Sanctuary

Sable Lay

“Aven!”

A commanding, yet girlish voice called out to the red-haired man who was trailing up the mountain. The sun was still rising and birds were performing the same songs for their mates. The sunlight created shadowy monsters from the jagged brown rocks of the mountains, shifting in shape as the sun came to its peak.

“We’ve been trekking since the moon rose… Can’t we rest for even a little bit?”

The red-haired man stopped walking and looked towards his red-haired sister. She was basically wearing rags, so was he. They were a matching set of purple, the clothes they were forced to leave home with. Out of all the misfortunes he has faced thus far, adventuring remote mountains while wearing tattered clothes was his least favorite one. He hated this… vulnerability.

“Faris… we’ve got to get a move on. Avies isn’t going to find itself if we spend another second sitting on our idle hands. Besides, the Brains are sure to catch up with us soon. You and I have killed enough of those things.”

Faris’s stride finally caught up with Aven’s. “I know, Aven… but it’s just been so rough ever since we lost Orelis. I wish we could catch even a little break, you know?”

Aven stopped and stared at his sister.

“Actually, no. I don’t know. Do you really think we have that luxury? Everyone’s dead, Faris. Dead.” Aven slid his pointer finger across his neck.

Faris looked as if she was just shot by an arrow. “Aven…”

She sunk her shoulders and avoided her brother’s gaze.

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“Aven!”

Faris screamed her brother’s name as she watched him get overrun by vicious metal beasts. He collapsed to the ground as they slashed at him with whirring blades attached to their arms. The things only said one thing. “*BRAINS ARE TO* *EXTERMINATE UNNATURALS*.” A fireball whizzed past her head, narrowly missing anything other than her hair. Faris muttered an old prayer, and wings of light manifested out of her back. She shot from the ground and flew to her brother’s aid. She formed a triangle with both of her hands, pointed the formation at the so-called Brains and spoke a different prayer. Faris’ skin became painted with green and yellow lines as the earth started to bend and crack around the creatures, smashing them together and burying them under graves of stone. A jagged boulder lifted Aven into the safety of Faris’ arms. Aven was bleeding heavily, unable to move from being overrun. All he could do was focus on breathing.

Faris’ eyes glowed as bright as the wings from her back. “We need to get the fuck out of here Aven. We can’t save them.”

“What do you mean we can’t save them? We can’t just run away-”

Aven stopped speaking as a towering stone spire began to fall towards the twin’s suspended figure. Faris turned her head, and managed to dodge the spire, while grasping Aven close to her. Aven looked down as the spire fell, watching his friends and family get slaughtered like farm animals. Faris made the decision to flee her home with her brother in tow. She was flying with her luminescent wings, Aven reached out his arm towards the ground and wailed for the life he would never know again. The pair knew they could never go back. Orelis belonged to the Brains now.

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“Do you really blame me for that? You have to know that we couldn’t have done anything.” Faris took a step towards Aven. “They almost killed you.” Faris slid her pointer finger across her neck.

Aven started to glare at his sister, but then had a glint of realization in his eyes.

“You’re right. I could have died if you didn’t get me out of there.”

“Could have? They were climbing all over you. Come to think of it, if I didn’t have my wings we would have both died. Easy.”

“You were always better at manifesting things, Faris.”

Aven thought back to magic training. They were both skilled at old Orelian magic that was secluded from the rest of the world. They were royalty, after all. Born at the same time and the same day as each other, within their veins, Faris and Aven carry the blood of the same people who crafted the mountain range they stand in. The reason why the twins’ ancestors built these mountains is unknown, but Orelis lived in seclusion until its end thanks to them. Faris finally began to think about leaving Orelis behind. No one has ever crossed the mountains before.

“Aven… you keep mentioning this place called Avies. What do you know about it?”

“Next to nothing. Across these mountains, there’s a place called Oria. I read it in one of those scrolls in the library. Avies is the capital of Oria, and the scrolls talk about it being a safe place. It’s the only direction we have, I’d say. The world next to us.”

“How comforting. I suppose that's the best we’ve got. These mountains are high, Aven. We really should stop for a rest soon. You’re still hurt, and I can’t fight for the both of us.”

Aven thought he was hiding his limp well. He scoffed at Faris.

“Fine. There’s a cave farther up.” Aven pointed to a hole in the side of the mountain. “A journey calls for preparation…” He muttered to himself. Aven had a tendency to just keep pushing, even if he knew he couldn’t. The red-haired man didn’t want to pause, he knew if he paused, he would collapse. To collapse is the same thing as to fail. The red-haired woman whispered a prayer of flight and offered her hand to Aven. “Shall we? Those wounds aren’t going to heal themselves.” Aven rolled his eyes at his sister and grabbed her hand. They took flight to the cave. Upon arrival, Aven spoke words of summoned fire to bring warmth while Faris closed off the outside with her prayer of Earth. No Brains would be getting inside.

Aven sat down next to his fire and blinked twice. His eyes and palms began to glow with a warm yellow light, the same color as the sun, though not nearly as bright. He began to place his glowing palms on his arms, his chest and every other part of him that was wounded thanks to the invasion. Each gash that he touched got stitched together by a yellow light. He watched as his bruised body returned to its normal pale color. Aven lost count of how many times he had watched his body glue itself together, but Faris watched the process with awe.

“Why do you always stare at me like that whenever I heal myself, Faris?”

“Because it’s a miracle every time you admit you can’t walk it off.”

Aven shot a glare at his sister.

“You’re just jealous that you can’t heal yourself.”

Faris’ face flushed with red. Healing arts were the easiest of the Orelian spellbooks but Faris could never get the hang of it.

“Hey now… you didn’t need to remind me.”

Aven smiled at his small victory. Faris sat down next to Aven and leaned her head on his shoulder. She began to wail.

“Hey now… Faris… it's no big deal that you don’t know how to heal. I can’t even manifest a-”

“I don’t care that I can’t heal, Aven.” Faris’ choked words cut her brother off. “I don’t want to deal with this, Aven. I don’t want to be one of the last survivors. I don’t want to go on this journey to Avies- we don’t even know if the city is safe. It could be on fire as we speak, for all we know. I don’t want to destroy any more Brains. I just wish I could have let those damn things kill me like they killed everyone else.”  
 Aven fell silent and wrapped his arms around his sister, attempting to bring some solace to her broken cries. Aven wondered why he wasn’t able to cry for the people that he lost. For the people that Faris lost. For Orelis. Aven began to think about the severity of his situation as he embraced his sister, before the twins heard utter doom: mechanical whirring and an ultimatum they did not want to hear.

*“BRAINS ARE TO EXTERMINATE UNNATURALS”.* The daunting voice bounced up and down the cave walls. It knows that they are there.

Faris and Aven sprung up from the cave floor and looked towards the noise. With tears still streaming down her cheeks, Faris flung four fireballs towards the direction of the Brain’s voice. One was sure to connect. A bright red light filled the cave as a laser hit Faris’ door.

*“BRAINS ARE TO EXTERMINATE ALL UNNATURALS.”* The mechanical whirring was getting louder. The beast was getting closer. Its clunky steps shook the ground of the cave.

“Why now? Why now? Why now? Fuck, Aven help me out here.” Faris stared dead ahead where the Brain would soon emerge.

Aven glanced at Faris and began to float inches off the ground. He would not lose Faris too. Aven’s muscular hands glowed with a sickening, black light. The black light seeping from Aven’s hands began to whirl around on the ground, below Aven’s suspended figure. The blackness grew, and grew. Before Faris could blink, Aven’s body flew out of her sight, and into the darkness. A loud crashing sound was heard as whirring blades cut into rocks instead of flesh. Pound. Crash. The Brain almost seemed to scream as Aven ripped it apart, metal limb from metal torso. When the cacophony settled, Faris only heard one thing.

“*BRAINS ARE TO- BRAINS ARE TO- BRAINS ARE TO- BRAINS ARE TO-”*

Aven emerged from the darkness that inhabited the Brain, holding its head as it tried to repeat its malfunctioned instructions, letting Faris hear it before crushing the beast’s voice. He tossed the scraps to the side.

“I don’t want to do this either, Faris. But these things don't care about how we feel. I wish that Brain just now killed me instead of the other way around. I wish I wasn’t able to destroy these things. I wish it were easy. But it’s not easy, Faris.”

Aven sat down at the fire again. Faris kept standing and stared.

“Sit with me, Faris.”

Faris sauntered over to her brother and occupied the space next to him. Faris continued to stare at Aven.

“All we can do is keep going, and keep living. If not for us, then maybe for those who can’t.”

Faris nodded in agreement.

“For those who can’t.”