

The Scarlet

We climbed back up the stairs and stepped onto the sandy surface. Felix clutched the ammo box tightly in his hand, and his eyes looking up at the sky.

"Where do you think we are?" Felix asked, his voice filled with wonder.

I turned my eyes to the sky as well, looking at the beautiful display of colors all around us. I didn't detect any signs of a threat, so I figured that we could indulge in a moment of respite in this place. "Somewhere in space, far away from our world," I answered his question.

The sky above Kirios didn't match what we've seen here, Saia had confirmed it for Shadow and me. This was a place that the Grand Spell could reach, but not a place that was anywhere near the planet. For all they knew what their eyes were seeing was all fake, made by magic.

"Really?" Felix asked.

"It's what I think, at least," I answered.

Felix nodded his head. "What do you think the light was? Why did it come here and do all of this?"

"What do you think?" I asked instead of answering his question.

Felix's brow furrowed in thought, and then he spoke. "Padre says that it is a test from God, to see if we are worthy of Heaven. He says that we must've disappointed him with all the sin we did. That we must cleanse

ourselves of it, and that at the end, rapture will come to those who have true faith."

I wasn't a true believer, but I could see how those who were would think something along those lines. Especially since what happened was so far beyond anyone's ability to explain.

"That's what he thinks, not what you think," I said gently.

Felix turned to look at me, then turned his eyes away. "I don't know."

I didn't say anything for a little while. We both stood on the sand and watched the beautiful sky. My purpose on Earth had always been clear to me, to do good. To help Earth survive the integration. It was a hard thing to plan, harder even to start. So, I took a deep breath.

"It is a spell," I said finally. "A Grand Spell with the power of a god, it might even be a god for all we know. It has found our world and taken it, joined it with its own world."

Felix turned to look at me with a shocked expression, and I decided to tell him everything that I knew. Well, mostly everything.

I started the story at the beginning, when the light came and took me away to another world. I skimmed over many of the details, but I told him about Kirios, and the fact that we are now part of another world filled with numerous other races, and that in time they would be coming here. That we weren't ready for them.

It was... like a test for me, to see how people would react to what I knew.

Felix was... young, his reaction was not what I had expected it to be.

"That's so cool!" He said excitedly. "So you are one of these Exemplars? Is that how you are that strong? Why you could jump that far? How many skills do you have? How many Carvings? Can you teach me to be like you?"

His questions were the exact opposite of the existential panic that I had thought learning about different races and our world being broken down by a magical spell and put back together would bring. But I guess that I shouldn't have expected anything different from a kid like him.

"Perhaps I'll answer you, one day," I said. "Now, we need to get you back home. I need to speak with the people there. There is much that I need to learn about what had happened on Earth while I was gone, and just as much that I have to tell them."

Felix looked like he was about to pout, but ultimately ended up nodding. Cute kid. "Well, we should hurry then! I want to show everyone what I got," he raised the box of ammo like it was some great prize, and perhaps it was.

We headed back toward the rift entrance, with Felix rushing ahead, excitedly.

"Wait up," I said, but he didn't slow, he jumped at the exit of the rift and the light swallowed him whole. I sighed and shook my head. I paused and looked around me one more time, making sure that there wasn't anything that I missed. There was nothing that stood out to me, but I did wonder what was going to happen to the rift once I left. Would it just be destroyed? Or would it be filled with new treasure and available to be entered once more?

"Did you see anything strange Saia?" I asked, taking advantage of being alone with her.

"Feedback: Nothing out of the ordinary. The stone walls did not match what we encountered in the Ish Vimza ruins, nor did they match anything from Ke Erzi."

I nodded. The little dungeon was simple, the stone blocks had been crudely cut. It could've even been from Earth for all I knew.

I hefted my spear on my shoulder and shook my head. "What do you think about the kid's story?"

"Feedback: It matches what Shadow told us would happen. The collapse of your technology is what interests me more."

"Yeah, we still believe that it is because of the Source?"

"Feedback: Nothing that we've experienced suggests otherwise."

I thought about the box of ammo in my backpack and wondered about it. "Felix gave me the impression that rounds gained from these rifts can be fired, but the propellant in the bullets we found at the estate had decayed."

"Statement: The propellant could be different, or it could be protected from the effects by the casing around it."

I grimaced, it was another thing that I would have to try and figure out.

I hurried after Felix, reaching the rift entrance and letting it pull me out. The world twisted and light flashed before my face before I felt solid ground beneath my feet and heard a whooshing sound behind me.

The weakness hit me immediately, making me feel disoriented. That's when I heard the yelling.

"Drop the weapon, put your hands up!"

I felt my heart start to beat faster, pumping my thick blood through my body faster and faster. Slowly, I opened my eyes and saw the scene in front of me. Three men stood in front of me, wearing mismatched clothes and holding weapons in their hands. One had a big staff carved out of wood, another had a short sword, clearly medieval European in make, but with no signs of decay. The last one was standing behind them, and was holding Felix by the clothes at his neck, pulling him up as the kid looked wide-eyed and terrified back at me. The man had a short knife in his hand, clearly threatening the kid.

I narrowed my eyes, but didn't move at all otherwise. My weapon was on my shoulder, but the weakness of the daylight was making me feel almost nauseous.

"Didn't you hear puta? Drop the weapon, now!" One of the men said.

"Estrella they are--" before Felix could finish the sentence, the man holding him hit him in the head then threw him on the ground.

"Shut up trash," he said.

My eye twitched and I felt anger rearing up inside of me. I could imagine what he was going to say. These people were most likely the raiders he was talking about.

"You don't want to do this," I said, as calmly as I possibly could.

"This is our turf, you stole that rift from us. You are going to surrender everything that you got from it. Drop the weapon, and your backpack, or we'll take them," one of the men said.

"I didn't get this weapon here," I said, trying to buy time to figure out a plan. I was weakened, but I was still stronger than a human. Though, fighting more than one opponent was always tricky. All my instructors had always said that in situations like this, the best course of actions would be to run away. I agreed with that, unless of course I got gripped by rage and just reacted. I knew just how lucky I had gotten the last time I fought against a group. I had taken them by surprise and I was stronger than they had expected.

"Well, we can't know that for sure, now can we?" The man on the right, the one with a staff, said.

"Are you deaf puta," the one in the back, next to prone Felix, said. "We won't ask you again, drop your shit on the ground or we'll take it off your corpse."

I narrowed my eyes behind my glasses. The silence stretched after his words, I looked to Felix holding his face on the ground, tears streaming down his face. These people were everything that I was worried about what happened to Earth. People who would take advantage of everything and everyone in their way.

"Fuck this bitch," the one with the sword on my left said, and before I could really react, he jumped forward with a raised sword. As he swung, I felt the imprint in the world around me.

It surprised me and made me pause for just a moment. It wasn't anything like what I had felt on Ish Vimza, from the beasts or Shadow. This was far... less in every way. And it was loud, it felt to me like someone telegraphing a punch in a fight. Even still, reacted too slowly.

[Double Strike]

For a moment, his sword split in two, one coming after the other. I jerked back, evading the first sword, but the second caught me across my face, from my temple over my cheek and down the side of my jaw. I jumped back, getting some distance. I felt warm blood slowly oozing out of my wound. A vampire's blood was thicker, it didn't flow in the same manner as a human's did. He cut the side of my glasses and mask, I felt as they slipped from my face. I turned my head slowly and looked at the man with the sword, rage filled me and I felt it burning up inside of me.

"What the--" he was looking at my cheek, and then his eyes slid to mine. I saw his face lose all color and he took a step back. "Adult vampire!" He yelled to his people.

"Impossible, it's daylight!" One of them said, but at this point I was too far gone.

I let my anger fill me to the brim, I pushed my weight to the leg in front of me and took the first Kata of the ***Veiled Mist Assault, From the Mist, Strike.***

Emotion is the fuel that grants me Purpose.

And today, my purpose was to kill the fools in front of me. I felt my lips twitching in a snarl that barred my fangs. I lowered the spear from my right shoulder and pulled it back. Then in an instant I attacked, taking a step forward at the swordsman. I brought the weapon up in a wide arc and then slammed it down on top of his head.

He put his sword up to block, but that was the wrong move. I was weaker during the day, but muscle was muscle, and mine was greater than his. My serpent-tongue spear hit overhead block and pushed it down like it wasn't even there. My weapon hit his head and cleaved it down to his chest before it got stuck.

The man on the right, yelled and raised his staff. The one behind him jumped with his knife, moving to grab Felix. I whispered. "Saia, get Felix," I said and she melted from my wrist and turned into her dragon form, flying straight for the third man. The staff wielder was surprised, but then I felt a skill, this one far more controlled. I didn't hear the skill in my head, but I saw his staff blur in my direction. I tried to pull the spear out of the corpse of his friend, but it was stuck and I was starting to feel lethargic. I couldn't pull it out, so I dropped it, and jumped to the side.

The staff missed me and hit the ground, and I pounced on the man. I grabbed his wrist and squeezed, feeling the bones grind against one another, if it was night I would've broken them. With my other arm I grabbed his hair. The scent of blood had filled my nostrils, it woke the **thirst** from its deep slumber and I pulled the man to me and bit his neck. I drank deeply, the blood touched my tongue and all else faded away. The taste of human blood felt like something completely new. It had been a long time since I last tasted it. It wasn't as powerful as what I tasted on Ish Vimza, but the taste of it was... it was everything.

I felt the surge of memories come barreling through my mind in burst, flashes of images and the man's most recent memories.

"A new rift!" A voice said to my right. "If return to the boss with good enough loot, we might get pushed up the ladder. Get to join a real raiding team!"

"Don't jump ahead of yourself Louis," I said, gripping my staff tightly. "You know the rules, we don't enter rifts, we only report on their location. It's too risky, we aren't equipped to fight them."

"C'mon Mateo," Louis started. "You can't be content with scraps, we'll never advance unless we take risks. And besides, it is only a green

one. There is like one in three chances that it doesn't even have any monster inside. You tell him Cristo."

I shook my head and opened my mouth to reprimand him, when Cristobal joined in. "Wait, what is that? It's opening!"

I turned to the rift quickly, and saw it flash with light and grow suddenly. Worried that it was breaking I raised my staff above my head, and then a shape tumbled out of the rift, a kid.

"What the fuck?" Louis said, his sword pointed straight at the kid. "Who are you, what are you doing here?"

The kid looked at them with wide eyes.

"Hey, I know him," Cristo said, his eyes narrowing. "He's one of the orphans from the church."

I looked at the kid and recognized him. "Why are you here, kid? The boss told your people that all rifts in these woods are ours to claim," I said, my anger rising. I knew that this was going to be an issue, the boss wasn't going to like it at all.

"Come 'ere kid," Cristo said as he caught him and pulled him up by his shirt. "You are going to talk, or we are going to make you regret it. How many more are inside, a full five?"

I turned my eyes to the rift, waiting for anyone else to come out, Louis did the same. And then, before the kid had a chance to answer the rift flashed, and another person exited. A woman, with a mask and glasses...

The memories ended in a series of rapid flashes as they approached his death, and I pulled my teeth out of his neck and threw him on the

ground. The wound on my cheek didn't close, though I felt the blood stop oozing out. The sun prevented the **thirst** from granting me all of its benefits.

I looked around and found the third one, Cristobal, lying on the ground dead with his throat cut open. Saia hovered above him, her claws covered in blood.

I looked around and found Felix leaned against the tree nearby. His eye was covered in a bruise, and his lip was open and bleeding. I took a step closer and he winced, which made me freeze. I closed my eyes, letting my anger go, it had served its purpose. Then, with a calm mind I looked at him again.

I felt the still warm blood flowing down my chin, soaking my shirt. I could hear the silence of the forest, and smell the scent of death around us.

I could taste Felix's terror in the air. I looked up at the sky, and the sun up above us through the trees. Then, I took a deep breath and looked at the kid again.

"Don't worry, I won't hurt you."

"H-how are you standing in the s-sun?" He asked.

I smiled. I didn't expect that to be his first question, but it was good. It was better that he questioned instead of screaming and running away.

I pointed at the sun above us. "That's not our sun anymore," I told him. He followed my hand, and looked up at the sun. "Oh," he just said.

"I'm really not going to hurt you," I said as I knelt in front of him, a few steps away. I didn't want to come too close and scare him more. I

also had the urge to reach up and wipe the blood off my face, but I resisted it. That was the human part of me, the one that had died a long time ago. This was who I am, and I wasn't going to hide or be ashamed of it.

"Yeah," Felix nodded, he seemed to be forcing himself to stand up and walk closer to me. And then, he spoke again. "Thank you, for helping me I mean."

I released the breath I didn't know I was holding and nodded. "No problem," I said.

Felix swallowed, then pointed behind me and spoke. "And what is that?"

I blinked, then glanced behind me. "Ah," I said. "Felix, this is Saia, Saia introduce yourself."

"Statement: Greetings, you may call this Unit Saia."

I shook my head at her introduction, and then looked back at Felix, who stared at her openmouthed. "Uh, you have a dragon," he said, his fear of me seemingly forgot.

As he looked at Saia, I turned my attention to the dead bodies. I had a lot cleaning up to do.