


LITERATURE

Baldur's Gate SoD: Dragonspear Crusade Ch12

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Chapter 12 Finale Dark Circumstances

Ralis and his party found themselves back inside Dragonspear Castle's cavernous vault.

"We're back. We're finally back," Neera said in relief.

"I went to Avernus and came back. I really did. And nobody who wasn't here will ever believe it..." Glint said.

"It's done. Thank the gods," Corwin exhaled, wiping the sweat off her face using her forearm.

"We're home, Boo!" Minsc happily said, then gave Boo a hamster food pellet.

"The rift 'twixt the worlds is finally closed," Dynaheir said.

"Nowhere to go but up," Neera said cheerfully, pointing up at the ceiling.

Ralis smiled, glad to hear how his allies are relieved to be back in the Prime Material Plane. He now understood firsthand why mortals fear the Nine Hells. He looked over at Aun,

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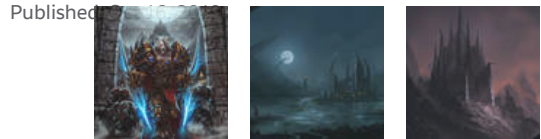
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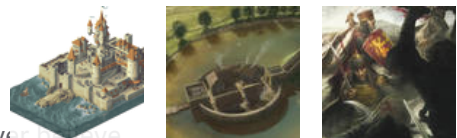
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"Aun? Are you all right?" Ralis asked with concern.

Ralis saw his hand wipe tears from his eyes even in this dimly lit room.

"I'm fine, thank you. The gate is sealed and Caelar... she has done what she must. It feels strange to be back in the world again. I must put my life back together," Aun replied.

"The travel back to Waterdeep will be long. Be sure to get plenty of food and drink for the trip," Ralis advised him.

Aun nodded. "I appreciate your concern. Let's get out of here."

The group headed towards the vault door. Ralis approached close to it and pushed the door open, revealing five Flaming fist soldiers, four Daggerford soldiers and six Waterdhavian soldiers aiming their bows and crossbows at them! Cedric deLancie and Bence Duncan stood behind the archers, and they immediately recognized Ralis and his party, and they instinctively knew that their soldiers might open fire on them, being on edge over the danger of facing demons from the Nine Hells, especially when one of the soldiers shouted:

"DIE, FIEND!"

"Hold your fire!" deLancie shouted. "Everyone, hold your fire!"

All the soldiers lowered their crossbows and bows, allowing Ralis and his party and Aun to step out into the hallway.

"It's okay! We're back!" Ralis called.

Cedric and Duncan approached Ralis, looking surprised as if they expected to see a horde of demons pour through.

"Ralis. It's... good to see you. What happened?" deLancie asked him.

"That is a very long story," Ralis replied, then exhaled.

Cedric couldn't help but smirk at that remark. It means that a lot of interesting things happened.

"I look forward to hearing it," Cedric said, the tone of his voice showing that he can't wait to hear the whole thing.

"What's the situation, General deLancie? What has been happening since we were gone?" Corwin asked.

"Our forces are continuing their sweep of the castle, checking for traps or pockets of resistance. The surviving crusaders have either fled or surrendered. The siege is ended, as is the threat of the Nine Hells. I believe the time has come to celebrate," Cedric replied.

cheered, overjoyed that the hero of Baldur's Gate has once again saved the Sword coast from another major threat. Bence Duncan looked around incredulously at the soldiers as if he expected something more spectacular.

"Is that all you've got for the savior of Dragonspear? You can do better than that! Three cheers for the hero of Baldur's Gate!" He exclaimed to them.

The cheering and whooping of the soldiers intensified, and they applauded too, the sounds of dozens of hands clapping in unison rang in the ears of Ralis, his party and Aun's. Duncan approached Ralis and shook his hand.

"I'll admit I had my doubts about you, Ralis, but you proved yourself more than worthy as an ally. I'm honored to have fought beside you," Bence said, the admiration in his voice making his words sincere.

"The pleasure is all mine, Bence," Ralis placed his right hand on Duncan's shoulder.

"Now if you'll excuse me, I need to go check on Skie. With Caelar defeated, there will likely be some revelry, and she can be... overly celebratory, if you grasp my meaning," Duncan said.

"Oh. Oh, no," Corwin shook her head smiling.

"I got a pretty clear idea on what you mean, Bence. Go, make sure she doesn't do anything stupid," Ralis said, smiling.

Duncan gave Ralis a salute, then turned on his heel and walked down the hallway.

Ralis and his party and Aun proceeded to move down the hallway, weaving their way past the cheering soldiers. Some of them took the time to say a few words, saying how much they admire him, and they hope to name their unborn child after him, things like that. As they walked down the hallway, Corwin walked next to Ralis, holding his hand.

"We did it, Ralis. It's all over," Corwin said, smiling.

Ralis looked over at Schael and smirked in amusement.

"I don't think I've ever seen you smile like that before, Schael. You should do it more often," he said.

Suddenly, Corwin made Ralis stop walking, and made him face her.

"Come here. I want to kiss you," Corwin said.

Ralis smiled. "And I want to let you," he said.

As soon as Corwin and Ralis locked lips, the soldiers around them whooped in amusement, seeing the steamy scene in the hallway, even Neera, Glint and the others felt a bit awkward witnessing this.

"Get your man, Captain Corwin!" A woman who is a Flaming Fist soldier exclaimed.

"I'll take your words over roses any day, Ralis," Corwin said after she and Ralis pulled their lips a few inches apart.

As soon as Ralis and Corwin stepped out the hallway with their allies behind them, they were greeted by more people applauding them in the wide room surrounded by metal gates on both ends.

"I'm almost there, Rohma. I'll be home soon..." Corwin said with a smile, looking up at the ceiling in a hopeful manner, likely because she originally thought she wouldn't live to see her daughter again.

"Not nearly soon enough. But at least we're alive to make the trip. That's no small thing considering," Ralis said as he led his lover and party towards the open gates to their left, heading towards the stairs that will take them up to the main floors of the castle.

"Come back to Baldur's Gate with me, Ralis. I'll smile a lot more once I see my daughter again," Corwin said after they passed through the metal bar gates.

"And will Rohma smile to see me, do you think?" Ralis asked, even though he knew the answer already, he just wanted to know Corwin's thoughts.

"If I have to choose between you and her, you must know who I'll go with. But she wants me to be happy, and she's a sharp kid. I think she'll approve," Corwin said as their feet began to take them up the stairs.

Word quickly spread around that the hero of Baldur's Gate has come through once again. Many Daggerford and Waterdeep soldiers rushed to Ralis to praise him for his heroic deeds. He was overwhelmed by the sheer amount of respect he has gained in such a fairly short time. A few months ago he was simply known as the hero of Baldur's Gate. With this victory, he might have a greater title than this.

Hours passed and during the evening of 20 Hammer, 1369 DR, the celebration fest finally got underway. Raypheus and Duncan cooked stew, turkey, corn, fig cakes, strawberry cakes, and last but definitely not least, a Luskan dish called "brassla", which is boiled rice which was added to finely chopped and fried eel, fish, frog, mouse, onion, and oyster. At one point during the celebration, while Raypheus Goodtree and Duncan were preparing the food, Ralis walked around Dragonspear alone, searching for his party members who didn't go with him to Avernus. He found Pfaug, Viconia, Voghiln, Safana, Patrescus, Dorn, and Edwin standing in line at the former crusader mercenary section tent site in the outer ward waiting to get paid the gold they were promised to help fight against the crusade.

"There you guys are!" Ralis called out to them, because he had spent thirteen minutes walking around Dragonspear Castle searching for them.

"Ach, look a' this. The bloody hero of Baldur's Gate honors us with his presence," Pfaug

Ralis couldn't understand why this duergar is so bitter.

"We all contributed to this night's victory, duergar," Ralis admonished the grumpy ebony skinned dwarf.

"Not all of us will be so celebrated as you, O "hero"," Viconia reminded him, standing behind Pfaug in the line.

Ralis had to admit she is right. The supporters won't get as much attention as the leader of the band.

"Ye think the shepherders an' the turnip picklers be singin' Pfaug's praises? Ye're mad, human. But ye did good work wi' the Shining Witch an' there's no doubtin' it," Pfaug said.

Ralis nodded as the Flaming Fist soldier gave Pfaug 2,000 gold for his contribution to defeating the crusade.

"You're right, Pfaug, I overestimated the attention you and everyone else who helped me will get. Just remember, even though bards will sing songs about me in the near future, know that I will be the only one to remember you," Ralis said.

"Feh! Until ye die o' old age," Pfaug scoffed, stepping out of the line to let Viconia get her gold.

"Hey! I don't plan on being single forever! I'll tell my kids about you and everyone else," Ralis promised.

"Really? You plan on having children, Ralis?" Viconia asked him, then turned her attention to the man handing her the bag full of 2,000 pieces of gold.

"Considering the attention and fame he will have in the near future, I'm sure Ralis will have no problem finding the right woman. Who wouldn't want to be married to a famous hero? Patrescus behind Safana said.

"I would," Safana said.

"Agh, I knew you'd say that!" Ralis rolled his eyes.

"What? Does the idea of spending time with me get you excited, champ?" Safana winked at him,

"Safana, I'm taken!" Ralis exclaimed.

She raised her eyebrows in amusement.

"Really? Taken by who?"

"By Captain Schael Corwin, of course," Ralis replied.

Ralis thought she would get mad, but she didn't she just shrugged indifferently.

"Oh well, then, your loss. You two have fun, okay? I'm going to go get a drink as soon as I get paid," she said.

As if on cue, Voghiln, who happened to be passing by carrying a crate full of mead with Mizhena who is also carrying a crate full of mead or ale said:

"Did you say drink? The Lion of Luskan is here to offer you what you need! And maybe more, ja?"

"Ugh!" Safana turned her head away in disgust. "That oaf makes me miss Coran!"

"(Monkeys talking about reproducing. Bah. The world would be better off with these Neanderthals infertile)," Edwin mumbled to himself.

"Are you talking to yourself again, Edwin?" Ralis called.

Edwin bristled in outrage. "W-What?! No, I was monologuing to myself!" He retorted.

"That's the same as talking to yourself, wizard," Viconia corrected him.

Edwin said nothing, he just grunted in annoyance.

A few hours later that night, everyone ate food, drank ale, danced and singed different songs. Everyone had the time of their lives, except for Viconia, Edwin, Glint, Dorn, Neera, Voghiln, M'Khiin, Pfaug, Rasaad and Baeloth because they departed Dragonspear and went their separate ways.

Ralis partied for hours until midnight, and in the keep, he and Corwin were about to retire to their selected chambers until Sergeant Dazzo of Waterdeep, another admirer of Ralis, waylaid them.

"Well met, Ralis, I must say it is an honor to meet you finally, after all the attention you've been getting. I am Dazzo of Waterdeep, and if I may say, it has been an honor to fight alongside the former hero of Baldur's Gate."

Ralis frowned at the word he said. Does Dazzo mean that his title is changing?

"Former hero of Baldur's Gate? Have you heard something I haven't" Ralis asked the fawning sergeant.

Dazzo smiled. "Baldur's Gate can no longer claim you for its own. You represent more than a city- you are a champion of the Sword Coast and all the realms."

"I apologize, sir, I am sorry. Enjoy the respite while you can, my Lord. You can't be sure how long the calm will last these days," Dazzo said, then stepped aside, allowing Ralsi and Corwin to walk down the hall towards their temporary room.

The following days after the party were daunting. The Sword Coast armies hired a group of workers to rebuild the bridge of the Coast Way Crossing, otherwise Ralis and the Flaming Fist armies will have to take the long route to return to Baldur's Gate, passing over Boareskyr Bridge, then head east to Soubar then Triel, head south to Elturel, then west across the Fields of the Dead. Reconstruction of the Coast Way bridge was long, lasting for three months.

On Ches 1369 DR, everyone celebrated Ralis' 22nd birthday, because Ches is the month when Gorion adopted Ralis and first brought him to Candlekeep.

On the day when the bridge reconstruction workers returned to inform Nederlok and Duncan that reconstruction of the bridge is complete, the Flaming Fist armies decided to stay in Dragonspear one more night before departing back to Baldur's Gate, and the armies of Daggerford and Waterdeep decided to stay with them until that day comes. On that night, the 14th day of Tarsakh, 1369 DR, that is when Ralis Rutela's life started to become the worst nightmare conceivable.

Ralis was laying in a old, decrepit bed with Corwin snoring beside him. He heard a strange noise from outside the room that woke him up. He wondered what it could be, but his mind couldn't come up with any idea in particular. He paused, listening closely, trying to see if he could hear the noise again. This time he heard approaching footsteps.

"Hey. Hey, Corwin, wake up," Ralis gently nudged Corwin trying to make her wake up.

She grunted and shifted her body slightly, but she never opened her eyes, and she continued snoring. Ralis sighed and decided to check out what that noise could be. If it is a monster that snuck into the castle, it's best to check out the disturbance armed. Ralis quietly strapped on his belt with the scabbards without putting on his body armor, then he walked outside the bedroom, slowly opening the door. Outside the bedroom in the main hall, he saw Skie Silvershield facing him with fearful, blank expression on her face.

"Skie? What are you doing up so late at night?" Ralis asked her.

She didn't reply. Ralis heard footsteps again, and this time it sounds much closer than before. And to his surprise, the mysterious hooded man appeared from view behind Skie. Was he standing behind Skie this whole time? If he was, he was standing nine feet behind Skie, and Ralis never noticed him until now. The hooded man approached Skie and stopped next to her. Skie didn't run, she didn't try to attack the hooded man, either. Her face is just simply contorted with confusion and fear.

"Skie Silvershield. Born into privilege, yet driven to rebel against the destiny her father mapped out for her. She has been challenged, as you have. Has she proven worthy- or been

dark yellow vapors to rise up around her body.

"What... What's happening? I-I don't understand..." Skie whimpered.

"Corwin! Nederlok! Duncan! Somebody help! Skie is in trouble!" Ralis shouted, hoping someone would come and help her.

The arcane energies surrounding her intensified, the magical vapors became thicker, surrounding her body and enveloping her like a caterpillar in a cocoon.

"No! NO!" Skie cried.

"Skie! NO!" Ralis rushed over to the ball of arcane energy, banging on it with his fists, trying to find a way to tear Skie out free.

Ralis drew Kondar out of its scabbard and tried to strike the arcane ball, but the blade couldn't cut it. The hooded man departed the hallway from the other side, and walls of flames appeared, preventing Ralis' escape or someone coming to his aid, but he never noticed this, he was entirely focused on freeing Skie. The arcane ball finally exploded, knocking Ralis off his feet, knocking him back ten feet from where Skie stood, and when Ralis pulled his head up, he saw that the magic energy that the hooded man cast on her had turned her into a yellowish red humanoid monster of some kind. It had sharp claws, sharp feet. The monster screeched and advanced towards Ralis.

"Skie... Skie... Wait!" Ralis exclaimed.

He rolled away in time when the monster tried to pounce on him. Ralis scrambled back up on his legs standing upright again. He still held Kondar in his right hand, but he had no intention of using it. He finally took notice of the flames boxing him in the room with this unknowable horror, then he dodged the claws of the monster, still making no attempt to attack.

"Skie! I know you're in there! Whatever that mage did to you, fight it!" Ralis exclaimed.

Ralis spent five minutes dodging the beast, trying not to attack it, in fear that he might kill Skie in the process.

But... but.. Skie is in there! She might die if I kill the creature! Ralis reasoned to himself as he dodged the growling creature again.

You don't know that! Killing the creature might save her! A new idea came to Ralis' mind. An idea that he couldn't dismiss the possibility of. If killing this creature is the way to save, Skie, then he must try. As the creature screeched and charged at Ralis, he thrust Kondar forward shouting:

"FORGIVE ME, SKIE!"

The blade pierced the monster's chest with the sickening noise of the blade cutting into flesh, then the monster collapsed dead, and the arcane energies coalesced into a ball and

Ralis was awoken by a voice.

"What the hells-?" The masculine voice said.

Ralis opened his eyes and groggily stood up.

"No- gods, NO!" Bence exclaimed in sheer horror.

Ralis was about to ask Bence what happened, until he looked down at the floor in front of him. He saw Skie laying on the floor, a dagger wound on her chest and blood slowly leaking out, staining her shirt.

The warmth drained from Ralis' face as soon as he saw Skie's dead body.

"... NO! OH PLEASE NO!" Ralis gasped.

Two more Flaming Fist guards appeared in the hallway and were equally shocked and horrified at what they saw. Ralis awkwardly stood up on his legs, but they felt numb, as if they were never there. Bence looked at Ralis in shock. Behind Ralis, Corwin appeared and had the same reaction as everyone else did when she saw Skie's corpse.

"What have you done, Ralis? WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?" Bence exclaimed to him.

"I- I don't know, Bence!" Ralis exclaimed, stammering. "I heard a noise in here, and-and-and, this hooded man turned Skie into a-a-a-a monster and I... I..."

Ralis's voice trailed off and his heart sank when he noticed that the front of his shirt is stained in blood. SKIE'S BLOOD, and he looked towards Duncan and saw his shocked expression slowly change into an expression of pure contempt.

"There's only one monster here- the one that stood on Boareskyr Bridge, a skull scorched into the stone around him," Bence began to say.

"Bence, no..." Ralis softly pleaded as he spoke, and the Flaming Fist guards surrounded him.

"... The one covered in Skie Silvershield's blood," Duncan concluded, pointing a finger at Ralis.

"I didn't do this... I swear, I didn't," Ralis softly sobbed as two Flaming Fist soldiers surrounded him and unbuckled his swords around his waist.

"May the gods help you. No one else will," Duncan said to Ralis, then approached him slowly, holding some rope in his hands meant to bind a person's arms. "You know what I've got to do, Ralis. In the name of the Council of Four, you are under arrest for the murder of Skie Silvershield. You will return to Baldur's Gate to be tried for your crime."

Duncan began to tie the small piece of rope around Ralis' crossed wrists.

Duncan sighed, shaking his head softly. It is obvious that he wishes to believe him, but in light of the current evidence, he must do what he is reluctant to do.

"I wish I could believe that," Duncan admitted.

"Don't make this harder than it needs to be, Ralis. Please," Corwin urged him.

As Ralis was being escorted out of the keep by Duncan, Corwin and a dozen Flaming Fist soldiers, he took one last look at Skie's body as Flaming Fist clerics retrieved it.

The next several minutes was a pure nightmare for Ralis, including Jovan, Minsc, Neera, Dynaheir, Khalid and Jaheira. When word spread out to deLancie, Stonehand, Nederlok and everyone else in Dragonspear, everyone was in complete shock. Jovan is severely appalled about Ralis's actions, and felt unsure of whether to trust Ralis despite his claims that he is innocent, including Jahiera, Khalid and Dynaheir. Nederlok, Corwin and Duncan immediately put Ralis in his wagon, and every Flaming Fist soldier rode their horses around the wagon, to make sure Ralis does not jump out and escape into the wilderness.

Skie's corpse was kept in another wagon twenty feet ahead of his own wagon, being preserved by the spells of clerics to prevent Skie's body from decomposing. From what he has heard, the clerics are unable to resurrect Skie using the necromancy spell Raise Dead, which is a huge problem. With no hope of resurrecting Skie, there is also no hope of clearing Ralis's name. It means either her soul is missing, or the weapon used to end her life prevents resurrection spells from taking effect. Minsc, Dynaheir, Corwin, Khalid and Jaheira also rode horses as well, and the tenday long journey back to Baldur's Gate.

On the night of the twelfth day since their departure from Dragonspear, the Flaming Fist armies finally arrived in Baldur's Gate. The wagon carrying Skie's body entered the Black Dragon Gate first, two hours before everyone else, followed by Nederlok and a hundred Flaming Fists. The citizens of Baldur's Gate and the refugees that have been staying there for the past few months gathered, awaiting the hero who not only defeated Sarevok, but also stopped Caelar and her crusade. When word spread throughout the city that Ralis had indeed defeated Caelar and stopped the crusade, but he killed Entar's daughter, all the cheers almost immediately ceased, and everyone felt as if they would come down with a heart attack, especially Entar.

Ralis was awakened by a soldier knocking on the wagon.

"Wake up. We're here," he called.

Ralis groggily stood up on his legs and stepped out of the wagon, to be accosted by four Flaming Fist soldiers, and the soldiers escorted Ralis towards the Black Dragon Gate. It took them 46 steps to get to the gate, and they opened, and hundreds of people standing along the sidewalks on both sides of the road awaited. As soon as they saw Ralis, come in, bound by rope and being escorted by a few Flaming Fist soldiers around him, with the bulk of the

Some people even had the nerve to throw apples, kiwis, oranges, any small fruit or object they could get their hands on at the former hero of Baldur's Gate! Some of the objects managed to hit Ralis in the face shoulders or legs, and other fruits and harmless projectiles just landed on the road because some people have a bad throwing arm. Ralis held his head down, continuing to walk with his Flaming Fist escorts to the Flaming Fist HQ. Every turn they took on their destination, more crowds of people had more hurtful words to say to Ralis, and something to throw at him.

It took the escorts twenty minutes to get to the Flaming Fist headquarters building. In front of a building, there is a wooden platform elevated 8 1/2 feet off the ground, and on top of the platform, Grand Duke Belt stood waiting for him. More than a dozen Flaming Fist soldiers stood in front of the platform, keeping the angry, jeering crowds of people at bay. Ralis' escorts took Ralis up the stairs to the top of the platform and the guards left when Ralis was left standing next to Belt to his right. The shouts of the crowd died down slowly, but there were a few retorts and yells here and there.

Belt had a book of written notes and said: "... We've heard the testimony of those who traveled with the Flaming Fist expedition to Dragonspear Castle. Many told of how the accused was found in Dragonspear's main hall, with Skie Silvershield dead at his feet," Belt announced to Ralis and everyone else.

A few seconds later, Bence Duncan arrived, walking up the platform and stood next to Belt to his left, his arms clasped behind his back like a soldier standing at attention.

"Corporal Bence Duncan bore witness to a disturbing incident involving the accused at Boareskyr Bridge. He is here to share his recollections," Belt informed the near silent crowd.

"Bridgefort was under siege by the crusade. The accused led an attack, driving Caelar's forces off. After that, he collapsed while crossing Boareskyr Bridge. The symbol of Bhaal, Lord of Murder, scarred itself into the stones around him," Duncan said, his tone calm and professional.

"Child of murder! Evil poisons your blood!" A commoner man among the crowd suddenly snapped.

That hurt Ralis deeply that he thought it would, he couldn't help but fidget, and the ropes binding his wrists still made his hands feel numb as if they are no longer there.

"The mark of Bhaal does not in itself prove guilt," Belt reminded everyone. "But it does cast a darker shadow of suspicion upon the accused. We cannot forget that Sarevok, another spawn of Bhaal, brought our city to the brink of war."

Ralis felt some relief when Belt said that. He is not a biased person, and he reminds everyone of every relevant detail that they might have forgotten. If evil does poison his blood, why hasn't he done anything to bring ruin to Baldur's Gate, or any other city in the Sword Coast? That commoner might want to chew on that for a while.

"Thank you for your service, Corporal. You may go," Belt nodded at Duncan.

turned his attention completely to Ralis.

"As for you, Ralis... Our diviners have presented evidence of your deeds since leaving Baldur's Gate, deeds that speak to your character. Is there anything you wish to say in your defense?" Belt asked him.

Ralis opened his mouth and licked his lips. It has been eight days since he has spoken to anyone.

"I can't remember what happened at the castle, but I am certain I am no murderer. My character is my defense," Ralis said, his voice cracking a little.

"Elaborate," Belt suggested, preparing to take note in his book using a quill feather.

Ralis explained that on the day most of the Flaming Fist departed Baldur's Gate, Skie told him that she joined the Flaming Fist and made him swear not to tell Entar, but he went and told Entar anyway, and he already knew.

Belt nodded, writing in his book.

"So noted," he said, and a few people in the crowd murmured among themselves.

"Is there anything more you wish to say?" Belt asked after taking the note.

Ralis thought it over for a few seconds then said "Yes".

"Elaborate."

Ralis told Belt about Cedric deLancie trying to send him to poison the crusaders' food and water supplies, which he flatly refused to do because it was a cowardly, dishonorable act.

Belt made another note in his book.

"So noted," he said.

Again, more murmurs arose among the crowd. Ralis never noticed, but it seems that a few people in the crowd are beginning to wonder whether or not Bhaal's blood controls Ralis's personality.

"Is there anything else you wish to say in your defense?" Belt asked.

Ralis thought it over. The idea of Thrix's game came to him, but he wasn't sure if explaining what happened in Avernus helps any, because only Corwin was there to witness it... Yes! Corwin!

"Yes, I do," Ralis nodded.

"Elaborate," Belt said with a nod, preparing to take note once again.

"The pursuit of Caelar took me to the wastes of Avernus. A fiend offered to let me pass freely to the tower Caelar escaped into- if I sacrificed the soul of one of my companions if I failed to answer a riddle he had for me. I offered myself up instead. Captain Schael Corwin is the witness of that event," Ralis said.

"So noted," Belt said after taking notes.

"Is there anything more you wish to say?" Belt asked.

Ralis shook his head. "No, that is all, Duke Belt, I am ready for your decision," he said, feeling a bit calm but still feeling a bit nervous.

He took comfort in the fact that people will take the time to chew on this evidence before they make their final judgment.

"We've heard much evidence today, both for your character and against it. Now we-" Belt paused there because he heard a loud commotion coming somewhere to his left. "What is that commotion?" Belt asked one of the gards near the platform.

Ralis looked to Belt's left and his heart dropped when he saw Entar Silvershield himself shoving his way past a dozen Flaming Fist soldiers, trying to prevent him from coming towards the platform. Ralis wished that someone would shoot a quarrel into his head right now, because he does not want to look into Entar's eyes, unless Skie miraculously comes to life and informs everyone of his innocence.

"Out of my way- OUT OF MY WAY, you sniveling pigs!" Entar exclaimed in rage, trying to make his way past the Flaming Fist guards to get closer to the platform where Ralis and Belt stand.

The guards knew that Entar has more than half a mind to beat Ralis' skull in, and though he is believed to be the murderer, they can't let the father of the victim exact personal vengeance until a final decision is made.

"We can't let you do that, my lord-" the Flaming Fist soldier in front of Entar protested.

Entar shrugged off the Flaming Fist soldiers around him, and they parted away from him when they saw that he is not bracing himself against the soldier in front of him.

"Do you know to whom you speak?" Entar pointed a quivering finger up towards the tip of the soldier's nose. "I'll have your family on the street begging for coppers if you don't let me pass!"

The guard reluctantly stepped aside and Entar marched up the steps Ralis stayed behind Belt, and Belt positioned himself between Ralis and Entar. Belt felt confident that Entar would not hit a fellow Grand Duke.

"You do not want to do this, Entar..." Belt said calmly.

He side-stepped to Belt's left side so Ralis can clearly see him, and Entar can clearly see Ralis.

"You! Ralis! MURDERER!" Entar pointed straight at him.

Tears welled up in Ralis's eyes and he could not find the courage to look Entar in his rage-filled bloodshot eyes at all. Entar already lost his son, Eddard, several years ago. Losing Skie too has obviously made him an emotional wreck.

"You killed my little girl... my Skie..." Entar began to whine slightly.

"Duke Silvershield I swear, I did not murder your daughter, please, you must believe me! Do you remember the last time we spoke? I know I failed you in keeping her safe, but I'll correct my failure in any way I can! I swear my life upon that!" Ralis exclaimed defensively between sobs.

Entar shook his head.

"You put on a good act, but I KNOW the truth. It wasn't enough to slay her bodily and leave me childless? You had to destroy her own soul too?"

Belt stepped between Entar and Ralis again. "This is not the time-" he told his distraught fellow Duke.

Entar wouldn't have it. Placing both hands on Belt's shoulders, he leaned to the left side so he can stare down the young man with his death glare once again.

"Tell me what you did with it, fiend! Before they send you to the gallows, tell me, what did you do with the dagger?" Entar demanded.

"Dagger? What dagger? I know nothing of any dagger," Ralis said honestly.

Entar's rage-filled expression slowly turned into an expression of sadness, and he let his hands drop from Belt's shoulders, surrendering to sadness and despair.

"The priests can do nothing... She's gone forever. My Skie..." Entar started sobbing.

A Flaming Fist mercenary walked up to the platform and gestured Entar to come to him.

"Come, my lord. I'll escort you back to the estate," the mercenary offered.

Sniffing and sobbing, Entar let the mercenary take his right arm and escort him down the platform's stairs and they departed the street.

Seeing how angry and sad Entar is left a severe scar on Ralis's emotions, and ever since Entar arrived, yelling at Ralis, the crowd started shouting too, and they haven't calmed down after he left either, shouting vulgar words at Ralis, cursing him, wishing he stayed in Avernus where he belonged.

He looked over at Ralis and saw that he is visibly distraught over Entar's outbursts.

"A father's grief is an irrational thing. Let us return to the facts. Ralis, we've heard the evidence and your own defense. Have you anything else you wish to say?" Belt asked him.

"Yes. What is this "dagger" Duke Silvershield spoke of? What happened to Skie's soul?" Ralis replied.

"Peering into the Weave, our diviners determined that Skie Silvershield's soul now languishes within an artifact called the Soultaker Dagger. All efforts to locate the dagger have amounted to naught. While her essence is imprisoned thus, Skie can never be returned to life. If we had the Soultaker, she might possibly be restored, and confirm your innocence- if you are innocent," Belt explained.

"Guilty, I say! GUILTY!" A noblewoman nearby exclaimed.

"The Flaming Fist will take custody of the prisoner until a decision is reached. Take him away," Belt announced.

Then two Flaming Fist mercenaries walked up to the platform, grabbed Ralis by both of his arms, led him down the platform and took him into the Flaming Fist headquarters building.

The two Flaming Fist mercenaries escorted Ralis to the prison cells far back into the building, taking him to the very same prison cell that Angelo Dosan threw Ralis into back when he had used the Belt of Masculinity/Femininity to change his gender so that he could sneak back into Baldur's Gate undetected when Sarevok fooled everyone in the city into believing Ralis killed the Iron Throne leaders on behalf of Amn.

The Flaming Fist mercenary woman finally cut off the ropes binding Ralis's wrists together while the other mercenary unlocked the cell door. He opened the door and Ralis walked in. When Ralis stepped inside, he turned around and saw the mercenary shut the barred door and locked it.

"I have a son who admired you," the Flaming Fist mercenary man berated Ralis. "I looked up to you too. Now, I don't know what to think about you anymore," he said, the sadness in his voice obvious, then walked away.

"When I learned what happened to you on Boareskyr Bridge, I was one of the people who believed you would be different from Sarevok. You proved me wrong," the mercenary woman said, then walked away.

Ralis stood on his feet, silent, staring out the heavily barred door into the hallway he will never go back out into until the day of his hanging. He stared out his cell for five seconds, turned to his right, facing the wall, his breathing quickening, then he started to break down emotionally, letting out an anguished scream, then he started beating his fists against the wall four times, hitting the wall as hard as he possibly could, then he stopped, and gently fell back on the wooden plank which is used as a bed, and he continued sobbing, his hands ache

"Hey, shut up over there!" A nearby inmate in a nearby prison cell exclaimed.

Ralis ignored him.

"I didn't do it..." He whispered between sobs. *"I'm innocent. I didn't do it..."*

He forced his eyes open and looked at his aching hands. His knuckles are bruised from beating against the wall, and his right hand's knuckles have a couple cuts, blood is already leaking out, creating small red circles on the knuckle under his right hand's index finger, and the knuckle under the left middle finger. He had no idea how he would prove his innocence, or if it is even possible, or if he is guilty and doesn't even realize that he is.

Two minutes later, when Ralis was on the verge of sleeping he heard footsteps approaching. He mostly ignored it, believing that it must be a guard doing his or her rounds. His eyes sprang wide open when he heard Corwin's voice.

"Ralis. How are you?"

He sat up in a sitting position and looked over at Corwin.

"I've had better days," Ralis said and sighed.

"You could have worse. Eltan and Belt moved mountains to keep you alive and out of Entar's hands," Corwin commented.

Ralis walked over to the door, wrapped his dully aching hands around the door's bars and said: "I need your help, Schael. Let me out of this cell. Let me find Skie Silvershield's killer, let me prove my innocence. Please."

Corwin shook her head. "I can't do it. I'm sorry, Ralis. There's only one way you're leaving here."

She didn't need to say much for Ralis to understand. The only way out this cell is on the day they are ready to hang him at the end of a noose or behead him, and that realization made his heart jump. Why? After everything he said in his defense, why? Is there some omnipresent force pulling the strings here that has something against him?

"I didn't kill Skie. You can't believe I'd ever do something like that," Ralis protested.

Corwin sighed. She is loyal to the Flaming Fist and Council of Four, Ralis knew that, and this predicament is throwing her loyalties and understanding of her former lover into conflict, deciding on whether to obey the wishes of the Council of Four, or help a known felon who might be innocent, which is a problem, because nothing is clear.

"I don't know what to believe anymore," Corwin admitted. "It doesn't matter. I wish it did, but in the end, it doesn't. If it weren't this, it would have been something else. I thought we

thought we had."

Ralis let his hands slide off the bars, then he rested his back against the wall, sighing.

"Love makes fools of us all," he said, to let Corwin know that she is not alone in believing that fate refuses to let them be together despite what they thought, felt and believed.

"You say you loved me. I want to believe it. I do. But I can't," Corwin tried to stop herself from crying more, but she couldn't help it, the hurt feelings she felt were too much for her to suppress. "I- I can't do this. I've got to get out of here, out of this place... Forgive me." She walked away, and Ralis could hear her sobbing fade away into the distance.

Ralis sat down on the large wooden plank and exhaled.

Ralis flexed his fingers to make the numbing pain from his knuckles ebb away, but the small cuts on his right hand still gave a mild stinging sensation.

An hour later, Ralis woke up, hearing footsteps approaching. He sprang up off the wooden plank and approached the door, waiting to see who is coming. He expected it to be Corwin, but no, it wasn't her... It was the mysterious hooded man again.

"Chains become you, child of Bhaal. The people you saved have turned on you, treating you as some nightmare made flesh. How does it feel to be trapped in a cell, after all you've done for this city?" He asked the young man in the cell.

Ralis didn't want to answer his question, all he wanted was for someone to lend him a hand.

"This isn't right. Whoever you are, you must understand. I didn't kill Skie. I could never do such a thing. This makes no sense!" Ralis said.

"Life offers no justification for the ills it inflicts on us. None know this better than I," The hooded man replied.

Ralis grunted in frustration and sat back down on the wooden plank.

"I warned you of the darkness running through your veins. Divine blood is not to be trifled with. Without control, power is naught but peril. But I am confident you will survive this. A greater destiny awaits you," the hooded man said.

Suddenly, without warning, Ralis blacked out.

Then, he had a very odd dream.

"Rise. It is time," the hooded man's voice nearby ordered, and Ralis woke up and stood up, examining his surroundings.

he could do is follow behind the hooded man as he led him out of the misty bedroom to the hallway outside the bedroom, the same spot where Duncan and the Flaming Fist found him with Skie's corpse.

"You know what you must do. Embrace the darkness coiling within you," the hooded man said as he led Ralis out of the bedroom, away from Corwin and everyone else sleeping, and as soon as he stepped outside the bedroom, he disappeared into the mist, but Ralis kept walking out the bedroom as if something else is controlling his body.

In the next room out in the main hall where the stairs to the basement can be barely seen at the far end of the room, Ralis found Skie Silvershield, standing in the middle of the misty room, petrified, her face frozen in utter fear, and the hooded man was nowhere to be seen at first. Then he appeared next to Skie to her left, as if he were one with the mist, disappearing into it and reappearing from it.

"Take the dagger," the hooded man said, holding a strange looking dagger in both of his hands.

The dagger had a dark red ruby in the pommel.

"Kill her. Take it," the hooded man ordered.

Ralis resisted the urge to do as he commanded, he did not budge an inch. This amused the hooded man rather than upset him.

"Even now you resist. You are more powerful than I thought," the hooded man said as he gently ran the dagger's sharp end down from Skie's cheek down to her neck, causing her to whimper.

"All that I truly require is your presence," the hooded man said.

Then he plunged the dagger into Skie's chest! Ralis gasped in horror at what he just saw. He truly is innocent after all! This mysterious man is the one responsible! The hooded man let Skie fall to the floor, and he disappeared into the thick mist. Then everything in the dream faded to black.

Ralis heard the hooded man nearby talk while his eyes were closed, his consciousness slowly coming back to reality.

"Curious. Your mind is not so open to me as it once was- you resist my will. Your power grows, child of Bhaal. Awake."

At that command, Ralis was finally able to open his eyes, and he sat up on the wooden plank bed. He didn't look straight over at the hooded man standing outside the cell, he just kept his head lowered as if depressed about something. The hooded man wondered why Ralis is acting this way.

"Tell me. What did you see?" The hooded man asked him with curiosity.

Ralis glaring at him with immense hatred.

"*I saw your death*," Ralis stated ominously, but his barely calm voice is clearly marked with barely restrained anger.

"An inevitability, perhaps- but your eyes tell me a different story. What did you SEE?" The hooded man asked him again.

Ralis slowly stood up on his legs, keeping his glaring eyes focused on the hooded man as he took slow steps towards the prison cell door.

"*I saw you die, screaming for mercy in my hands. I looked down at your corpse and laughed, for my vengeance was complete.*" At that moment Ralis reached the prison cell doors but he leaned forward, his face pressing between the bars. "*You had paid for your crimes against me- paid for Skie Silvershield's murder with your own wretched life!*" Ralis exclaimed with such malice that spittle flew from his mouth.

"Despite my efforts, you remember. Impressive," the hooded man congratulated Ralis, but his voice is devoid of joy, though, and he showed Ralis the Soultaker Dagger in his hands.

"I'll show you impressive, mage. When I escape, I'm coming for you. You best beware," Ralis growled, gripping the bars so tightly that his hands slightly turned red.

"Greater powers than you have challenged me, yet I still stand," the hooded man said. "You will escape this place. We will meet again. Fear that meeting, child of Bhaal. We have so far to go together."

Then the hooded man walked away.

Ralis grunted in frustration, wanting to punch something or someone so badly.

Approximately 44 days later, at the moment he was beginning to give up hope on finding away out of this prison and avoid impending doom by beheading, he heard someone call to him. A man's gruff voice.

"Hey. Hey, wake up."

Ralis groggily woke up and rubbed his eyes. He heard the sound of keys jingling, then he heard the door unlock and creak open. He turned his head and saw a man standing outside the cell, holding the door open, beckoning him to come out.

"Wake up and move your ass while you still got an ass to move," the man outside the prison cell door said.

Ralis looked at the man and did not recognize him. He wore the clothes of a Shadow Thief, he could tell. What's a member of the Shadow Thief guild doing breaking into the Flaming Fist

"Who are you?" Ralis asked, climbing out the bed and rolling his neck a bit because it had gone a bit stiff while he was asleep.

"Don't matter. What matters is the bag o' gold your friend Imoen gave me to get you outta here, and the four other bags o' gold she's givin' me when I pull it off," the thief said.

Ralis perked up. This man was hired by Imoen to break him out? What luck!

"Imoen sent you? Where is she?" Ralis asked.

The thief nodded his head down the only direction out of the hallway of prison cells.

"The girl's waitin' fer ya, 'long with my gold. So let's go!" The thief urged Ralis.

Without wasting time with other questions, Ralis stepped out of the prison cell and the thief led the way down the hallway of prison cells, and Ralis followed closely behind him. He had half a mind to ask the thief if he had his body armor, weapons and equipment to give to him, but Ralis instead stayed silent, choosing to believe that Imoen may have them instead.

An inmate, a human man inside the fourth prison cell to the right spotted Ralis and his Shadow Thief rescuer walk by, and the man pleaded: "Let me out! Please, I can help you!"

But Ralis and the thief chose to ignore that man. The thief is partially paid to get Ralis out of jail, no one else, and Ralis was unsure if the man deserved to be here or not. It's best not to complicate things that are already complicated. Another prisoner, another human male, this one with dark hair inside the sixth prison cell to the left saw them, but said nothing. But the prisoner across from him to the right spoke up.

"Sure, good, that's just great- run away, leave the rest of us here to rot," he said sarcastically.

Seconds afterwards, the thief and Ralis made it to the room where to the left, the stairs go up to the upper levels of the headquarters, to the room where Ralis saved Duke Eltan from being poisoned by a doppelganger working for Sarevok disguised as a healer.

Ralis expected to run into some guards here, so he was clearly surprised to see three dead guards sprawled all over the floor, their throats cut open likely by a dagger. The thief moved over to the trapdoor to the basement on the other side of the crimson rug and opened it.

"Over here. You can get out through the basement," the thief said to Ralis, holding the trapdoor lid open.

"What happened to the guards?" Ralis asked the thief, pointing at the three dead bodies.

"Them? They came down with a case of slit throat. Come on, time's a' wastin'," the thief replied.

Ralis was afraid of Eltan, Belt and Corwin discovering the bodies and believing that he killed them. This will reflect negatively on his already negative reputation. He followed the thief

touched the wall in various spots, searching for a button. He finally found it when Ralis stopped four feet behind him, and the wall opened like a camouflaged door, revealing a secret passage, a passage that leads straight to Baldur's Gate's sewers.

"Through here," the thief said.

Ralis whistled in admiration while peering down the passageway.

"A secret exit in the basement of the Flaming Fist's headquarters? Gods, I love this city..." he said then turned to his rescuer for agreement or approval.

"Well, the city don't love you no more. Now listen: When ya get down, there's a waterfall to the east, flows down into a lake in a cavern. You'll find Imoen near the entrance. Now go, quickly!" the thief instructed Ralis, handing him a potion of invisibility, in case he needs it.

Ralis nodded at his rescuer and entered the secret passage, carefully positioning himself on the ladder and then climbing down.

Ralis' feet touched solid ground and he found himself in the sewers of Baldur's Gate. The tunnel only went forward, extending a long way away for his eyes to discern, so he had no other choice but to head in the direction presented to him. As Ralis thought over his directions, where he is in relation to the rest of the city, he memorized the fact that the Flaming Fist HQ is several blocks north from the High House of Wonders, which means the direction this tunnel is taking him is going northeast. He needs to go directly east to find the waterfall the thief talked about. But how long will it take to get there since the Flaming Fist HQ is maybe an hour's walk or less away from Elfsong Tavern, which is close to the city gates that lead out to the Wyrms Crossing bridge over River Chionthar? And what if he takes a wrong turn? Ralis decided not to dwell on that. All that matters is he should follow the directions given to him.

As soon as he found a tunnel that allowed him to head directly east, he took it and followed it, and he stayed on that path for what felt like 19 minutes or less. As soon as he hit a dead end, a barred gate that only allows sewage water to pass through, Ralis was forced to retrace his steps a bit and take a new route and find his way back on the tunnel that takes him directly east. He had to do this several times, finding alternate routes to bypass the barred gates to continue on the eastern tunnel path whenever a dead end wall with a small barred hole that only a small stream of sewer water and a rat or small creature can fit through, or a barred gate blocked his way. Twenty-five minutes later, Ralis had a gut feeling that the Flaming Fist and the city watch already know that he has escaped from prison, and is likely conducting a widespread manhunt. That possibility turned into a likelihood when he heard a sound somewhere in the tunnels to his right, the sound of someone opening up a manhole, and he thought that he heard voices, too.

"He might be down here somewhere. Spread out and find him," he heard the somewhat nearby voice say.

Crap. I better get out of here and fast, Ralis thought to himself, beginning to run. As usual, whenever he found a dead end on the tunnel going east, he tried to find an alternate route

Seven minutes later, after bypassing another dead end going east, Ralis finally found the tunnel that leads out into the waterfall.

As soon as Ralis took a step towards the pipe's end, he heard someone behind him say:

"Wrong turn, Ralis."

He recognized that voice. Bence Duncan. Ralis slowly turned around and saw Duncan standing ten feet behind him armed with a tower shield and longsword, with Schael Corwin by his side, pointing her bow at him, ready to fire an arrow at Ralis if she has to, and behind them are two Flaming Fist mercenaries and two city watch guards, wearing uniforms that have the city's coat of arms on the chest.

"Hands in the air. Get away from the opening," Corwin ordered.

Ralis slowly turned around, with his hands in the air at the same level as his head, but he did not walk towards Duncan and Corwin.

"Schael, Bence. You have to let me go. I know the truth now with out a doubt- I'm INNOCENT. You have to believe me!" Ralis pleaded.

"Innocent? HA! We were THERE, Ralis. You can't lie to us," Duncan scoffed.

"I know what I saw. You were standing over the body of Skie Silvershild. Duke Entar's daughter. His DAUGHTER," Corwin said.

"I was standing near Skie's body, yes, but where was the murder weapon? This dagger that took Skie's soul? If I'm the murderer, why haven't you found it?"

Corwin shook her head.

"You can't deceive me, Ralis. I know it was you, no one else was there but you."

Ralis frowned incredulously.

"What, so, I'm a mage who can magically hide evidence? Open your eyes, Corwin, I would not do such a thing, and i'm not capable of it either, what makes you think I am? Ah, I understand now. This is about Rohma. You're kowtowing to Silvershield because he promised a reward too big for you to refuse, enough gold to raise Rohma and retire from the Fist."

"Don't bring her into this. You won't like where that ends," Corwin warned him, pulling back further on the bowstring.

"I already don't like where we're at and where we're going. Do you seriously think so little of me? That I would stoop down to killing in cold blood? I am a child of Bhaal, I admitted that to you since the destruction of the Coast Way Crossing bridge. I could have lied to you about my heritage, but I didn't. Sarevok would lie to you. I won't."

"No," Ralis retorted defiantly.

"No?" Corwin repeated in surprise, arching her right eyebrow upwards in confusion.

"I am not the killer. I know who it really was, he came to gloat at me before I escaped," Ralis said.

Duncan scoffed. "If this 'hooded man' you speak of is truly responsible, then why did we find you instead of him?"

Duncan had a point, Ralis quietly admitted. The hooded man planned everything out perfectly for all evidence to point at Ralis as the killer. He is a very shady and slippery character indeed.

"He is a mage," Ralis replied, knowing that explanation is weak. "He likely had some illusion spells cast over all of us."

"Enough!" Corwin snapped. "Hands behind your head and get down on your knees. This is your final warning."

Ralis felt that it is now or never.

"Corwin, if you shoot me, you will become a murderer yourself!" Ralis warned her.

From the shocked look on Corwin's eyes, he could see that he got to her.

"I know you believe I murdered Skie, but I know the truth of this farce, and if the gods were watching everything I've been through, they know the truth too. Stop me if you must, but I don't want Skie's real murderer to get away with this. If you want to shoot me, do it. Are you ready to live the rest of your life knowing that you killed an innocent man? If you are, you're no better than a Bhaalspawn," Ralis scolded her.

Corwin began to falter- she couldn't keep her bow aimed at Ralis forever. She eventually gave up aiming at him.

"No... I... I don't know what I should do," Corwin began to cry.

"No, Corwin, dammit! He has to die! Die in the name of Skie Silvershield! Kill him!" Duncan exclaimed.

"Damn! Run, Ralis! Run!" Corwin exclaimed as Duncan moved aside to let the archers have a clear shot at Ralis.

Ralis turned around and ran for the pipe's end just when the archers opened fire, the arrows breezed past his body on both sides, the arrow to his right nearly grazed his right arm and both arrows fell outside the pipe, falling towards the lake below. He ran for the opening and when he reached the end, he jumped out of the pipe and into the large cavernous room with

"EYYYYAAAAHHH!" Ralis yelled as he fell towards the water below him.

He threw the potion of invisibility down at the lake's surface to break the tension of the water's surface otherwise landing in the lake's undisturbed surface will feel like hitting concrete and knock him unconscious.

SPLASH!

He landed in the cool cavern water, sinking 8 feet below the surface before swimming up towards the surface. He came out gasping for air and sneezing water out of his nose and he swam 13 feet towards the rocky shore and climbed out. He stood up on his feet, feeling the weight of his wet clothes pressing down on him, and he headed for the pathway sloping upwards, and when he reached the top, he saw the exit across the small bridge ahead of him. He kept moving without hesitation, crossing the bridge bravely and going out the cavern's exit.

Ralis emerged from the cavern to find himself in the wilderness somewhere outside not too far from the eastern walls of Baldur's Gate, probably two miles north from River Chionthar. It is still night, the stars and moon illuminate the dark blue sky.

"Heya! Over here!" He heard a voice he hadn't heard in months call nearby.

He saw Imoen at the peripheral of his right eye and ran over to her, and embraced her in a hug.

"You made it! That's great, I was- I was scared you wouldn't," Imoen said.

"You and me both," Ralis said.

They stopped hugging each other and gave each other some space.

"I'm so sorry, Ralis. I should never have let you go to Dragonspear without me," Imoen apologized, gently patting Ralis' back.

He shook his head slowly in denial.

"No. I should have listened to you when you told me that I shouldn't get involved. You were right in so many ways."

Imoen smiled enthusiastically when Ralis turned to look at her with his sad eyes.

"Well, whether I was right or wrong, we can't go back and change what already happened. We're together again now, and that's the way it's going to stay. I'm not letting you out of my sight ever again. Come on, let's get a move on. It's only a matter of time before the Flaming Fist figures out where you are," Imoen said.

Ralis followed her into the forest, feeling the cool air against his wet skin and clothes was somewhat refreshing, erasing the fatigue that made his arms and legs ache. After taking

"Oh, Imoen! Do you have my armor, weapons and equipment?" He asked after they passed by a few trees.

Imoen snapped her the fingers of her right hand as if she had a brilliant idea.

"Oh yeah! I did! They're over here." Imoen led Ralis over to a boulder near a thin tree, and between the boulder and tree, Ralis found his ankheg armor, repaired and brand new, and his two bastard swords Kondar and Albruin, his two-sided dirk Avenger, and his longbow Dead Shot.

"Finally! I feel naked without my armor and swords, and longbow," Ralis said.

Imoen waited as Ralis got dressed into his ankheg body armor, then strapped his belt and sword scabbards around his waist, strapped his quiver containing his remaining void-tipped arrows and ten regular arrows behind his back, then strapped his longbow around his torso.

"Ready? Let's go!" Imoen exclaimed.

Ralis followed Imoen east through the forest until they reunited with Minsc, Dynaheir, Khalid and Jaheira at a small clearing with a large boulder close by them.

"Heya, everyone! I got 'em!" Imoen called out to them, pointing to Ralis coming up behind her.

Ralis was shocked to see that Imoen got Minsc, Dynaheir, Khalid and Jaheira to tag along, he thought that Minsc and Dynaheir would be long gone to Rashemen by now, and Khalid and Jaheira long gone out of the Sword Coast.

"Rejoice, Boo! Our friends have returned to us!" Minsc exclaimed happily, and Boo squeaked in happiness with him. "But people have said one of our friends has been up to no good..." Minsc said, his voice a bit low, less vibrant.

"I never thought I'd see thee again, Ralis. Knowing what I know, I would have preferred it that way. Thou art lucky to have a supporter as passionate as Imoen. Were it not for her, neither I nor Minsc would deign to look upon thee, never mind assist thee in escaping justice," Dynaheir said.

Ralis was about to clarify the situation, but Jaheira spoke up.

"So Imoen's hireling told it true. You have have escaped the Fist and Silvershield's justice- for the moment. I promised Gorion to watch over and protect you. Your actions make me question that promise," Jaheira said.

"Do not th-think I'm pleased to be here, Ralis. What I do, I do for Gorion and Imoen. If you did indeed murder Skie Silvershield, you will answer for it," Khalid warned Ralis.

"Guys, I did not murder Skie Silvershield! The hooded man did it! Why? I don't know yet, but I plan on finding him and bringing him back to Baldur's Gate dead or alive with the Souldaker

"Could we talk about this someplace, you know- far away from here?" Imoen whispered, afraid that someone might be watching.

Ralis frowned incredulously at Imoen.

"Huh? You go to all the effort to have me sprung from the the Fist's headquarters, and you don't include transportation in the plan? Bad form, Imoen. Bad form," he placed his hands on his waist and shook his head in disappointment.

"You should not make light of the effort Imoen has made on your behalf," Jaheira said.

Imoen looked at Ralis, then Jaheira, then back at Ralis, looking very confused.

"Wait. Wait, wait, wait. You think I got you out? No, no, no. A message came from the Ducal Palace, telling me when and where to meet you. I thought it was some scheme of yours," she corrected him.

Ralis frowned. Who the hell in the Ducal Palace would arrange his escape? Something isn't right.

"Most strange. And not a little disturbing," Ralis said, getting the feeling that someone is manipulating events.

"Less disturbing than being caught and imprisoned once again though, no?" Dynaheir asked Ralis.

"Yeah," he nodded.

"We can figure this out later. For now, we need to just keep moving. Forward!" Imoen exclaimed, and the group headed south.

When they reached the road between Wyrms Crossing bridge and Baldur's Gate, they crossed the bridge after Ralis drank his potion of invisibility so that no Flaming Fist soldier on Wyrms Crossing would see him. Soon they crossed over River Chionthar and continued heading south, since going north towards Daggerford and Waterdeep is not a good idea since Stonehand and deLancie and every citizen in their respective cities heard about what Ralis supposedly did to Skie, but going south towards Amn and Tethyr is more ideal.

Along the way, Imoen explained to Ralis what she and Minsc, Dynaheir, Khalid and Jaheira have been doing for the past 44 days. Ralis asked her how did they earn the gold to hire a thief to break him out of the Flaming Fist prison, and Imoen told him that is a long story.

Five miles later, they came to a stop in the wilderness.

"I'm pretty sure the Flaming Fist isn't on our trail. Can we take a break, just for a minute?" Imoen asked.

And so the group paused, Sitting down on the soft grass, resting their aching feet. If they had transportation, this would be easy. A few seconds after they got relaxed, something strange happened. A misty cloud slowly appeared around them. And for some reason, by inhaling the mist, Ralis felt... zoned out. Tired. Everyone felt the same way.

"Hey, do you feel a little... off?" Imoen asked Ralis.

The mist grew thicker. Stronger. And it stung their eyes. Out of view from Ralis and the group, a shadowy figure sitting on a tree branch armed with a blowpipe took aim at Dynaheir and blew a dart of sleeping. The dart hit Dynaheir on the neck and she immediately fainted.

"What the?!" Ralis gasped.

"Ambush!" Jaheira exclaimed.

Shadowy figures danced all over the mist, disappearing and reappearing like ghosts in the night.

They struck without warning attacking with the intent to capture, not kill. Soon Ralis, Imoen, Khalid, Jaheira, Minsc and Dynaheir were knocked unconscious by the shadowy figures. Who are they? Time will provide the answers, if Ralis and his allies live long enough to learn them.

To be continued in:

Baldur's Gate 2 SoA: Shadows Within

Based on "Baldur's Gate 2: Enhanced Edition"

gate

Again, another chapter that needed heavy editing! 17,602 words long in fanfiction.net! The reason why this chapter is originally so long is because in the 44 days between my OC's jail time and his breakout, the events of "Heroes of Baldur's Gate" tabletop adventure game takes place. www.dmsguild.com/product/26939...

My headcannon lore reason why the Baldur's Gate game protagonist does not appear in that adventure even though it is set before Shadows of Amn is because he/she is still doing jail time for the murder he/she did not commit. In the adventure, Imoen, Khalid, Jaheira, Minsc, Dynaheir and Coran team up with a small group of four adventurers (In my story, they are Archer Kheev, a human man who is a reincarnated green dragon, half-moon elf woman Delphine Teravi, Washia Naubles a forest gnome, and half-elf man Lucas Elminndaren) to figure out why a small group of Zhentarim agents assisted by Edwin, Viconia nad Faldorn, and led by Xzar himself, who recently found out he is a Bhaalspawn too, is trying to pick up the pieces the Iron throne and Sarevok left behind. (SPOILER ALERT! Xzar wants to ascend to godhood too!)

Anyway, Archer, Delphine, Washia, Lucas, Imoen, Khalid, Jaheira, Minsc, Dynaheir and Coran defeat Xzar's Zhentarim agents, stopped Xzar's plans of ascending and he retreats, and then a day later that's

Viconia created a colony of driders in the Cloak Wood forest in the hopes of one day finding a cure that turns the driders into normal drow and starting a surface colony with them, but her plans were ruined by Imoen, her friends and their new allies, but she escaped with her life, including Faldorn and Edwin. I won't say any more spoilers from that tabletop adventure, I've said too much already.

I know that a lot of people don't like Siege of Dragonspear's ending, but I don't hate it, to be honest. Know why? Because I keep in mind the fact that Shadows of Amn's intro, the original and Enhanced Edition, hinted that the people of Baldur's Gate do eventually find out that Gorion's Ward is a child of Bhaal, and that eventually he/she was forced to depart Baldur's Gate "under circumstances more dark than anyone can imagine", according to what the narrator said. Beamdog was only staying in line with the canon, don't blame them for "poor, lazy writing" or crap like that. In my story, there is a reason why Ralis becomes a disgraced hero, and it has a lot to do with why his brother, Abdel Adrian, is treated as Baldur's Gate's hero even though he had no involvement in taking down the Iron Throne.

As always, the only character that belongs to me is my OC Ralis Rutela (and Jovan Goldmarsh my Icewind Dale Enhanced Edition OC who appears as a guest character). The rest of the characters in the game who were not in originally in BG like Schael Corwin belong to Beamdog of Overhaul Games, and the original BG characters like Khalid and Jaheira belong to BioWare.

Characters

Ralis Rutela

Race: Human

Gender: Male

Alignment: Lawful Good

Class: Level 8 Fighter

Schael Corwin

Race: Human

Gender: Female

Alignment: Lawful Good

Class: Level 9 Archer

Dynaheir

Race: Human

Gender: Female

Alignment: Lawful Good

Class: Level 8 Invoker

Jaheira

Race: Half-Elf

Gender: Female

Alignment: Neutral

Class: Level 7 Druid

Khalid

Race: Half-Elf

Gender: Male



Neera

Race: Half-Elf

Gender: Female

Alignment: Chaotic Neutral

Class: Level 8 Wild Mage

Minsc

Race: Human

Gender: Male

Alignment: Neutral Good

Class: Level 8 Ranger

Jovan Goldmarsh

Race: Elf

Gender: Male

Alignment: Neutral Good

Class: Level 13 Ranger (Archer)

Voghiln

Race: Human

Gender: Male

Alignment: Neutral Good

Class: Level 7 Bard (Skald)

Glint Gardnersonson

Race: Gnome

Gender: Male

Alignment: Neutral Good

Class: Level 7 Cleric and Thief

M'Khiin Groubdoubler

Race: Goblin

Gender: Female

Alignment: True Neutral

Class: Level 6 Shaman

Rasaad yn Bashir

Race: Human

Gender: Male

Alignment: Lawful Good

Class: Level 7 Monk

Viconia DeVir

Race: Dark Elf (Drow)

Gender: Female

Alignment: Neutral Evil

Class: Level 8 Cleric

Dorn Il-Khan

[Watch](#)[Shop](#)[Upgrade to Core](#)[+ Su](#)

Alignment: Neutral Evil
Class: Level 9 Blackguard

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