is dead, if I ever even had one!"* Now he seemed angry. *"Varnand, it is time you learned."* Mephala said. "

You were lied too, by both me and the Tong. Your parents may be dead, but your brother still lives. It is time you meet Augustus, your... Twin."

When the daedric prince finished, Varnand stood speechless. Augustus unsheathed his weapon, which Varnand thought looked highly similar to his. In the light of the window and the open door, Varnand saw the words etched into its side: Rainor.

This assured him that this was his brother, despite the differences. "Augustus..." He muttered. "You... Know my name?" His brother sounded suprised. "Yes, and I also know that we should get out of here. Now." He said, running towards the window.

The battle was in full swing now, and Varnand knew the castle would soon be swamped with daedra and undead if they didn't get out.

"Talon! Show us out of here!" He yelled at the Golden Auroran, who nodded willingly. The trio ran out to the hallway.

Draken's spell connected, and the vampire's fatigue stabilized. The Lycanthrope did not appear overly phased by the curse, and it was apparent that the beasts would stand on level ground for the remainder of the fight. The strange orange glow of the magnified torchlight cast chilling shadows all around the baying werewolf, and charring the skin of the nimble, leaping vampire. It was a daring move, trading health for stamina, but Josef knew all too well that immortal creatures were often more bold than those who were afraid of death.

Josef leapt forward on all fours, trying his best to claw at Draken's midsection as the bloodsucker began to land from his immolated dive through the stone halls. A ferocious noise escaped his jowls as he lunged.

Azmodæum did not appear worried. The Dremora had for the most part been routed and forced into hiding, the other intruders being dealt with by his Vampiric servant.

Finally, the undead armies were sent scattered throughout the bottom floor of Balindrium, and the Lord of the Castle moved with his lieutenants towards a set of hidden stairs. They bypassed most of the castle, including the Daedric Prince room and the Armory, and after a short upwards hike through the dark, the group found themselves in the Chamber of the Dark Varlais.

Many of the stones were missing from their pedestals, and one lay cracked on the floor, seeping a foul-smelling smoke that made the air hard to breathe. Azmodæum's eyes began to alight with rage.

The smoke itself began to coalesce and shape into a face, the twisted and horrible visage of Mehrunes Dagon again looked upon the hosts of Balindrium.

"These powers will not work for you forever, Hefæstæum. They are MINE! MY POWERS ARE NOT FOR MORTALS TO TOY WITH! As we speak, the boundary between our worlds is failing, and you can mark my words that this place will be overrun, as will the rest of this pathetic world. Dawn's Beauty indeed! This place will be deader than the deadlands, and YOU WILL HAVE HELPED ME SUCCEED."

Azmodæum waved a hand and blew the smoke from the room, ending Dagon's enchantment upon it. He looked gravely upon his servants.

The group of villainous warriors soon found the battle swinging their way, and pausing only to pick off a few rather unfortunate survivors, they swept down to the hall of magical stones.

Adonis hopped off the oversized hound, and followed his master in, a pungent smell wafted across the stone chamber, and it began to constrict the supply of precious oxygen in the groups throats, but it was not lethal, at least, not yet.

While the group looked around, casting glances at the missing pedestals, the smoke hovered in the air a moment, Adonis frowned, the smoke looked as if had purpose, hanging there. Then it formed into a face. A face filled with hatred, and anger, eyes that could make water boil, the face of Mehrunes Dagon.

The spectral imitation of the unholy power broke into a speech, rage, and longing for destruction hanging from every word, but when it came to the faces final sentence, it seemed as if, for the tiniest of moments, the world slowed, and the princes eyes settled

on Adonis. Then it seemed that the world resumed time, and its eyes were fixed on the entirety of the group once more, Adonis was sure none of the others had seen the brief moment of spectral contact between the two.

Adonis's master raised a hand, and a magical breeze blew the smoke from the room, and the air cleared. Azmodæum looked upon his servants.

Adonis was going to wait for Azmodæum to speak, but then he noticed something, not all of the lieutenants of his master were gathered here, Draken was not present, with good reason, but another was absent, with not good reason.

"Where is he? Where is the Breton?" Adonis growled. As if in answer to his question, running footsteps were heard outside, and Adonis would have been inclined to believe that it was routing Dremora, except for one small thing, he'd travelled with Varnand many times, and he knew now what an Auroran's footsteps sounded of, he'd learnt to pick up on sounds when in the Dark Brotherhood, if one sense fails you, another should be ready to fill the breach.

Adonis hurried for the door, grabbed the handle, twisted, and hurried through. He closed the door behind him, he wanted the Breton for himself, then he turned to continue his run.

But he stopped. A pillar of smoke hovered in front of him. Before Adonis could move, it shot forwards, it slid through anywhere it could find entrance, it slithered up his nostrils, and squeezed through his mouth, in a matter of seconds, it was gone, and Adonis dropped to his knees, gasping for breath.

Adonis soon regained control, but took a moment to think. A Daedric prince, or at least some form of dark magic, was inhabiting his body, and-

"Greetings bringer of death." Mehrunes Dagon spoke, the voice ringing out loudly through his mind.

Adonis ignored the prince, knowing somehow, that he'd speak again. He resumed his pursuit of Rainor, and awaited the prince's words.

Sure enough, the deity of destruction continued his speech.

"I offer you a chance. A chance to be more than a petty tool, more than a dog held on a leash by a puny altmer. A chance to be a king above mortals. A demi god. All you have to do is one thing. Just one." The prince paused, as if savouring the thought of the last words that came.

"Kill Azmodæum" He finished.

"Never. I have loyalty more than a dog." Adonis retorted.

"You'll regret that." The prince replied darkly, unconstrained anger in his voice.

"No. I won't." Adonis responded shortly.

Adonis's mount had slunk away, but now its animal sense of hearing had picked up on its master's pants, and it was hurtling down the corridor at terrifying speed. It turned a corner, its paws sliding on the flat surface a little, causing it to skid. In the middle of the corridor were two men, and some odd sort of Dremora. Adonis's wolfen mount growled, and shot forward. The beast, large as it was, barrelled into the men, a door was to their right, and the wolfen dremora hit them at full pelt. The two Bretons were thrown sideways, smashing through the door, and landing on cold hard steps beneath, the

dremora that had been accompanying them, was throw in the other direction, temporarily out of the action.

Adonis heard his mount yell, and rounded a corner, he spotted the wolven beast hit Varnand. Adonis's eyes widened, as he saw that his brother was with him. The one that Azmodæum had warned him of, and attempted to dispose of.

Adonis sprinted to the door, where the two men had disappeared, and looked inside, there was a long winding flight of stairs, the sort that would lead up to a tower, and the men had clearly gone that way, eager to escape his wolven friend.

Adonis leapt through, and pursued them, they must be near the top of the tower by now.

After queer events unfolded in the room of the Stones, Merthierry dropped his head crestfallen. They fought, won, and now utterly lost. The power they had was now gone. He looked up at Azmodæum. For once the evil wizard seemed not assured of the situation as it was. He was stricken with utter perplexity. The mastermind did not know what to do. The scene was readily demoralizing.

"How much did we lose?"

"Adonis Vile!" Varnand spat. Drawing his knives, he glared at his rival. Augustus redied his sword, but did not intervene. After spitting out more curses at the man who Varnand knew very well could be the one to kill him.

He slipped the daedric dagger through his fingers, throwing it so it landed just shy of his opponents foot.

"You are nothing but a pawn, a pawn in this evil scheme, which is slowly crumbling! Believe me Adonis, if I don't die today, then you will!" He screamed.

Augustus, a grin on his face, turned to help his Auroran defeat the oncoming dunmer.

Adonis smiled as Varnand dispatched a volley of insults. He responded accordingly.

"You think to much of yourself Varnand. You think you are anything more than a pawn? I've seen you. Talking to that goddess of yours, what makes you think she has your best interests at heart? She is using you Rainor, and you embrace it with open arms, it is not I who is the pawn breton, but yourself." Adonis replied, a grin on his lips.

Varnands brother moved to intercept him, but Adonis whipped out a dagger, and flung it at the Breton, before moving in, and delivering a swift kick towards the Bretons jaw, attempting to keep him away.

"I think not Breton. If I have to kill two Rainors today, so be it." With that, Adonis span round, and instinctively his hand flew out, and he yelped with surprise as a ball of fire sparked into life in his palm, and his hand flicked out, sending the magic projectile at the pair, forcing them back.

What the... Adonis thought to himself, but then a voice whispered in his head.

"You rejected me mortal. But I am not disposed of like a rag. My magic is within you, much to my displeasure." Dagon paused, before adding, in a cocky tone.

"But it is not without it's consequences."

As if it had been waiting for a cue, pain flared into life in Adonis's outstretched hand, and he could see faint burn marks on his arm. He gritted his teeth against the pain, and advanced on the Rainor twins, forcing them up, towards the high tower above.

The Altmer clenched his teeth, kneeling to pick up the broken pieces of the Varla stone. Some of its white magic was struggling to shine through the fading crimson. He held the shattered pieces in his hands, closing his long fingers over them. Magicka billowed around his hands, and they trembled a bit as he began to speak. He did not look into Merthierry's armored face as he answered him.

"All is lost, and yet everything is ours, child. Look around. Adonis is off fighting the Breton traitor. Your brother," he said, nodding slightly towards Raven, "is off fighting mortal interlopers, and here we stand, beholding what the Daedric interlopers have done to us. Or, rather, what they have attempted to do."

His hands squeezed, and the shards in his hand popped and crumbled to dust.

"How could this have just happened?"

Merthierry outspoke in fuming anger, his armor hissing by the dissolving of blood it was covered in. A puddle of deep whine-red blood had formed at his feet, and still more came seeping down. Then for moments all that was heard were the dominant concussions of drips, their hollow impacts echoing far and deep.

Lycanthrope and blood-sucker clashed. The Werewolf got a hold of Draken, slashing at his mid-section with those monstrous claws. Draken hissed madly and roared in response, punching wildly at the Werewolf, his nails extending as the vampiric Imperial displayed his own sense of monstrosity. As the Werewolf fought against Draken, he began to evade the attack to get a better position to confront his immortal enemy. Draken's torso began to bleed, claw marks all over his chest and face. The vampire admired the Werewolf and honored him with a smile, the fight could not take long, one of them will probably get out alive, a fight between two powerful forces never ended with a white flag.

Josef's bloodlust drove him into a frenzy as his claws finally met their mark. Instantly his nostrils filled with the earthy, spicy scent of spilled immortal blood. He kept on the offensive, testing the Vampire's agility to the brink. The aroma of the blood kept Josef attacking blindly, ferociously.

Without thinking, the werewolf charged, plowing both immortals through the open archway. A deafening noise echoed through the entire castle as the invisible rift in the doorway began to become unstable; Josef cast into Hircine's realm and Draken into Coldharbour. Outside, the door began to shift and twist unnaturally.

A Winged Twilight burst forth from the unstable portal, carefully examining its surroundings before turning around and making some sort of signal into the door. The torches in the hall went dim, almost out, and a small group of silhouettes emerged from the twisted door before its energies fizzled out. The room on the other side looked as it had once before, with some statues standing tall and others crumbled to bits.

Azmodæum walked determinedly to the remaining two Dark Varla stones which hummed in their pedestals. They looked decidedly different, like the white inside and the black inside were in conflict, and at times they appeared to glow white, while at other times the familiar crimson crept out of the crystal, charred black with the smoke of the Deadlands' fire.

He lifted the two stones up, one in each hand, and turned around, holding them both. The look in his eyes was strange and terrible.

"Fate is never written in stone. If we fight the Daedra Lords and their pawns like this, we will die. But there is always an option, a gamble. You asked me what I would have you do, Raven. And I will answer you with a question. You will not disappoint me no matter how you answer, for it is the most base question one can be asked. Exactly how loyal are you? Are you willing to die today?"

The Warlock began channeling some sort of magicka into the stones. Their crystalline casing began to shimmer as if it was deteriorating.

"Merthierry and I are going to consume these stones. I do not know what is going to happen to us when we do so. We may keep control of ourselves and the great power that will engulf us. We may be consumed whole by the power. We may simply explode. Therein lies the gamble."

One of the now-ethereal stones, now a ball of conflicting, battling energies, flew from Azmodæum's left hand and hovered before Merthierry's steel-skinned face.

"I advise you, first and foremost, to run. Where you go from there is your test of loyalty. If you choose to flee from this castle, your life is in your hands once more. If you run downstairs and aid your brother and fight the interlopers, you stare Death in his empty face. Regardless of your decision... I advise you to run. Now."

A loud clang echoed throughout the entire castle. Something had happened downstairs, and it was deafening all the way to the highest towers.

The magicka that once comprised the Dark Varla stone passed into Merthierry's mask, making chilling noises of arcing electricity. The other ball of light and darkness was thrust into the Altmer's heart by his own twisted hand, and he fell to one knee, beginning to scream.

Silassen roared, looking for the vampire. Before realising he was in an entirely new space. He span around, eyes darting around looking for where the grey walls of the passageway he'd been in before had been. His eyes darted for the door, and he started running towards it, but suddenly the door was engulfed in fire, before exploding into a thousand pieces. Shrapnel flew from the door, and Silassen threw himself to the floor, but caught a glimpse of the shards, which had dissolved in thin air before they'd even flown a ft from the door.

Silassen rose to his feet, and looked around, he wasn't sure which, but he knew he was in the realm of a Daedric prince. Suddenly the world was wrenched sideways, and Silassen yelped in surprise, knocked down once more, by the tremors of the earth. Before a portal opened beneath him, and he fell through.

He landed hard, falling from the sky, before crashing into the ground beneath him. He leapt to his feet, fearing some sort of demon. But he realised his surroundings were different. Nature was all around. The thundering crashing of water was throwing itself into a pool of water beneath, with foam bobbing up to the surface.

Suddenly a blue portal blazed in the sky, and a host of winged twilights shot through, at an exceptional speed. Each was carrying a passenger. The group that had been with Silassen before he chased Josef.

Azmodæum spoke to her once more, giivng her a last warning. Run, flee, get out. Raven considered it..but the power..the chance she had to achive the purpose she wanted..now was placed simply in chance.

"I am loyal" Raven said finally.

Raven, watching Azmodæum fall to his knees, turned around and began to run. Raven cursed herself as a fool. Azmodæum fell to his knees and began to scream. Raven fled, running away from the scene like a craven thief. As she ran, she thought of her plans...if the Altmer survive, would he allow her to return even if she showed herself as a coward...if he died in his own act, would she risk dying as well in a foolish attempt to play fate and cheat destiny?

She understood the risks, but nothing of importance had ever been accomplished without risk. Raven ran to aid her brother, not out of any moral sense, she did it for herself. She would need his assistance in her goals and he was one to bring it to fruition, he could not die now.

Even if she died there, she could easily make a deal with the Daedric Prince, Molag Bal, to continue the work she promised she would complete. It was not all lost after all.

Raven jumped downstairs, her fall easily endured, she passed by, catching the scent of Werewolf and Vampire blood. She followed the scent and the unique sound of magic with all her speed until she came into a darkly lit hall where she originally had passed through. Raven's Hunters Sight was used and she looked around with her vampire eyes, dark becoming clear as day.

Cold. All that Draken felt was cold. The snow freezing his wounds, his face. Draken got up and saw a whole new world before him. Before he was fighting against the Werewolf, before he was slammed back into Coldharbour. Now he had time to fully admire it, the Imperial vampire, ignorant of what is happening outside, looked around. *It better had not ended like this. Im not ready for the afterlife* Draken complained.

"Blasted pup," Draken growled, as he looked around. The air was freezing, the sky was on flames. He knew where he was, he had been here once long ago on that damn Maelstrom. Now...he did not know if he was trapped or not. Ahead of him, was a large statue, resembling Molag Bal himself. Draken approached it, but only keeping his distance. He began feeling funny, as if the area he was in was about to explode or vomit him out.

A Stone turned into a pure raw essence of magic and disappeared into the face of the spawn of the Deadlands, whom welcomed it with arms spread wide. The Ceremonial armour twisted, expanded, curled and spiked.

Merthierry grew beyond a human size, a mutilation with care, his armour cracking with loud snaps. Not only did it split and curl, it took shapes caused not just by The dilation. Spikes sprang out -- on places where it would not hinder -- and strips of engravings likewise to the ones he had were scraped about him.

The union; the process was so fluid and natural, it was meant to be. The final pieces had fallen together.

His knee-pads pierced the stone like a sharp wave crashing into seaside rocks as he too dropped to the ground. He looked up at Azmodæum.

Azmodæum's face contorted as he held back screams of agony with suppressed groans. The Altmer began to morph into one of the beasts that had appeared as a ghostly visage during the battle in the Balindrium mountain caverns. His head became longer, his mouth wider, his teeth more jagged and fanged. Elements of the Deadlands began to emerge in his very genetic makeup. The jagged talons which dotted the Oblivion landscape pierced upwards from Azmodæum's shoulder blades, giving the illusion of two hideously deformed wings, useless for flying but razor sharp and with a point glowing orange-hot. His legs buckled and seemed to reshape themselves, and he too became larger than he had once stood. His skin began to char and turn black, before the outer layer of it fell to the ground and blew on the floor like ashes. The grey-green, scaly and stony husk which shone through had no merlike features. His ears had twisted, becoming wide horns which twisted like some sort of exotic antelope. All in all, his visage became most demonic.

When the dust settled, the stones were gone. Two monstrosities stood in the tallest tower of Balindrium, near a throne which would never fit its master again.

Azmodæum spoke, his voice a hungry, gurgling abomination. ***"We will teach the Daedra Princes that all things in this world are fallible. We will crush their pawns before them, and we will follow their pawns back to Oblivion and destroy them where they stand!"***

The devil walked heavily on his new clawed feet towards the throne, where he grabbed hold of a large pearl set into the armrest. His monstrous hand fully enclosed around the giant stone, nearly the size of a grapefruit, and he began to murmur an incantation through a throat full of acidic phlegm.

The entire castle began to quake violently.

Josef felt a hard jolt as he was slammed back into reality, hitting a wall scone with his shoulder and wincing as the blow registered. The repeated jolts back from Hircine's Hunting Grounds and back, and the repeated transformations, were absolutely disorienting. He shook his head hard, trying to get ahold of himself.

The first thing his eyes locked onto almost brought a tear to his eyes. Before him was a table, with all of his belongings laid out carefully. But not just his spear and light armor adorned the table. His Clan Armor, the Nordic Ringmail suit with the emblazoned Wolf logo on the cuirass, that he had left stashed in some unnamed cave long ago, but here it was, laying before him as if it had been yesterday since he had worn it. But first and foremost, before he even got dressed, Josef grabbed frantically for the cigarettes on the table and set one ablaze with the very torch he had come barreling into before. As he smoked, his head cleared, and he remembered what must be done. He dressed himself, first in his clothing, then in his armor, and grabbed his spear up. Finishing his first cigarette, he smashed it into the carpet with his metal boot and lit another. He began to walk down the hall, getting used to the armor he had worn like a second skin for so long. Before long he was pole-vaulting down the hallway with his spear for practice. The armor

encumbered him more than his clothing, for sure, but Josef had relied on the armor to save his life on many an occasion, and he was fairly used to moving around with the armor on. But in the midst of one vaulting jump down an unfamiliar hallway, the ground began to rumble and shake. Josef felt the ground itself come up a few inches while he was airborne, and the change in elevation beneath him threw off his balance. He stumbled and fell, and he stayed on the ground clutching his spear while the earthquake continued.

"Balindrium Rises once again..."

Chapter Forty Two Balindrium Rises Once Again

As fire scorched past him, Augustus spun around with amazing agility. The dunmer whom apparently had a problem with his brother was now rapidly throwing out spells, and the popping veins on his arms seemed to glow red with the flame. As if by magic, Hellfire seemed to appear in Augustus' hand. He did a front flip, landing in front of Varnand and pushing away one of the giant balls of flame.

But even with the Rainors' combined skills, they were still being pushed back by Adonis' newfound strength. As they passed another side corridor, Talon could be seen, still fighting the demon dog. As they neared the top of the massive citadel, screams could be heard from the floor below. Suddenly, their upward advance was halted as the earth shook violently, causing the stairs above them to collapse.

The duo glanced around wildly, looking for shelter from the onslaught of flame. Turning, they sprinted down the hall where Talon still fought on. The young Auroran followed them as they flashed by, and all three broke through the cracked wood arched doors at the end of the tunnel.

They found themselves in the dining hall, which had apparently made its way up the tower during the fight. The table cloth was ripped and burned, and broken tableware lain all around. Varnand flashbacked to the first time he had been in this room, when he and the rest of Azmodeum's followers had first seen the daedric army and the Varla Stone balcony. The ground continued to shake as the entire room slowly made its way upward...

Merthierry spoke, and his voice had changed. From abhorrent inhuman to a wise old man -- much alike the voice he once had. The cold tint of metal had largely gone too.
"Why, whyyy change the holy peak of Balindrium ...? Why do we take flight ...?"

Adonis pursued his prey relentlessly. They couldn't lose him. Neither him, nor they, were particularly swift, and he was determined not to stop, until there was a satisfying pool of blood, around his feet, whether it be his, or the Rainors.

He pursued them into the dining hall. Memories flashed through his mind vaguely. But he pushed them from his thoughts. They were nothing but distractions in combat. He had little time to take in the scene anyway. As the ground began to shake, and slowly tilt up. It felt as if a terrible force was wrenching the castle from the very foot of the mountain.

"It's over Rainor's. One of our family lines end here. Think about that. If you fail, not only will you die, but your family will be nothing but a legacy. No one will remember, and no one will live on to tell your tales. When you fail here today. It will not just be you who dies. But your family also." Adonis spoke. All though his voice was deeper than normal. As if it wasn't he who was speaking. But another, even more sadistic and evil, more twisted than the mouth it was speaking through.

He advanced, slowly, at ease with the world. Prepared for either eventuality. The group were nearing the balcony.

"Adonis, it doesn't have to be this way!" Varnand screamed across the cracking table. *"We can work together! Azmodeum is EVIL! He's using you!"* But still, Varnand could Adonis would not fall back.

"So be it..." Varnand muttered.

Jumping forward with his knives. Augustus followed, his sword Hellfire glistening red. Talon too joined, his golden armor grayed by his earlier fights.

Adonis leapt backwards, rolling with the flow of the castles movement, and avoiding the trios attack. He launched a powerful fiery projectile. He recoiled from the force of the magical shot. It would do serious damage if it connected, but he had tripped over his feet from the knock back of his attack. He slammed into a railing, and almost toppled over. But managed, to catch himself, and steady himself. He stood there. Feet held in a combat stance, occasionally he had to steady himself against the castles vibrations.

He found himself on a familiar balcony. He grinned, and awaited the other trios charge.

Balindrium rose above, by some majestic power, the castle itself suddenly started to lift. Holding her sword before her, she climbed the stairs. Every sense was at a heightened state, alert to the slightest hint of a problem. Emerging from the stairwell, she found herself in a vaulted corridor heavy with the weight of ages. Time and decay had taken their toll on this part of Balindrium. The walls were cracked and crumbling. Around were glyphs and other a Daedric relics, resting in niches along the walls, were covered by many decades worth of dust. Cobwebs cloaked the hanging tapestries. The paving stones were broken and uneven, forcing Raven to tread carefully. Melted snow dripped from the ceiling, forming puddles upon the floor. Rats scurried away at her approach. Daedric light from the closed magic room shone through broken stained-glass windows, casting a spectrum of eerie colors upon the ancient stones as she carried her unconscious brother on her back. Raven tripped as the castle rumbled, she tumbled down the stairs, rolling off onto the cold floor as Draken tumbled behind her. Even as she stopped in motion, she already got back on her feet and threw him back over her back. Everything went wrong, everything was the opposite of what she wanted them to be. Raven pushed Draken through the metal door and went through it herself, there was one place she was sure where she was sure the Castle would not take. The caverns beneath it. Raven loomed over the small abyss that lead to the caverns. They were dark and they whispered death, but like minutes earlier, Raven had to gamble her odds. Using the Hunters Sight, she looked around to see if there was a way out, behind the walls..nothing, back door. Negative. Stairs were not there, for they have been destroyed by either the Daedric forces of the owner of this re-locating establishment. Raven felt the Castle lift a little higher than before. Minutes were being wasted and Raven did not want to spend her time here in Balindrium, now that her goal has failed..at least for now.

Raven dropped Draken to the ground on the edge. Bending down over him, she lightly kissed his forehead. The inert flesh felt cold against her lips. She rose and turned away from the body, her eyes shimmering like ice rubies. She wiped away the incriminating moisture and tossed Draken down into the abyss. She could tell he could survive the fall. Her entire species has from the weakest birthling to the oldest Elder, survived amazing falls and conditions. Draken soared down, gravity taking its hold on the unaware victim, at least he will not feel the fall. Draken disappeared in the darkness below, the faint sound of a loud crash audible. Now it was her turn to jump. Gravity grabbed her and didn't let go. She plummeted, falling fifteen feet toward the ground below. The wind smacked against her face as she fell, Feeling no fear, displaying no resistance, Raven allowed herself to soar down until her knee landed on the ground first, then her other foot. The pain was temporary, almost faint. She was at her strongest, so it made little difference. Raven grabbed Draken again and started to drag him over to the dark corridors of the tunnels. Past the dead bodies of skeletons and Dremoras until she finally reached a dead end. Raven dropped her brother there on the ground and simply fell apart. It was no use. His chest had been torn to shreds. Draken was dead. Bending over him, she laid her hand against his cheek, hoping to get a response. Her fingers searched for a pulse. "Brother," Raven whispered "Draken!" She added, even louder.

Anger, an emotion she knew far better than grief, rushed over her. "Damn you" She fell to her knees beside the body. Her clenched fists pounded upon his ravaged chest, coming away stained with his blood. Tears gushed from her eyes, mixing with the cold melted snow dripping from her hair. Four hundred years of loss and heartbreak surged up inside her, spilling over the dams she had erected around her heart. Violent sobs racked her body. At last, the deafening roar of the avalanche and the rising of Balindrium died down enough that Raven could actually hear herself think. Stray stones and chunks of ice clattered down from above, but the worst of the collapse seemed to be over. A cloud of raised dust reduced her visibility. An eerie silence, broken only by the

occasional falling rock, descended over the dungeons in the wake of the explosions and their cataclysmic aftermath. Raven was alone, her only company, the corpse of her brother. Only that...a corpse, no dust, no ash. Raven had feared he was dead, for his heart ceased to beat. However, she retained some hope he might be still living. He needed blood in his system. He sustained too much damage to heal properly. Raven's emotional distress were from the fact that even she felt sorrow. It was pathetic, how she had succumbed to such mawkish behavior. Raven carried Draken to a corner and placed him there, his arms crossed on his chest resembling how they sleep. Raven sat next to him and buried her head in her hands, gritting her teeth bitterly. *It's over.*

Silassen suddenly bent double in pain. His hand clutched his abdomen. Slowly he lifted his shirt. There, clear as day, was a small bite mark. His eyes widened, and then it was upon him.

His muscles were in agony. His bones felt as if they were slowly grinding each other to dust, and tearing themselves apart. A searing pain in his head. Thoughts were wiped away in an instant. His legs gave way, and he fell to his knees. The pain intensified. It felt as if his head was going to split into. As if the skull was trying to force its way out of the confines of its fleshy prison. His legs suddenly lost what little support they had left, and he dropped, his body sprawled out on the grass beneath him. His body began to convulse. His legs began to spasm, and he pounded the floor with his fists. His mind now that of an animal.

Then his muscles bulged, and bulged. They grew, and Silassen roared in pain, his vocal chords thickening, turning the loud noise into a far more animal like cry. His arms reached breaking point, and stopped, un-naturally large for the man possessing them. The skin cracked from the pressure of holding the muscles back, and slowly hairs began creeping from the cracks, and soon more cracks appeared, being replaced with more hair, which thickened and curled, becoming a tough wiry fur. His fists began to curl into claws, the bones in his fingers lengthening, the tips of his nails grew, becoming tough as rock, and razor sharp. His toes began to curl inwards, becoming more like a paw, flattening out. Silassen reached up with his hands, and tried to cry out, protest against the agony that was taking hold of him. But all he could manage was a thick growl, as his vocal chords twisted, and reformed.

He clutched his head with his new claws, and desperately tried to hold onto the last vestiges of humanity that remained. But it was no use. His teeth began to lengthen, bending out of shape, and burst out of his mouth, two of his teeth, one on either side of his now gaping maw of a mouth, twisted into a set of vicious curled fangs. His ears grew, and his whole head began to expand, his nose splitting out into a snout, and his eyes glowed yellow, a ravenous hunger within them.

He stood up. How pitiful that a creature such as him had been in pain from such trivial injuries. His mind was incapable of full thought now. There were few words which meant anything to him. Food. Blood. Eat. Prey. He howled with satisfaction at the thought of fresh meat. His nose drew him to a pack of fighters being flown in by winged twilight. There were too many. He would have to find pickings elsewhere. He roared, and it filled the landscape of the realm they were residing within. He beat his fists on the floor, and his four limbs hit the floor, as he bounded away, his nose leading him to easier, but equally as bloody pickings.

As Adonis came closer to the clearly outmatched trio, both Rainors began to consider a retreat. But suddenly, as the crystalline voice of Merdia shouted out an incantation in the brothers' heads, they turned around and watched as Talon began to grow. First he went to the size of a troll, then a daedroth, and finally he towered over the humans and the dunmer. *Mehrunes won't win*. Meridia's voice echoed again, as her massive daedra advanced on the darkened dunmer.

Silassens heart was pounding like a pneumatic drill. Hammering against his rib cage, fueling his newly powered body. His mind was a blur, much like the surroundings around him, he was moving fast, and with purpose. He could smell it. He could smell blood. The thought of it made his mouth tingle with excitement. A bloody steak, of human flesh. That is what he longed for, and what he was drawing closer to. He could smell them clearly now. The scent filled his nostrils. Three of them humanoid. Weak. Easy pickings. He growled with satisfaction, just the thought of it excited him. He could feel himself ascending, he was climbing higher and higher....

Adonis watched as the proud daedric servant grew. He became massive. Adonis face did not much change. He had accepted death. He had accepted it along time ago. Fear was not an emotion he had felt in a long time. If you accepted death, then there was nothing more the world could throw at you.

"We can beat him you know. Unleash me." The power hungry voice of Mehrunes Dagon purred in his mind.

Adonis paused for a moment. Before a wicked grin crossed his face. He dismantled the mental barriers between him and Dagon, letting the magical beast within him to stretch his legs. It roared it's satisfaction, and enveloped him in spiritual power.

A swirl of black shadow enveloped Adonis. It twisted, and hissed, slithering around, forming something. It was spitting flames, and snaking tendrils darted backwards and forwards. They surrounded Adonis, consuming him, and snaking around and on top of each other. The heat was unbearable at first, but soon that dissipated, his body toughening, and becoming immune to the black tendrils of destruction. The black tendrils began to form into a suit of armour. Soon he was clad in an armour, made of magical smoke. He raised an arm inquisitively. Without warning he flicked it at a nearby pillar, and a tendril struck out, striking the pillar, and severing the base.

Adonis roared, and propelled himself forward, the tendrils of his armour adding to his momentum. He grew as he attacked, and rivalled the great size of Talon. The two began ripping at each other. The two pawns of the daedric princes locked in fierce battle. One of Adonis's tendrils struck Talon below the knee, opening up a gash in the armour of his opponent. Talon battered him with a gigantic fist, and and the smoke tendrils faltered a moment, he had been hurt by the attack.

Adonis's tendrils sneaked through Talons defences. Cutting his armour to shreds. Talon returned the favour. The pair were evenly matched, and they tore at each other. If the pair below attempted to aid their ally, then the tendrils of Adonis's armour swatted them aside. It looked as if it would be an eternal battle. No one had any advantage.

Silassen was drawing closer to his prey. He was growing even more excited. There was

more blood than before. Fresh blood, and it filled his nostrils, and it was good. It was heavenly. He longed to sink his fangs into flesh. He longed to lap at a pool of blood, and howl at the moon, the deliverer of this sweet state of affairs.

One of Adonis's tendrils sneaked through Talons defences. It was a matter of pure luck. It opened up a huge wound on the Daedras stomach. Steam rose from the wound. It had fatally weakened Talon. It wasn't lethal. But it was enough to put him out of action for now. Adonis stood there a moment, savouring the victory. He raised an arm, and it transformed into an enormous sword. The smoke was dancing around wildly, excited of it's promised victory.

Silassen rounded the corner. He was on the balcony, the smell of blood was so thick in his nostrils now that his mind had fully clouded over. It was heavenly, and he didn't waste any time stopping. He saw a man clad in shadowy tendrils, preparing to finish another. He glanced at the sky. He froze. The moon had passed behind a thick bank of cloud. He felt himself transform. All of the changes reversed. He was in twice the agony as before, as his bones, and muscles shrank, returning to their normal shape and size.

Adonis watched as a new comer stumbled into the balcony. He was a pitiful affair. A mass of hair and claws. Pathetic creature. Mehrunes Dagon whispered to what little conscious thought that Adonis still possessed. He nodded. A one day Lycanthrope could not defeat him. Hircine could not even send his champion against him. He chose a pawn. A weak Lycanthrope. Not even a day old. He swatted the Daedra aside. He could deal with him momentarily. He stalked over to the wolf, now rapidly reforming into a man.

"Tell me wolf. Or should I say, Redguard? How does it feel to know, that you are moments from death?" Adonis drawled, the evil traces of Mehrunes Dagon's voice flowing through his words.

"I can...tell..you..." Silassen began, a heavy panting coursing through his lungs. He could see something the monster before him could not. His back was to the balcony, and more importantly the night sky. Where a silvery orb had just drifted into view. He didn't try to fight the change this time. He let it consume him, and moments later he was powerful once more. He blindly grabbed Adonis by the waist, and dived off the balcony, taking him with him. The pair locked in a death embrace, plummeted off of the edge, and falling towards the ground beneath.

As the pair fell they battled ferociously. Silassen biting, and clawing, his raw power, and disregard for safety allowing him to battle Adonis Vile. They plummeted downwards, the wind ripping at them in anger, proud to produce to more victims of the air.

Another lower balcony stretched out beneath them. The pair hurtled towards it, twisting in mid air. They narrowly avoided being speared on a spike. Silassens outstretched paw grabbed a spike, and attempted to haul himself up. He could feel the moon beginning to drop, and his humanity was slowly returning. Adonis grabbed his leg and tugged, with a howl, Silassen fell, and Adonis with him.

The floor of Balindrium was hurtling closer. The pair were shooting towards it like a torpedo. Impact was moments away. Both men roared, and braced themselves for the

inevitable impact. The two crashed into the stone floor. Adonis's armour blew through the stone work like a lit keg of gunpowder. Their descent stopped there. They did not fall through Balindriums underside. Stones had fallen from nearby towers, and the two were blocked in.

Silassen felt the bone shattering impact. All of his hardened bones cracked, and splintered, the white barrier snapping, and spearing his flesh. The bones shrunk. Resuming their normal shape. His heart was still beating. He could feel blood seeping away. Nothing could save him now. His breath was ragged, and he was fairly sure that his rib cage had punctured both his lungs and his heart. His last thought before he died was of Mariane. He imagined her. The perfect image. Her smile. Her face. Her hair. He remembered her. He remembered her, as the strands of his body came apart. He remembered her, as his lungs began to fail him. He remembered her as his breath became painful. The faces of his friends joined her briefly. Augustus Rainor, Seris Marentius, Bethras Northwode, and others he had encountered. His family, his mother and father. They were all smiling down on him as his last breath left his body, and his heart beat its last. Silassen Ilden, was dead.

Chapter Forty Three

The Final Battle

Josef climbed back to his feet, gently rubbing his large hip, which had taken the brunt of the fall. It was not bad. Angrily, he picked up the half-burned cigarette off the stone floor and re-lit it with a wall sconce that had fallen during the quake. *"What in Oblivion was that?"* he grunted, walking slowly down the hallway he had just been pole-vaulting through. Even at his slow pace, the Ringmail jingled about his chest when he walked, giving off a tell-tale sign of an intruder if there were any sentries about. This put the Nord on edge.

He slipped into another room, this one with no real door, just a shimmering tapestry hung over the archway. On the other side was a lavish array of food, drinks, and...

Josef's eyes opened wide. Moon-sugar! He made a quick jog across the small chamber and began to survey his bounty. He grabbed a big leg of turkey, polishing it off with haste, and then turned onto a pie of meat and potatoes. After belching, his eyes settled dreamily onto the crystalline powder, piled high on the table near a poured glass of wine. This was obviously meant for the lord of this castle, Josef mused as he grabbed a nearby Dwemer artifact shaped like a tube. *"Now, it's mine. I never wanted to be here to begin with. I should be in a tavern somewhere. Doing this!"* he started, laughing, and insufflated a large quantity of the drug.

His head began to spin, his insides felt like they were receiving a massage by countless hands of warm velvet. His heart rate quickened, his cold blue eyes dilated. Dazed, he sat back in the chair, feeling the Sugar take its effect on him. He began to laugh loudly, his laughter echoing down the hall and finding its place in the ears of Hroarez.

When his laughter subsided, he knelt down to finish the pile off. His tube, however, bumped into something metallic that was hidden in the pile. He cleaned off the tray of its contraband, and found beneath it a strange ring, cast of some strange metallic stone he had never seen before. Emblazoned on the ring was a crest of a wolf, nearly identical to the one his family had chosen for their Ringmail armor.

Josef grabbed the ring, popped it in his mouth to clean it of the moon sugar, and spit it out into his hand. It shone brightly. Although he hated jewelry, he figured it would fetch a high price, and so he reached to put the ring in his pocket. To his dismay, he remembered that there are no pockets in his armor, and his pouches tucked beneath the armor itself. Removing his right gauntlet, he slid the ring onto his third finger, and his eyes opened wide with a mixture of understanding and wild intoxication. He stood quickly from the chair, let out a whoop, and tore through the tapestry, running headlong down the hallway.

Azmodæum was a disgusting beast now, and Merthierry a iron-skinned behemoth. It became immediately apparent that they would not fit into the doorway to go back down into the castle. The master screamed at his own reflection in the stained glass, then gave an inhuman look at his servant.

"We must bring the interlopers to us, my child. Lure them here, somehow. I..."

With this Azmodæum screamed again, as he began to undergo another transformation. The magic was becoming unstable inside him.

It all happened too fast. One minute, the Rainors and Vile had been fighting viciously on the top of the now-flying spire of Balindrium.

The next, a giant werewolf burst out through the doors, and he and the bastard Adonis went plummeting off the tower. Augustus looked down, but it was impossible to see their bodies in the mass of blood and gore below.

"Their is no time to mourn, my child. Azmodeum's end is upon us!" The voice of Meridia told him.

"Varnand!" He yelled to his his brother. *"Let us move downwards!"* At the same time, a loud, horrible scream could be heard throughout the complex.

The Rainors' and Talon slowly made their way through the hallowed corridors of Balindrium, in a search for the demon Azmodeum. As the halls narrowed, the group was forced to walk single-file. Finally, they turned into a much larger hallway bordered by columns and daedra-shaped torches. The castle shook violently again, as a large chunk of rock fell from the mountain top that still flew with the tall spire.

Both were still shaken by their encounter with Adonis Vile and the unknown wolfman, and they all still had burns from Adonis' fireballs.

As they continued down the dim corridor, they saw a strange duo make their way around the corner. A hairy Nord, was immediately recognized by Augustus as the same werewolf who had attacked their camp earlier.

Quickly, he pulled out his sword. Varnand and Talon followed his example by unsheathing their own respective weapons. *"The big ones a wolf."* Augustus whispered to his brother.

Slowly, they advanced on the group of two, weapons drawn to a defensive position. *"More of Azmodeum's bastards, I'm sure!"* Augustus said, a little bit louder so that the other group could hear him.

"I don't know what the hell you jus' said, but you'd better start explainin' things right the hell now." Josef exploded, his eyes ablaze. He had little else to say, closing the gap between the Rainors and the Daedra but maintaining a distance.

When he saw the Auroran he took a great pace back and readied his spear defensively, his dilated pupils scanning the beast madly. *"What in Oblivion is that, and why ain't it dead yet?"*

Varnand, burning with rage, was prepared to jump at the duo and slit their throats. Augustus, who had calmed down considerably, now lowered his weapon, though still kept it at ready should a fight break out. *"The daedra? Personally, I haven't any idea where it came from. My... brother, may elaborate more?"* He stared at Varnand, who scowled. Augustus, seeing that he would not get an answer from his brother. *"Anyways, he's good to our cause, and has YET to attack us. As to our reason of being in this hellhole, I really cannot explain right now. What I CAN tell you is that we're being pursued by an army of trained warriors, who will probably kill us all if we don't get out of here. Now, as I presume we have the same mutual goal of escaping this deathtrap, what say we temporarily join up to get out of here, all personal grudges aside?"* Varnand, by this time was simply glaring at his brother. Slowly though, his knives came back to his sides, and he stared at the other group. An ominous silence settled over the corridor as the Rainor's awaited an answer.

In a normal state of mind, Josef simply did not like Daedra. They came from a place he did not understand, from a dimension which clashed with his ideas of the universe, and they made him uneasy. In his current state, he bristled with anger just looking at the beast. But he was not too intoxicated to realize that this unholy creature was, for whatever reason, a package deal with the only other allies he had in this strange place.

"I'm ready to get the hell outta here. I came and got what I was 'sposed to find. I'm findin' a way out, and you and yer... thing... are welcome to follow."

"Ohhhh... my aching head..." said the smooth, velvety voice of Hroarez the Khajiit. He was disoriented and overcoming a moment of vertigo. Interdimensional travel, it seemed, was a new and uncomfortable experience for him.

As he shook off the spinning feeling in his head and stomach, Hroarez noticed that he was laying on a floor. The room was dimly lit by red-flamed candles, and he could barely see the furthest wall. Near him was the unconscious body of his travelling companion Elrohir L'hrador. He crawled dizzily towards him and began to gently shake him awake.

Elrohir woke without too much effort, but said little. His trip through Azura's realm had left him introspective and quiet. Hroarez spoke first, after a long silence while each collected themselves and took an inventory of what they had after the trip. *"Do you figure we still go to find your canine friend?"*

Elrohir nodded grimly, shrugging. They groped around in the darkness until they found a corridor, which led them to one which was considerably more well-lit. They continued silently, stopping all of a sudden when they heard a man let loose a terrible scream of rage and confusion. Bethras followed.

Josef had 'led' the group the balcony just beneath the top tower. When he saw that the castle itself was flying through the air, his scream resounded throughout the mountains and the fortress behind him. He screamed in anger again and again, wheeling around on his heel to confront the Rainors.

"The damned demon of the hunt took me over. Made me do things, made me go places. An' the whole damned time he was tellin me once I got here, things'd get clear and I would understand everythin'. Well, I'm HERE! AND I DON'T GET IT!" he screamed.

Deep within the dark bowels of the mountain, a rumbling evil stirred. Taking note of its newfound freedom from the magical enslavement of the One Above, and the sounds of its trinkets being handled echoed throughout the cavern. Silently, the beast swooped from its perch and began flying throughout the cavern.

'Blood, blood, blood...' ran through the creature's mind. It smelled it, it knew that someone, something, was here. For decades, it seemed, the beast had been paralyzed by the magic of the One Above, tortured by his voice as the creature slumbered. It had been human once, or some imitation of it. But that faded memory was barely in the monster's mind. It was free, and it was hungry.

With their preternatural hearing, Draken and Raven could hear the distinct and rhythmic whooshing of air, and before long, the flapping of enormous wings.

Hroarez and Elrohir made their way stealthily toward the source of the scream. When they neared the corner, they too noticed that they were in flight. As they rounded the corner, they saw Josef and the others, and hurried towards them, dropping their stealthy act in whole-hearted excitement to see a familiar face after the strange kidnapping by the Winged Twilight.

Josef did not seem any more pleased to see his old friends. Only more raw confusion emanated from the Nord. He motioned for the pair to come closer, but turned to face Varnard Rainor. His confusion was beginning to enrage him. Josef's patience was beginning to dwindle. And the way the Daedra lurked behind the silent man, made Josef all the more uneasy.

"You, there. Tell me what the hell is goin' on, right now." His blue-eyed glare was made of the Ice of Skyrim itself.

They looked at each other and began to look towards the door that they first entered from. The sound of flight caught them by surprise, they never remembered it before, they just knew it was airborne.

"Daedra?" Asked Draken.

"Most likely, but I do not know." Raven said as she tried to hear the constant flapping. By the sound, she could discern that whatever it was, it was very large and monstrous.

Raven removed her scimitar from its sheath and just hid near the door. Blending in with the darkness. Draken's faint footsteps tried to sneak his way towards the hall, only to be stopped by Raven.

"That won't work. You have blood all over you and it already knows we are here. Stay." Whispered the girl, motioning to Draken with her ringed finger to find cover. He did as she told, sneaking would be useless and fighting it would be the best thing...Unless it was powerfully strong, then they would have to find a way to outsmart it and flee.

The two awaited what was about to come. Fighting was never over, no rest for the wicked at all. Draken's ears perked up to hear the approximation of the creature that was flying towards them.

The flapping of wings drew closer and closer. Odd mushrooms dimly lit the caverns, and down a long and wide corridor, Draken caught the first glance of it. Its wings were thin, stretched, and veiny, not at all feathered, with long bones holding it together. They flapped into the light only for a moment, and then they returned to the blackness.

With a screech, the monster burst out of the dark corridor and was close enough for the vampires to see with their enhanced vision. Its body was about the size of a man's, perhaps a little larger, but its long wings spanned several meters across. Its face was twisted, like that of a bat's, and its body seemed to be twisted by the same daedric magics that had affected Azmodæum before Raven had fled. Patches of fur and glowing, stretched skin covered the giant bat-thing's wiry body. Instantly, the two recognized, underneath the stench of rot and the taint of the daedric magic, the unmistakable smell of one of their own.

Screeching and skittering, the beast's clawed feet landed on the floor. At the end of its wings were twisted talons, pitch-black, and its cruel eyes were focused squarely on the siblings

The monster had finally revealed itself and what a remarkable sight it was. Then, both of them realized it had the blood of the dead running through its veins, the creature that stood before them was a sort of mutated vampire. If she had not smelled its true scent, she would of mistaken it for an Imp.

Draken's squinted his eye as if he had not seen it clearly, as if he was seeing some sort of hallucination. The creature was bat-like, but mixed with man. It was grotesque but very intriguing all together. He moved a little bit closer with a careful and thoughtful step, Raven stayed back at first, but then followed closely.

"Is it hostile?" Raven asked quickly.

"It's thirsty, I can tell" Draken answered.

Now, both of them were unsure as to how approach this thing, with hostility or something a bit more civilized, but with its hungry eyes, they were willing to bet it wanted to eat them and suck them dry. Although they had nothing to offer but cold

blood.

Raven held her scimitar tightly, wrapping her fingers around the edge of the hilt, only to prepare herself for a battle. Draken on the other hand, only had a simple dagger, he had lost the other weapon in his recent battle with some amateur adventurers. He studied the monster with his own red eyes, hissing slightly, trying to see how the beast would reply.

"Kill it" Raven whispered to Draken from a distance.

Draken raised his hand slightly, silencing Raven with a finger. He walked closer and stood still feet away from it. He felt as if the beast would attack him, but he had hoped they would come to a more quiet negotiation rather than battle. And truthfully, he wasn't betting on a peaceful end. He stood, waiting to see what it would do.

Azmodæum gave Merthierry a bizarre look, as corrupt magicks began emanating from his pores. The twisted beast that had once been an Altmer began to writhe and howl, slamming his gigantic, clawed fists into the ground repeatedly. The floor became crooked as it started to rip itself from its joists.

"DAMN IT ALL! IT BURNS! DAMN IT ALL!"

Below, the group which had gathered around Varnard became alarmed at the renewed violence of the castle's trembling. Josef hoisted Varnard to his feet and leaned him against the Daedra, which seemed more than eager to help his mortal friend. The ceiling began to crack and crumble, and in an instant, the room behind the balcony exploded into pure chaos. Two large beings, obviously Daedric in nature, erupted from the ceiling and fell heavily, plainly visible to the men assembled. One was tall and metallic, and the partially-conscious Varnard recognized him instantly as Merthierry Yvienne, the inhuman right-hand of Azmodæum. The other beast, an unrecognizable mass of flesh, muscle, and bone, surrounded by twisting green smoke and electricity.

Azmodæum's eyes locked on the group assembled on the balcony as his form continued to change. He did not see a group of men. He saw in the Khajiit nothing but the cunning of Azura; In the Nord, only the ferocity of Hircine. In the twin Rainors, he saw the blinding light of Meridia. And in the rebellious Dunmer, he saw the actualization of Azura's threats; Azmodæum saw in Elrohir only the fury of a Daedra Princess scorned.

Merthierry clanged forward to Azmodæum's wanting.

He managed to stop his twisted arm from writhing long enough to motion to them. **"Kill them all!"** he croaked to Merthierry, screaming and gurgling between his words.

His pace increased, his pose tensioned and the fire was now almost blinding. He was utmost angered by the beast. Why hadn't the beast just kept its snout? He groaned soundlessly under the metal as he lifted his hammer, ready to sweep. He felt like ramming something to mere dust, to particles.

"Do you know what happens when you die?" He said.

Roaring loudly, Josef flung himself, spear extended, towards Azmodæum. His eyes shone in the cold moonlight. His target, the beast, still writhed in agony, but he was not out of his mind. Merthierry stepped to defend his master, but Josef ducked the arm of the now-gigantic metallic Dunmer.

It all comes down to this, Josef thought in that agonizingly long instant. The curse, the journey, the fighting. This is why I was sent here.

With Hircine's guile flashing in his eyes, Josef heaved the spear with all of his might towards the mutating Azmodæum. It pierced his arm, and the beast let loose an indescribable sound. Josef yanked violently at his spear, trying to loose it from the stone-like skin as the muscles beneath it flexed around the bloodied spear shaft. He did not manage to pull it free in time to dodge Merthierry's next swing, which knocked Josef clear off the balcony. A pained yell was all that could be heard, and just like that, Josef was gone.

Azmodæum had as much luck ripping the spear free from his arm as Josef did. He found himself wholly unable to call forth his magic, and realized with horror that the tip of the spear had been poisoned.

"Silence..." he weakly muttered, and motioned for Merthierry to kill the remaining heroes before they could finish him off in his extremely vulnerable state. The Castle began to descend slowly; The twisted warlock's magic was helping to keep it aloft since some of the Crystals had been stolen.

Merthierry swung for the Nord, missed, then went for another sweep, which he felt hitting the Nord. He grimaced as to show a false ridiculing pity but nobody could perceive the staged sorry-face, which saddened Yvienne, and for that one second, he vaguely felt jealous to the humanity. It angered him.

The rest of the second where his hammer would finish the swing, his mind was philosophizing at a brilliant speed, weighing humanity against being a demon. The answer was not a definition, it was never anything in the way of something certain. He felt sad and proud.

Azmodæum was angry. Things had turned against him. His castle was descending, Vile was no where to be seen, the vampires equally illusive, and his failed lieutenant, Varnand Rainor, was far to easy to see. His one remaining lieutenant was being faltered by a puny arrow. The spear was still protruding from the flesh of his arm, despite his continued efforts to remove it. Cursing, Azmodæum took stock of the situation before him.

Merthierry, powerful as he was, could not remove the forces before him single handed. Azmodæum could act as a destruction, it was a thin hope for victory, but at least he could cause some disruption.

Azmodæum advanced on the traitor. Anger was coursing through him, and as soon as he came within range, Azmodæum swung his arm in an arc, the spear still embedded deeply in his arm, the sharp tip of the spear swinging towards the Rainor at speed. Azmodæum was fortunate, the spear, while stemming him of his magic, at least allowed him to have some crude form of offence. He kept his distance, waving the bloodied shaft at his enemies.

Azmodæum span the spear wildly, the embedded weapon still posing a great threat. As the tip struck towards Varnand Rainors exposed throat, his brother, determined to defend the new bond he and his brother shared, tossed a magical projectile towards the attacker, but he whirled out of the way. As the seemingly undefeatable daedric servant Merthierry swung a devastating blow aimed at Reeda-Thar, Hroarez the Khajiit darted forwards and struck the metal armor that protected Merthierry Yvieene, and withdrew his fist to strike again, drawing his kantana as he did so. It was then he caught sight of his fist. It had become engulfed in the flame that danced around the monsters armor. He dropped and rolled, slapping at the flames, narrowly missing a swing from Merthierrys hammer.

It was as if two separate battles were being fought in Balindrium. Hroarez and Elrohi tried to keep Merthierry from causing serious damage, distracting him more than anything, beginning to tire as their strikes bounced harmlessly off on the strong twisted metal. On the other side of the room, the two mages, Bethras Northwode, and Augustus Rainor pitted their magical prowess against an altmer who mere moments ago would have struck them down without breaking a sweat, but was now forced to fight on more even terms.

They tossed magical projectiles at the twisted beast that was Azmodaeum, who managed to duck, or dance away from their strikes. It was clear he was feeling the strain. In a move of desperation the altmer, swung his arm once more, and the spear struck true. It was barely a graze, but it connected with Augustus.

He stopped mid spell, the magic dying at his fingertips, as he felt the silencing spell slither into his blood. He backed away, the tables suddenly turned. Azmodaeum laughed, his hysterical howl cutting through the men's courage like a blade through flesh. It was then, at that crucial moment, where it seemed all hope was lost for the Rainors, who were both backing away quickly from the altmer, that Bethras Norwode showed his true courage.

As the Altmer prepared his final strike, as Varnand and Augustus fumbled with their blades, as the trio across the room desperately fought to hold the advances of Merthierry Yvienne, as that one single crucial moment struck the land of Cyrodiil, as that one second dragged out as if in slow motion, in that one singular second, Bethras Norwode became a hero.

With a roar he leaped forward, and thrust his blade wildly at the Altmer, it by chance struck true, driving straight through Azmodaeums back, and ripping a gaping hole, and destroying truly, once and for all, the dark miserable mockery that was his heart.

The moment shattered. A fountain of blood erupted from Azmodaeums chest, spraying the two men in front of him. The battle between Merthierry and the trio across the room ceased in an instant. All were transfixed by the death of the dark overlord, the death of Azmodaeum. The Altmer was still standing, blood foaming at his mouth. He was incredibly still alive. His neck slowly lowered, and his eyes focused groggily on the blade, covered in a dark crimson red, blood, that was extending from his chest. He spat blood, and his mouth moved, worded a silent curse. Fury, confusion, and pain were heavy in his eyes. Bethras wrenched his sword from the twisted monsters back with a grunt of satisfaction, and he collapsed to his knees, struggling to hold on to the last vestiges of life, clinging to them. He must have known he was going to die. In one more furious moment, he roared on final word, before collapsing to the floor.

Die.

An inhuman roar shattered the silence, fury burned brightly in the heart of Merthierry, his gaze, while hidden by his helm, was fixed squarely on Bethras Norwode. He struck out, swatting his three previous opponents away, as if they were flies, not grown men. He raised both arms, and with one furious feat of strength, hurled his warhammer directly at Bethras, and it was moving fast.

Even as the Breton came to his senses, and began to throw himself out of the way, the Warhammer struck his rib. He cried out, and was thrown against the wall by the force of the giant metal projectile. He laid there, his breath ragged, unable to move to defend himself. Varnand and Augustus shot towards the Daedric Servant intent on revenge, but he merely turned and met their challenge, bearing the brunt of the charge, willingly accepting the impact, before twisting, dragging them with him, and tossing them at their allies across the room who had just regained their mobility from his last strike.

It was just Bethras Norwode and Merthierry Yvienne now, and it was fairly obvious who would be the victor. Merthierry raised one metal clad fist, and took aim for his enemies face, meaning to crush his brains to pulp.

It was then that all hell broke loose. A massive explosion rocked the foundations of Balindrium, and Azmodaeums remains erupted in a pillar of fire. An unnatural wind swept through the hall ways, and ripped away the walls.

Huge chunks of stone were tossed from the wall as if they were mere bales of hay, rather than the pieces of magically enhanced rock that they were. Merthierry took no notice of this, and drew his fist backward, and swung forwards.

But there was one final obstacle Merthierry Yvienne had to face before he could claim Bethras Norwode, and it was one that he was unable to defeat. As he prepared to strike the Rainor brother, a massive cracking sound drew his attention, and his eyes widened behind his daedric mask, as the entire ceiling was ripped free of its foundations by the magical wind, and came crashing down towards him. He turned towards his enemy..

"I die, knowing you die, that is what matters" He snarled with absolute fury.

Elrohir L'Hrador watched as the ceiling shot downwards, and then as he prepared to meet his maker, he heard a voice whisper in his ear, a wonderful voice.

"Tell them to leap, and I will catch them." Softly advised the voice of his prince. Elrohir looked round at his fellow allies, and roared without question, his voice straining to be heard of the roar of the wind.

"JUMP!" He yelled, before throwing himself into the air, and being wrenched from the room, by an unseen force. Hroarez saw him being taken from the room, and followed suit. Bethras Norwode, too weak to dive for freedom, and his friend, Augustus Rainor remained. Augustus sprinted for Bethras, and ducked a strike from Merthierry, and grabbed his friends arm, and let out one more shout before the ceiling hit them.

"Get stuffed Metal man!" He shouted as he leapt, and was torn from the room at insane speed before the ceiling slammed down on what was left of Merthierry Yvienne.

It was indescribable. One moment the group was in the rapidly collapsing Balindrium, another they were collapsed on a mountain peak, within site of the soaring castle. As the great majestic stone fortress could be seen veering wildly around, and slowly coming apart, lit up by the pillar of fire no doubt still emanating from Azmodaeum, a voice whispered in the ears of all those standing on the mountain.

The voice was beautiful, and a blue flash behind them made the group turn away from the castle heading towards the mountains. Behind them Azura stood, and Elrohir could feel his heart beating like it only would when she was around. They understood the honor of standing face to face with a prince, but they were tired and beaten, and faced her without much emotion.

"Well done, my champions. Six of you were instruments in derailing the plans of the blasphemous altmer. Four of you remain here now." she said and looked at the surviving five. As she spoke, wounds began to heal, large or small, inflicted by spear or hammer, by fist or blade, all had begun their path to recovery. *"I grieve not for the failed heroes of Hircine, but I will reward you for their loss. Their lives was a small price to pay for what you have accomplished."*

As the words settled on the group, Bethras was the first to talk. *"Silassen was a person."*

Not a number. Not a battle statistic, if it were not for him, Adonis Vile would've murdered us, and Azmodaeum would have triumphed." He spoke quietly but the anger spilled from his tongue.

"Josef is no light loss either, my prince. If it weren't for him, we would be piles of ash at Azmodaeums feet." Elrohir said, but he knew the ways of the daedra were confusing.

"Who's to say that the cur Adonis vile would not have killed me and my brother if it weren't for the wolf?" argued Varnand Rainor wearily. Hroarez nodded and silently agreed. He followed Elrohir.

"Quiet, successors. Your friends were not sent here by me, and their faiths are not in my hands. Pray to the other princes if you wish to help them, I am unable to turn the fallen to life." Azura said and nodded as to show them she had spoken. *"I have a reward for each of you, but these gifts will be bound to you forever. I cannot tell you who gave them to me, but I promise you, your names, births and deaths are all noted on planes afar from Nirn."* Azura said and called a servant to her side. As she gave the servant a reward, she explained the reward for the hero.

She granted Elrohir a silver ring with the inscription of a star inside. She told him to always wear it, and that it was her gift to him. To Hroarez she granted him a winner's dice. The dice can help with necessary gold, but punishes greed. To the Rainors, she guaranteed their safe companionship, under the terms that if either of them committed evil, he would have to die by the hands of his brother. As the turn came to Bethras, Azura looked at the man and told him that she had no reward for him. Instead, she had looked into the future and found what he would have wanted the most 20 years later. Bethras was impressed by Azura's insight, and asked what his reward was. She told him that she promised to make sure the fallen friend Silassen's wife would be protected against evil as long as she took care of their son.

The group looked at each other, some of them barely knowing each other. *"You share a bond now, all of you, but some of you will never meet again. I hope you have said your goodbyes."* as the last word faded out the world around them turn into a dark blue cloud. The group closed its eyes and when it opened they were all in different places.

The battle was now fought on won, finalizing the terrifying chapter Balindrium. The evil was repelled, but little to none was learned. It remained a dark mystery. The rooms will forever waver those that have tread within, as it simply is no more and never will be again. The story of the flying castle was taboo of the rational belief. It had not ever made sense, it won't ever, and how could it? It was ridiculous if it was possible at all. And so the story was forgotten. Rumors were unpopular; all that lived on were a singular or so fairy tale or lullaby. Somewhere indeed the idea of a sky fortress was romantic, and was well to dream about. But what madness.

Castle Balindrium had been an actual entity, sporting well what we'd call Soul. But as an entity it was still far incomprehensible. Did its Master understand it? Most assumable he did not. Did we apprehend the Master? We certainly did not.

Epilogue

Adonis vile's mind was blank. His body lay motionless in the darkness. As Silassen Ilden struggled, and fought for life next to him, he did not move. As his opponents life passed, his body remained still. This small hole carved into Balindriums underside by the crash of his destructive magic was silent. There was no sign of life. No little creature scurrying around. All that Adonis Vile had for company was the eerie darkness. Something he couldn't even experience. He was dead to this tiny corner of the world. For now.

It was a long time before something disturbed the dark silence that had fallen upon the two motionless bodies. There was a slithering sound in the dark. Faint at first. But slowly the sounds grew closer. They were drawing nearer. Something was drawing the source of the strange and ethereal sounds nearer.

Adonis Vile could feel. The feeling of being able to, well, feel was slowly inching it's way back to him. It was a long stretched ordeal. Which grew more agonising by the moment.

Little feelings returned to him first. He could feel his toes. He moved them. Then he could feel the pain. Slowly, every broken bone, every damaged organ, every open wound, began to flood his body with un-imaginable agony. His throat was too damaged to scream. But his ears. It was as if they had been left functioning for the sole purpose of hearing one sound. The sound of something drawing closer, and he could do nothing, but wait, in terror, and despair. And then, in an instant it was on him, like a coiled snake, and the agony he had been in moments before withered in comparison.

Magic was pulsing around Silassen Ildens lifeless body. His limp figure was not even cold yet, and yet the magics of castle Balindrium were stirring. Something was moving in the darkness, but something more was coming to life, born from his own untimely death. Something closer to him than the magic that was working its own mysterious charms. The first flicker of light in the darkness sparked, and Silassen Ildens mouth opened, and exhaled, his breath laced with a ghoulish turn. His eyes remained closed, and his skin pale.

Adonis's feeling was completely returned to him now, and the magic piercing his body was taking full advantage of this. Adonis wondered if this was some sort of punishment for his failure. But this thought was wiped from his mind, to be replaced with pure undiluted agony, he finally opened his mouth and let loose a blood curdling scream.

A twisting spiral of white mist was pirouetting into the air, stemming from the still open mouth of Silassen Ilden. His features remained emotionless. It would have been clear to anyone if they had been able to see him that this was no miraculous return to life. This was an unprecedented revenge of the castle, but something was wrong. The magic was acting too quickly, and the castle needed to lock onto this.

Adonis Vile was panting now, his teeth gritted against the pain. Beads of sweat had formed on his face, and were joining with the tears of pain that were being squeezed unwillingly from his eyes. Through the watery veil that was forming across his vision, he could see a green blur, pulsing around his chest. It was as if his mind was a jumble of electrical bolts. Everything was in disarray. But amidst this jumble of pain, and strange thoughts, a voice whispered, a familiar voice. His own voice.

The amulet

The magic was relentlessly attacking Adonis's body. It was covering him, as if slowly consuming him, eating away at him. It had its target. The amulet, the castle was protecting its own, and who better to protect such a magical artefact than the one the castle's master had chosen to protect it. It continued. But there was another magic in this isolated space of the world. A light had formed in the cavern carved into Balindrium's underside. This magic was uninvited. The black magic surrounding Vile hissed, and twisted in anger, and one tendril of darkness shot across the room.

The white spiral of mist was suddenly seized by a black tendril of shadowy power. It was wrenched from its slow ascent, and locked into a vicious magical struggle, tearing and

ripping at each other. It was like a battle of darkness and light. It was vicious and brutal, and it was obvious that it would not take long for a victor to be decided.

The magic was progressing. Adonis was trying to fight it, but it was too strong. He should have passed out from the pain, but the dark power was keeping him conscious, whether just to torture him, or because it needed to, he did not know. He could feel it. There was a sudden surge of power. The magic shot forward, sliding to his open mouth, and diving down, quenching the scream that had been bursting to release for a second time.

The battle of the magics was drawing to a close. One side was dominating the other. The stream of Silassens' breath had stopped, and his cold form had been abandoned, even by the magic that it had once been forming. The tendrils of magic had battled each other, fighting for their very existence. The white magic of Silassens' soul, which had been trapped by the necromantic magic of Balindrium, had fought back, and the shadowy magic of Balindrium had retaliated in kind. One moment there was a raging war, and the next there was finally a calm, one tendril had beaten the other, and was already streaking towards the one magic focal point of the closed-off crater, the amulet, the stream of magic's intention however was unknown.

One moment there was undeniable agony. The next an eerie calm. Adonis was confused for a moment, it took him a moment to realise the pain was gone. His thoughts returned to him gradually. There was no more jumble of thoughts and pain. He could think freely again. The magic of Balindrium had revived him. He could feel it. There was no pain. He could not feel the broken bones anymore. He knew they were not there. Something to do with the amulet had helped him. It had acted as a magnet to the necromantic magic of the castle, and drawn it in. The magic had kicked started his previously ebbing heart, and repaired his body. He could feel it. He could feel the power. But something troubled him.

Then he felt a white hot burning sensation. He gasped, fearing the magic was returning to torment him more. But it was momentary, and was gone in an instant. It had felt strange, not the same pain as the other magic.

He lay there for a short while. Gathering his thoughts. Something was wrong, but what it was was alluding him. He could not put his finger on what. But then, something stirred within the deep dark depths of his mind. It was a voice. A voice he had come to know well in the past hours. A voice, not at all welcome.

"Greetings, Lord Vile, you didn't think you were free of me just yet now, did you? Our partnership has only just begun." Whispered a dark demonic voice, and Adonis Vile could practically visualise the grinning face of the Daedric lord of destruction, Mehrunes Dagon, which fell silent, leaving Adonis Vile to his thoughts.