

- It's a lot busier here today, - the tall man said, slowly stepping down the cobblestone road. He had only been in Ravenburg for a few days, and all that time the weather and atmosphere had been the same. Everywhere dampness, grayness, gloom and fog reigned.

In fairness, such weather conditions were inherent not only in this city. After Salvador crossed the Aldagger Sea, the weather quickly began to change to the current one. Apparently, this was one of the features of this continent.

The second of the features was architecture. Gloomy, damp buildings fully demonstrated all the grandeur of the Gothic style. Sharp spires on high roofs soared into the sky, and the exquisite pretentiousness on the buildings themselves created the impression that someone was embroidering these buildings from stone. It is also worth noting that the most unusual here were the stained-glass windows. They struck with their gloomy sophistication and deep, truly unique stories captured in glass images. However, stained glass windows reached their peak of splendor only when a lone ray of sunshine, accidentally lost on this continent, fell on one of them. At such moments, the glass, as if absorbing a little life, created multi-colored reflections everywhere. It was in these unique moments that cities such as Reivenburg revealed themselves in all their glory.

Salvador attributed the inhabitants themselves to the third feature of this continent. They were mostly pale and depressed. At least people. Because if we talk about other races, they were either more aggressive or too bold. Simply put, this continent was filled with all kinds of creatures, ranging from the well-known vampires, demons, and werewolves to lesser-known ones like furies, elviriums, and incubi. Salvador still didn't know all the races, but he really tried to figure it out.

- What did you expect on the day of the tournament? - sounded the answer to the neutral phrase of a man from nowhere.

This was not entirely true. Even though Salvador looked like a lonely man walking down the street from the outside, this was far from the truth. The one with whom he had a dialogue is his own shadow. An unusual shadow. This creature with the power of shadows was called the Shadomorph. If such a man as he could exist on his own, then he could undoubtedly be attributed to some dark race. However, this is impossible. That is why Shadomorph is considered a parasite

that lives at the expense of its host. Having merged with someone once, he is doomed to remain the shadow of the random chosen one for the rest of his days.

- I've never understood why tournaments are always crowded and why it's so amusing for spectators to watch someone being beaten up or killed for fun. And now, look around, everyone is hurrying there so as not to miss the upcoming spectacles, - Salvador reasoned in a voice that was not so much bored as disappointed.

- You're going there too, - the Shadomorph remarked in a snide voice, as if by chance.

- I'm not going there for fun, and you know it very well, - the man replied indifferently.

- Of course, you're going there to see the old man who ruled this city in the past and is now doomed to fight to the death without being able to leave this place, right? Well, you will look, and then what? Do you think you can get him out? Do you really believe that this old man is exactly who you need?

- Believe it or not, don't you find his story interesting? I need a teacher, and according to the information we've gathered, he might be a good fit for that role.

- Eh... I feel that something is coming. We've only come to this continent for him, but there's still too much we don't know.

- That is why we will first look around and then decide how to act. And we've arrived, Shad.

Salvador did not expect the battlefield to be so large. It became obvious that this event was something like the pride of the city, and maybe the whole region. The territory for battles had the shape of a circle with a radius of one hundred meters. At an equal distance from the border, seats began to be located, and their length reached one hundred and fifty meters. All these rows, as they moved away from the wall, towered more and more above the previous ones. Thus, it turned out that the place for battles was at the very bottom.

On one side of this circle, it was not difficult to notice a specially elevated platform, obviously for special guests. And right under it is an arch with a bar, from where, probably, those

who will fight came out. Everything around was designed in the Gothic style, but without frills. Apparently, in order not to regret too much if something breaks.

To say that this place was overcrowded is to say nothing. There were different races everywhere who took their places or didn't hesitate to use their gifts to create their own seating places out of stone, ice, metal, and anything else they could imagine. Some even soared up and looked from there.

It was difficult to determine who those special guests were at the previously mentioned venue. All four hid their faces behind masks and sat in very comfortable-looking chairs. Someone was constantly walking around them, filling their glasses with drinks. However, if these guests were not wearing masks, the man would still not recognize any of them.

- Hey Salvador, we're late. Look, the battle has already begun, - Shadomorph spoke excitedly, as if he had been waiting for it.

Only now did the man look at the opponents standing in front of each other and was surprised at himself. There were too many new things going on around him. Surprisingly, he almost forgot why he came. And it was all because of the old man.

In addition to the target Salvador was interested in, there were three other men in the center. Obviously, they acted as opponents.

- Look at this, three against one old man! - Shad could not resist a condemning comment,  
- Well, what can describe this kingdom more eloquently than this?

- I don't like the way it looks either, - Salvador agreed, - but something tells me that it won't be a problem for him.

The man paid attention to everything: the way the old man stood, the way he moved, or where he was looking. Salvador tried to grasp everything that was possible. This became possible only because he descended almost to the very bottom of the arena. Strange or not, there were indeed a lot of empty seats close to the battlefield.

As for the opponents, they were all young men, obviously more believing in victory in quantity than quality. The tallest was lean and looked the most neutral. The shorter man had a strong physique and a self-confident expression on his face. He seemed convinced that victory was not far off. The lowest of the three was probably the youngest. He seemed to be the most unscrupulous and completely uncontrollable.

The three of them attacked the old man at the same time, and none of them planned to give in. All of them used their gifts related to the elemental group without a twinge of conscience. The tall one controlled the whirlwind, the youngest the flame, and the third the water.

The tall opponent soared several meters into the sky and headed towards the old man with incredible agility. Having shortened the distance to what was necessary, he immediately began to create a small tornado around him. Apparently, its maximum was three meters high, but this alone could be enough to damage the opponent's limbs.

A short man moving a little slower, seeing the tornado, exclaimed contentedly: "That's what you need!"

In an instant, he recreated the flames around him and literally jumped into the tornado towards his partner, immediately turning his attack into a deadly one.

The third man kept to the side, as if looking for something. However, at the same time, he didn't stop getting closer to the old man. And when, after a couple of dozen meters, he managed to find a source of water, he immediately recreated a wave rushing towards the enemy. As a result, both attacks occurred almost simultaneously. The three of them had no intention of giving in, making the most of the power of their gifts.

The old man remained standing, but he did not look bored or frivolous. He was completely focused on something. His hands barely moved, as if he was doing something very neat, requiring high control, and the result was not long in coming. At some point, the wave directed at the old man changed its direction and was now rushing towards the other two men. But even before the owner of the water draft had time to understand anything, right from the ground, in an instant, a small earthen pillar stretched out. It successfully hit the poor guy's chin, literally throwing him a little into the air.

As a result of everything that happened: minus one enemy, the flame was extinguished, and the remaining tornado, now without the fire element, was easily blocked by a dense wall of earth.

- It seems to be getting colder, - the old man remarked, as if by chance, after the tornado had crashed against the wall, - There are so many drafts, so you can catch a cold.

- Heh... - accidentally burst out of Salvador's mouth.

- Why are you laughing? The Shadomorph was lost in his assumptions.

- If he has time for this kind of joke, then he does not fight at full strength.

- I think you're right," the shadow agreed with its host, "But what even happened here?

- Experience. The old man does not fight with full strength - he simply does not need it. All he does is use his mind, not brute force. The young people had a good idea, but their forces did not combine well with each other. They should act in turn and not rush all at once. If they had done so, perhaps the old man would have been at least a little more interested. He used the element of surprise and nothing more. At first, the old man slowly turned his opponent to one side with the help of the ground beneath his feet. The draught driver lost his bearings for a second, but did not understand what exactly had happened, because he was not ready for such a move. He decided that he had just put out his hands unsuccessfully. Then the poor guy tried to correct the movement of the wave, but at that moment, the old man abruptly turned him in the opposite direction.

- Oooh, it's too complicated, I didn't understand much, - the Shadomorph began to wail.

- You don't need to understand everything, - Salvador waved off, - The bottom line is that the old man redirected the flow of water in the direction he wanted and knocked out the enemy before he could react. A stream of water overwhelmed the tornado, penetrated inside and mixed with it. The flame was extinguished, and its owner turned out to be wet, that is, almost defenseless. It will not be easy for him to flare up again. And what about a small tornado? You've already heard the old man's opinion on this matter.

- Wow! And I like this guy! - The Shadomorph exclaimed, - I don't want to fight him.

Salvador made no reply. He was in solidarity with Shad, but somehow, he strongly doubted that this outcome could be avoided. Be that as it may, the man completely returned his attention to the arena.

Whichever way you look at it, it is difficult to compare the way the old man moved with his age. He's clearly about seventy! And the way he ruled the land... He did this so precisely and naturally that one might have the deceptive impression that the earth itself was subject to him of its own free will and acted in the interest of protecting its possessor. Such a natural and gentle control of such a strong and stubborn element... It's more than an experience! The old man really deserved admiration. But it seems that not many people understood this.

After he knocked out one of the men, disgruntled exclamations began to be heard from everywhere. It seemed as if everyone present wanted the old man to simply let himself be beaten.

Salvador's gaze did not leave the target for a moment. The old man seemed simply elusive, and his movements were barely noticeable. At the moments of the jump, the ground seemed to gently throw him into the air, and then carefully caught him back.

The possessor of the fiery gift could not fully use his element now. And what he could do was clearly not enough for serious counterattacks. Be that as it may, his partner tried to remedy this by recreating a kind of sphere of wind around the short man to dry him out as soon as possible.

However, dodging and dodging enemy attacks, while simultaneously assisting the wielder of the flames, made the thin man also unable to attack. As a result, both partners did nothing but retreat again and again, allowing the old man to play with them like a cat with mice.

This continued until the clothes of the owner of the flame were dry enough for him to use the gift. And as soon as the first signs of the return of the fire element appeared, the old man immediately attacked both opponents.

The owner of the vortex was the first to notice something wrong. To help his partner, he had to be close enough to him. And as soon as the deed was done, he immediately made an attempt to climb higher, away from the enemy, and therefore from the threat. But his leg was tightly gripped by the ring of earth and pulled down with its weight.

The short man saw this and wanted to fix the problem with the compressed energy from the flames, but it was not to be. The old man attacked him too. A pillar of earth was heading straight at him, and the owner of the flame had a choice - to help his partner, and probably end the fight right now, facing an insurmountable obstacle, or to dodge, but not to help.

- Damn you! He cursed as he dodged the attack with a few jumps backwards. The time spent on this was enough for the owner of the vortex to be pulled into the ground up to his ears. It was not possible to pull him out of there without possessing the necessary gift.

- How is that?! - again the short man could not resist an annoyed comment.

- Do you really want to give up? Don't rush so much. - For the first time during the battle, the old man directly addressed the enemy. His voice sounded completely calm and there was no hostility in it.

- Listening to him, looking at him all this time, I just can't understand him, - Salvador said thoughtfully, - He doesn't try to do any serious harm to any of his opponents, and he's doomed to fight here for the rest of his life. This old man, who is he really? What is his history? No, look at him. His body is undoubtedly hardened in almost daily battles. But he is clearly not fed enough, he is all thin. And look at all those disappointed spectators. They want him dead! Had he gone mad?

- And I, for one, still do not understand why he did not run away. With such force, - the Shadomorph supported the man's monologue, - I certainly wouldn't have been long in waiting if I were him.

- yes, and he would have died the same day, - Salvador waved him off.

- A what? Why is that? Shadomorph was indignant.

- Look carefully at those four masked men. If it were that simple, he wouldn't sit here obediently. I dare to assume that their strength is no weaker than the old man, and maybe even stronger. In addition, I am more than sure that these four are not all who can cause serious problems to others.

Salvador slowly slipped over the faces of those present. He could hardly see them because of the distance, but at one point it seemed to him that his eyes met the second in a row. It was physically impossible, but the sensations were too obvious, even a chill ran down my spine as a result.

- Salvador asked himself, but finding no convincing arguments, he returned his attention to the arena.

It is worth noting that the man did it at the right time. Because the unstoppable attacks of the owner of the fiery gift, along with his confident advance, began to gradually subside. What can I do, I'm exhausted. The old man hadn't even attacked all this time. He only playfully dodged attacks, from time to time motivating the enemy to continue with harmless phrases like: "Try again", "Is this really it?" and so on.

- What the?! Why aren't you attacking?! The owner of the flame growled angrily. And once again, having inflamed his body, he went on the offensive.

- Yes, I'm already, as it were, - the old man replied, as if with some awkwardness in his voice, at the same time pointing to the right. As soon as the short man instinctively turned in the direction indicated, a pillar of earth struck him directly in the forehead, knocking him unconscious at the same instant.

- Don't be angry, but you really need to do something with your hot energy, my friend.

- Did you hear that? Heard? He was joking again! The Shadomorph never ceased to admire,  
- It seems as if he really likes it here.

- I don't know, it's all too strange. I still think it's not that simple, - Salvador replied, staring at the old man. - He is wearing only shabby pants, not even shoes. But it's not so hot here. I look at him and don't understand anything. He was the manager of this city, and now what? He entertains the audience with a peaceful expression on his face. And it would be fine if they loved him, but no...

- Greetings, ladies and gentlemen! A confident voice thundered from the special observers. The third of them rose from his seat and approached closer to the fence.



- As many expected, today the winner was our permanent champion, let's welcome him!

At the same moment, almost simultaneously, even more disgruntled shouts and indecent exclamations began to be heard from all sides.

- Seriously, what's wrong with them? The Shadomorph asked, utterly disappointed.

- Don't pay attention, - Salvador stopped the shadow's lamentations, - That's not what we're here for.

Meanwhile, the speaker continued.

- However, today I have a great offer for you! Whoever volunteers to defeat our champion and can do so will be rewarded with the opportunity to grant one of their wishes, and we will grant it!

The exclamations of the audience instantly changed to enthusiastic. What's more, almost everyone supported this idea.

- I am glad that you liked my offer. In that case, who wants to tempt fate?

Just one moment, just one phrase, and the whole podium was filled with deathly silence. It became so quiet that you could hear the breathing of those standing nearby.

- What, no one wants to? Are you afraid? You just need to defeat the old man and any of your wishes can come true! As for me, just a wonderful offer! Come on, be brave!

- Definitely, it smells like roasting here, - Shadomorph commented, - We certainly won't go there after all this. There are no fools. Absolutely not. Hold on! What are you doing?!

Salvador confidently raised his right hand in the air, meekly waiting for the speaker's gaze to meet his.

I'm ready to give it a try! The man said confidently.

- You're probably completely crazy, - the Shadomorph said in a drooping voice, - We're finished...