

# Chapter 0.

## Introduction.

Somewhere, one time only the gods remember.

The scene was covered in much light as darkness, red flames covered the village that night, people rushed from the wells and the near river with buckets, wet blankets and some even were throwing dirt to roads, houses and fields in order to slow the spread of the fires.

Two hours passed from the start of the fire when it finally got extinguished, the funeral that had been taking place that afternoon had been suddenly stopped when the woman's daughter gone missing, only his father was worried by her child, but the villagers comforted him, until the first sight of smoke was seen. All the villagers, with exception of the local cleric and two men who kept there rushing the burial and ceremonies, ran to their houses, farms and barns, trying to minimize the damages, because the small village would not survive the winter if the crops and animals we're killed here, while the man looked after his missing daughter.

Only three houses were destroyed, but the calm didn't last, the cries of a man where the only sound to be heard so everyone attended to see what happened. They all knew the man, who lied on his knees on the most burned house, half naked, only wearing a half-melted chainmail, the only possession he had brought from the war, he definitely had been inside the house early in the fire. A less than impressive achievement for the man that sustained the title of [ Hero ] and [ True Immortal ], if he wasn't holding the burned corpse of his daughter everyone would have called him crazy, but no one said a single word, that night the cries were to be listened in the whole village.

\*\*\*\*\*

Location: Unknown. Before sunshine.

A man, probably in his forties, not too much tall, a dense black and gray beard and hair and some scars to be found on his neck, and a young beautiful woman about twenty, with a distinguishable pale-white hair and golden reptilian eyes were found to be arguing again

“Yeah, yeah, I have listened that story, but I think it’s time for telling me the full story. Won’t you expect me to go with you when you keep hiding me secrets? Even after all this years together”

“Okay, okay, we had this discussion an infinity of times. Do you really wanna know?”

“Well, yes, I mean, we have been together a really loooooong time and that’s the only thing you never told me”

“Well, if you insist. When I reached my house, I knocked down the door only to find that my daughter was the one starting the fire, it seemed she had a great magic aptitude.

I had no way to know, it happened while I was fighting at the other side of the gates and there was no way to contact the realm of Karithar, and less a long-forgotten village at the feet of some northern mountains.

Then she started to blame me for the dead of her mother. “Why did you had to confront the very Creator”. Did you know what a did?”

“Surprise me”

“Nothing, I did nothing while my own daughter, my only treasure, burst in tears, rage and flames”

“But why didn’t you try to stop her?”

“Because she was right, she was totally right, indeed that’s what happened. I confronted the Creator, and that’s what killed my wife, and I knew she was right”

“Then, why did you confronted him? That’s absurd! Did you go mad or something?”

“No, I just didn’t want to follow some orders?”

“Just that? You decided to go against an omnipotent being and creator of everything just because you didn’t like some orders?!”

“Yes. When those orders are to decimate an entire species of intelligent and sentient beings with civilizations and that stuff, yes. I mean, I’m not against genocide or that things, even I made some of those in my times as hero fighting the Demon Lord, but isn’t literally sending an indestructible living weapon capable of mass destruction, too harsh even for the most powerful Demon Lord ever? I understand he had reasons to sending a hero after him, but exterminating the dominant intelligent life-form from an entire universe is kinda exaggerated. So I refused, bring some demons to populate the middle kingdoms and began peace talks. One day the Great Gates that lead to the Underworld closed all of the sudden and then the Creator threatened with not letting me die but neither live, then I just went back to my life as a farmer and few days later my wife died”

“And that’s the whole story?”

“Well, after the incident I wanted revenge so I traveled through the world for some years like destroying kingdoms, villages, everything I could really. It didn’t mean nothing, the Creator never responded to my offenses so, I couldn’t do that forever and someday I just stopped. Everything seemed meaningless so I became kinda crazy”

“Naaah, you trolling me”

“No, it’s the truth, it’s what you wanted”

“Holy... How did I ended with You?”

“That’s something even I wonder”

“Not all hero stories have a happy ending. Then, let’s return to the matter. Would you like to go on a little trip to the Middle Kingdoms”

“Wouldn’t you go engage in another fight with the Creator again, right?”

“No, I promise, I want to have an old-stylish low-profile adventurer career”

“You going fight another minor deity, don’t you?”

“No! Like I said, old-stylish low-profile adventurer career, I never had one and I thought it was interesting”

“Well, I think I’m on. I’d like some action again, I have nothing more to do anyways”

“Because you evade your responsibilities like a little girl when you are quite old”

“Shut up! I don’t know what you talking about, you are way older than me!”

“Oh, by the way, it’s one of those. Wanna go to the last stage?”

“Ugh, I can’t run this time, right?”

“Hmm. I see you got it”

With a disapproval sound the conversation ends as the sun shines over the sea and an almost angelic white-feathered dragon flies above them as to welcome the new day.

# Chapter 1.

## Tough times for the young ones.

Location: fortified village of Olu. Adventurers Guild. Midday. Day 34 of the 7<sup>th</sup> star. 1268.

Roxanne, Markus and Al'viras, entered the guild covered in viscous liquids, carrying a bag directly to the receptionist, who quickly covered her nose and accepted the bag. After counting the contents she replied "Every thing seems in order", handling back another bag of coins. They were about to go away and clean themselves, but the grim smile of the receptionist and Guild Master, Alvenia Harrison, stopped them. "You know what's know, right?" said while she offered son mops.

""""Yes"""" the three of them said as if they were caught robbing. The most veterans present laugh at the situation despite some day they were the ones doing it, but the so called "younglings", for being the newest members of the guild, even after 3 years working here, just ignored them, they all knew each other as a little happy family and even they hated the *blorbs* smell.

Both, Roxanne and Ali were waiting at the entrance of the inn the party was living in, due to their low budget they couldn't afford a house or anything else. Being low level adventurers, a D-rank party, meant their payments were also low, but this was a long-standing problem.

A decade ago the guild was over-whelmed of adventurers, who killed most of the monsters in the area for fun, because a dungeon had been detected through the Saria Dungeon Surveillance System. Dungeons were a rare phenomena were the space was severely distorted and a point of entrance was created to, there are registers of this phenomena happening in ancient times. Only a select couple of space magicians with high level on detection were able to detect the apparition of one of this entries, first they were detecting using a map and water drops, the magician would let the drops fall in the location of the dungeon, and the more drops fell more level had the dungeon, but the one that appeared that time was the most special of the dungeons, and also the most dangerous ever.

The average dungeon were only 6 drops, equivalent to a B-rank dungeon, and the S-rank dungeon was from 12 to 20 drops, higher rank dungeons were assigned to SS-rank adventurers and the army in a joint activity. But this was even the rarest instance of dungeon, one some legends talked and described very well the limited information they had about, only relative to the apparition and a solely legend of the only supposed instance someone managed to get in. At the moment of the first manifestation a breathtaking scene seizes the office of detection, all mages in the room, every single one of them capable of detecting dungeons makes the same gesture, all pint

to the same spot on the map and a stream of water was poured in, and this is said to happen every single time, randomly through space and time intervals.

The only record of someone that managed to go in and coming back suggested the destiny was the legendary nest of dragons. As the name suggested this was the place the dragons were supposed to have their great nests, an ecosystem so varied that all species of dragons lived and nested not so far from each other. The records of the explorers talked of appearing in a small island close to the shore of a greater land mass and of sights of 2 earth drakes, 3 small ice wyverns, 2 sea dragons, 1 fire dragon and a giant angelic arch-dragon. The sights of such quantity of dragons in just an hour was an amazing fact, but this was the first sight of a giant arch-dragon. Giant dragons were a rare instance of dragon, this individuals, as the names suggested this individuals had a greater size than the average dragons, they also were masters of their elements and the attacks were more destructive and precise than those ones of their relatives, but the sight of a giant arch-dragon was believed to be impossible and the giant dragons were considered a separate branch on the dragon family, unable to evolve to arch-dragon, such as drakes, sea dragons, serpents or wyrms.

*Draconology I. Referring to.*

*Dragons are described following a simple order. (Special characteristics (Usually size or age). "Giant" is reserved for specific individuals of great size only used dragons) (Element. A trait usually easy to determine since dragons tend to have very determined characteristics for the race and element, having fire dragons solidified magma or ashes on their backs due to their volcanic activity areas they use to live on and having red scales also) (Species) or directly (Especially denomination/Titles ex. "Stormfort drake". A drake known for manipulating big storm clouds that made of one Orsenio's greatest fortress his nest.)*

*Draconology II. Simple species list and main characteristics.*

*Wyrms: Mostly legless dragons or with several legs and elongated bodies, sometimes even wingless, all wyrms are able of fire-breathing abilities.*

*Serpents: Close relatives of Wyrms, also wingless and/or leg-less, this group has no fire-breathing related abilities, but the poisons produced by this creatures is one of the deadliest ever found in nature and some species of serpents are able of spitting it.*

*Sea Dragons: In this category falls every dragon, drake, wyrm or wyvern that lives almost exclusively on water. Most of them have a fire-breathing ability but with water as the main element and they can throw high pressure water streams, sometimes it can freeze you at contact or boil your entire body.*

*Drakes: Dragons with four limbs, no wings and are fully terrestrial. They are recorded to be able of fire-breathing or exhaling big clouds of poison. Found on every known region, from the stone Titan region to the depths of the cavern system.*

*Wyverns: The closest relatives to dragons, and with one only notable difference. Having 2 or 4 legs and a pair of wings wyverns are powerful creatures, fast, strong, intelligent and with high defenses fighting only one is a challenge for A-rank parties. The hunt of a single wyvern is a high risk-high reward opportunity for adventurers looking for some fame, but some especial equipment was needed in order to surpass its great defenses, and even with it no success was secured.*

*Dragons: As powerful as wyverns, but with a mighty breath, dragons have a renown for being greed, attacking cities and stealing the treasures or even occupying it, dragons suppose a menace when sighted near borders. This behavior is not usual, so an observing team is previously disposed, no kingdom wants to mobilize their troops to deal with a dragon (that might be only hunting) and risk to a foreign attack.*

*Arch-dragons: The last-possible known evolution in the draconic branch, and exclusive of wyvern and dragon groups, Arch-dragons are known to have 4 wings, greater size, even a more intense breath and a mastery on their element. There is only one record of a hunting party of one of this dragons, and the armies of 2 countries and some S-rank adventurers. Even with siege weapons and the suitable equipment for fighting the ice Arch-dragon, only 1/12 of the forces returned, and 2 S-rank adventurers. There were no injured coming back, since the blizzard or the beast killed them, or let them in agony with severe frostbite injuries from which they never recovered.*

The materials collected from the expedition were high-valuable, such as scales and fangs on the ground, brought by the tide to the little island, and were the fuel to a dragon-material fever, and teams were assembled, expecting for the next opportunity to enter the dungeon.

*Unpublished information: Explorers described activity in the shore and some human-like buildings, the responsible were first identified as some sub-human tribe, with tail and some visible scales. The individuals were classified as reptilians, similar to another tribes in the continent, that were more human-like instead of the more reptilian-looking ones, the only recorded difference were the horns found in every individual.*

*Investigator note: More data is needed for further investigation. Endemic sub-human race?*

*Among the items retrieved from the expedition was a pair of black scales, but when studying them proved to be virtually indestructible so one of them was kept in a safe, while the other was set to extreme tests in order to try breaking it.*

Due to the lack of preys resulting in a decrease in the contracts for the guild there were few missions really worth it, meaning the low-rank adventurers always picked the cleaning ones or some bad jobs with very poor payment which only allowed them to subsist.

When Markus finally arrived at the guild the party, now clean, went in the guild, looking for their next job, “the one that will allow us to be great and famous” they always said, but this time Alvenia stopped them before even taking a look at the contracts. She wanted to meet them in her office, *That’s no good*, they thought.

--(18) Role: Archer. Roxanne, a beautiful human girl for which noble men probably would fight for, with a pale face, bright red hair and eyes that suggested danger. She is usually described as arrogant and presumptuous but pretty jolly. She has a good ability in detection and an innate sharp senses making suited for the explorer job once her ability for hiding like [Block Perception], [Invisibility] or related skills improve enough for making safe for her to venture alone, advanced in the party looking for any kind of danger. At the moment, with her archery skills and magic empowered attacks, she uses to stay at the rear, sniping the enemies and monsters, trying to not let any hole on the formation by losing any vanguard member.

Skills: [ Enhanced Perception. LvL 3 ], [ Stealth. Active. LvL 2 ], [ Archery. LvL 5 ], [ Ranged Weapons Mastery. LvL 3 ], [ Mana Imbued Projectiles. Active. LvL 2], [ Agility. LvL 3 ], [ Ranged Heritage. Innate ], [ Dagger Training. LvL 8 ], [ Stab. Active. LvL 2 ], [ Augmented Critical Strike Chance. LvL 1 ], [ Analysis. Active. LvL 1 ], [ Melee Weapons Mastery. LvL 2 ]

Extra info: Status: Peasant. Single. Job: Adventurer.

Relations: Markus (Party Leader) // Al'viras (Party Member) // Tornis Loxan (Father) // Karen Veris (Mother) // Kody Loxan (Big brother) // Iris Loxan (Little sister)

--(19/14 in appearance) Role: Tank. Al'viras aka "Ali", a girl that did not look more outstanding than other girls of her age except for her sapphire-blue eyes. She is the older of the party, but due to the fact she is a half-elf she looks like the younger one. She is constantly bothered at the guild for her appearance but the guild staff knows the truth, since is impossible to fake the guild's exam, which age is a requirement, and a magic stone of analysis and a high-rank mage convoked for the exams, examine looking for cheaters or any other kind of suspicious anomalies. Her body-reinforcement skills and her iron will made her quite a good tank even for her slim body.

Skills: [ Iron Skin. Active. LvL 3], [ Iron Will. LvL 4 ], [ Stone Shell. Active. LvL3 ], [ Shield Blow. Active. LvL 2], [ Intimidation. Active. LvL 2 ], [ Taunt. Active. LvL 5], [ Slash. Active. LvL 4 ], [ Shield Mastery. LvL 2 ], [ Great-Shield Wielding. LvL 4 ], [ Stunning Strike. Active. LvL 3 ], [ Last Stand. LvL 2 ], [ Weight Lifter. LvL 7], [ Maze Wielding. LvL 1 ], [ Melee Weapons Mastery. LvL 3 ], [ Sword Training. LvL 5 ], [ Magic Empowering. Active. LvL 4 ], [ Critical Strike Resistance. LvL 3 ], [ Fast regeneration. LvL 3 ]

Extra info: Status: Human middle-class // Elf rejected. Single. Job: Adventurer.

Relations: Markus (Party Leader) // Roxanne (Party Member) // Al'Erius (Father) // Grysinda Sirlana (Mother)



--(18) Role: Swordsman. Markus, like every young man is quite impulsive, if he were to be alone the visits to the hospital would happen more often. He and Ali make up the front lines of the party, he wears a lighter armor than Ali and a smaller shield, this increases his mobility and agility, needed for wielding his long-sword and stab his preys. He makes a great team work and uses to have the dominant role of leader, but in case of need Ali and Roxanne would stop him immediately.

Skills: [ Trust. Active. LvL 6 ], [ Slash. Active. LvL 2], [ Shield and Sword Combat Mastery. LvL 3 ], [ Long-sword Mastery. LvL 4 ], [ Round Shield Mastery. LvL 2 ], [ Parry. Active, LvL 2], [ Melee Combat Mastery. LvL 1 ], [ Melee Weapons Mastery. LvL 2 ], [ Empowered Attack. LvL 3 ], [ Dodging. Active. LvL 2 ], [ Fast Healing. LvL 7 ], [ Better Physical Attributes. Innate ]

Relations: Al'viras (Party member) // Roxanne (Party Member) // Father Wuyi (Caretaker) // Sister Ir'Nifas (Caretaker)

Note: Hand-and-half grip sword, 90cm aprox.

“Do you know why I called you” Alvenia said with a serious tone in her voice.

They exchanged glances but none of them said nothing.

Alvenia sighted, “I’m going straight to the point, you are the only low ranking adventurers in the guild, even if you have been here a long time and we all known each other, but this is a situation no guild can manage, if some person, or party is stuck in a low rank for a long time the guild politics and administration rules force the guild master to “retire them” or advise them to do so, for their safety, and you have already reached that point”

“But it’s not our fault, we are no weak, and there is no work for us” Ali shouted, like almost breaking on tears.

But Alvenia spoke, fast and decided. “I have not ended, or given you permission to speak yet. I know it’s hard situation. That’s exactly why I’m called you here today, I may have found a solution in the rules of the guild system, and I think is a good opportunity for you”.

The kids almost jumped from their seats on the news, this was good, finally, the chance they were waiting for so long. They wanted to hug each other, jump, even cry, but then Roxanne made a question no one really wanted the answer for.

“Is it going to be dangerous?”

“Well, I think it may not so hard to you, but certainly it’s not going to be the easiest or safest thing to do”

“And what are we supposed to do?” Markus asked.

“The only viable solution I found is some kind of dangerous training camp, even you are D-rank, we are able to send you to C-rank missions or some equivalent tasks, but if you want we are able to send you to some kind of B-rank training, which obviously will automatically give you B-rank status as soon as is considered finished, but this comes with a part I don’t really like that much, and I don’t recommend it”

“What is it?” Ali asked, driven by curiosity.

“Well, since some lesser dragons and relatives are a common prey for A-rank adventurers you shall sneak into one’s lair and steal something from. Let’s call it a practice incursion, the real deal is that, since there has to be something to steal, there must be a real dragon to steal from, and I don’t think you have any experience with dragons”

“Can we have a moment to discuss it?” Roxanne asked, this was something important, and maybe dangerous, this was reasonable

“Go then, I’ll give you five minutes, you can go to the next room”

And so the kids left the room for a lateral door, leading to a small meeting room, usually used for more discreet meetings. But the discussions in the main room were not over yet. “How much will you two be hiding in the dark?” Said Alvenia, like talking to the air. Then two figures appeared

from the dark corner of the room. A man, in black clothes with white hair and a brown lizard-man, armed with a curved thin sword and a big battle-ax respectively.

“Oh! Come on, let me make a big impression appearing from behind”. The man said

“Why can’t you act like an adult? You are fifty years old, it’s time to stop”

“Oh, you loved my tricks when you was young”

“Damn Arius you’ve become a crazy old man”

“And you a scarred grumpy woman”

“Well what did you expected? I had to stop working as adventurer and I lost a breast way to the hospital thanks to a damn gryphon”

“Ok, ok, you two stop! Always the same. We are not here for this, once me and the kids leave you can fight the whole day if you want, but first we have thing to do”

The room fell silent as the lizard-man spoke, Markus was peeking out the door, with a confused glance, he was not used to the peculiar relationship of his guild master and this person he had only seen a few times in the guild or walking in the streets, but this was not the moment for asking about, the discussions in the other room had ended and the party came into the room and took seat.

“You didn’t take long” Alvenia stated.

“We made our choice” Markus said.

The looking in the guests stared at the young man, he could feel his eyes piercing through him. This made him feel uneasy, like having to talk to the emperor himself, being a mere adventurer this was a situation he wasn’t used to.

“We will make the B-rank one, we thought is a better investment for our future, and we will make responsible of ourselves in some accident scenario, that’s one of the adventurers contract clauses”

“Is it definitive?” Alvenia asked.

“Yes” Markus replied.

“Well then, I hoped you did not choose that option, but I won’t try to change your minds either. Allow me then to introduce you our guests, and your new instructors.” and pointed to the two other people in the room, the party immediately turned to them.

“First, the senile man right there is Glaius, an old friend of my family. He is an A-rank adventurer, mastered in assassination with several weapons and stealth, he has some knowledge in shadow magic, I think he will be a great master to Roxanne, since she needs the stealth. And the next one is Bah’bi Risat Arumis, and, in spite of her appearance, she is a woman, from the crocodile tribe of lizard-men, from the south of the continent. Also A-rank adventurer, master in sword and shield combat style, but thanks to her innate strength she wields a big shield an ax, with great offense and defense she is going to be the other one training you”

The man chuckled at the presentation, and the lizard-woman approached Markus and Ali leaning on their shoulders.

“So you are the unlucky ones that will be training with us, uh?”

Despite the good intentions and big smile, the young felt the pressure of her well built body, and the feeling of her claws brushing the clothes only made them feel like she could rip them apart at any moment.

“Don’t go so fast, you gonna break them” Said Glaius, yet on the corner on the room.

“Sorry, my bad, I’m not used to presentations like this” In fact, she wanted to create a good first impression, in the adventurer’s world you don’t use to have time for presentations, during missions time is an important factor most of the times and people uses to go to the point from the beginning.

At the sound of the man’s voice Roxanne turned to him.

*So he’s the one training me I guess.*

She took a look at him. In spite of being on his fifties he looked in good shape, and the scars he had on his face and hands proved he had experience, she wondered if his age would affect the training in any negative way.

Just then Alvenia spoke.

“Whats your plan then?”

“It depends” Was the man who responded to the question, and then turned to his new apprentices

“How money do you have right now?”

The three of them looked at the ground “Just 1 silver left” responded Ali.

“So, where you are actually living is 5 coppers per night, and food for 3 should cost 15 more coppers. So, you have only for 5 days”

“Yes” confirmed Markus.

Glaius closed his eyes, and almost immediately opened them. “We leaving on 2 days, solve your issues, pack your thing and get some supplies, mostly potions, for food we will have to hunt from the third day on”

“Impatient as always, old man. Do you have a plan already?” asked Alvenia while sitting on her chair.

“I’m taking them to a nearby forest at the north, the creatures there should pose no danger while we don’t get too close to the mountains and being so close will provide water sources, animals to hunt and some wild berries to eat, plus, I got some info that may speed up the final test”

“Oh? You found one?”

“It’s not sure, but I have solid clues that suggest there is one, and it may be actually safe”

“That’s your decision, but I want an inform when you go in”

“At your service milady”

Alvenia smiled. “Call me that again and I’ll make you eat your own testicles”

Suddenly Markus interrupted “May be impolite but, may I ask what’s your relationship?”, that was something that everyone in the room was wondering.

“As she said I’m a friend of the family and I got to know her father when he was still working as this guild master’s. I even was here when she was born and changed a diaper or tw...” A *\*floosh\** was heard on the room, followed by the sound of a dagger hitting the wall right behind Glaius.

“Enough!” It was Alvenia the one who throw the dagger, everyone looked at her, her face was clearly on pain, those were the sequels of her fight with a gryphon, all her left ribs were broken, and with the infection her bound never healed well. She can live a normal live, but the efforts would end

breaking her ribs again. "I swear some day I'm gonna kill you!" Her face blushed, she was clearly pissed off "You are worst than my childs"

Just then the party got up and rushed to the door "We have to prepare to the trip, clean the clothes, bag them, those things" and with that excuse Markus closed the door.

"You two fucked up you know?"

"Yes"

"Well, Alvenia, as always, a pleasure to meet you, I swear I'm taking care of the kids while they're with us"

"Thanks"

"We leaving now, but we're taking them back safe. By the way, catch!" Glaius tossed a little box right before leaving the room "Happy birthday" With that everyone but Alvenia left the room.

"That was really tiring"

Alvenia lay down on her chair and sighted, then looked at the box she supposed was her birthday gift.

*What could it be? That man is really crazy sometimes, I never thought he would remember.*

She turned, grabbed the box and began to open the little box.

"It can't be! He has definitely gone crazy, that was like centuries ago"

She began taking out the content of the box. It was a golden necklace with a prismarine dragon scale, which were only found on cold-water sea dragons, and were no cheap to buy.

"I knew he had money, but this is too expensive even for him. Maybe that's why he has been working so much lately"

Someone knocks on the door.



Outside the guild the party was discussing about what had just happened. Firstly spoke Roxxane.

"That was quite intense"

"Yeah, and have you seen her? It's the first time I met one of her kind but those teeth spook the hell outta me and she felt super-strong, I think if she punches me I won't be able to take more than three hits even with my shield"

"But I think they looked like a real family" Those words made Roxxane and Ali stare directly to Markus.

"Yeah, a family of weirdos" Said Ali, making everyone laugh.

Suddenly a well known figure came out from the guild. It was Turön the dwarf, a small figure with strong arms, big belly and a long brown beard.

"You all still here! That makes things easier to me, c'mon c'mon" He jumped and wrapped his arm around Markus' neck, making him bend due to the difference in height, and began pulling him inside.

"Where do you pretend to take us?" asked Markus, in total confusion.

"I heard the news, you're leaving for training, don't you?"

“Indeed, but how did you found out so fast?”

“I just asked when those two finished arguing. Ho, ho! Those two are always an explosive mix”

“Do you know why?” asked Roxxane.

“Oh, yeah, it’s not that hard. This man is some sort of “uncle” for her, for what I know they know each other since she was little, but for my time on the guild this man used to travel a lot, so they built this love-hate relationship over time”

“Did you said “used”?” asked Roxxane in even more confusion.

“Yes, it was only seven years ago that he and the lizard-woman joined the guild, I know they made party a long before. Even at his age he was training, traveling all the continent from one assassin guild to another, learning every technique, weapon and art. This is top secret but I’ll tell you, since you are training with him, once I heard from Alvenia’s father, Regul, that he was one of the four R’s.”

““““You kidding right?””””

The four R’s, this was the title given to those with the top ranks, they are said that each of one is able to handle an army of 500 well-trained soldiers by themselves or kill a medium-rank dragon in 1v1 combat. These four people, R-rank Adventurer party Er’va, the rift-maker magician, and Aulos, the master warrior; Ume Wolfanger, ex-leader of the semi-human wolfanger tribe in the wild regions close to Orsenio, and actual captain of the Central Kingdom’s guard; and a mysterious fourth person that never showed to the public.

The power of this individuals is such that the time Aulos and Ume fought in a 1v1 a whole fortress was damaged and the only way to stop them was a solid, thick and tall wall of pure iron Er’va summoned like nothing from the ground. No animals or other beast, even middle range ones, where to be found close by for several days.

Turön spoke again, trying to change the topic “Anyways, c’mon kids, come inside, we are making a party for you!” he opened the doors wide, and the few people that were on the guild cheered at them. Since this was the guild of a small town all were well known faces, Turön and his party members the witch Morgana L’Ateau and beaver-man Jack, the bartender and Alvenia’s right hand, elf Uc’Resto, lancer Arthur with his great companion Bedyr and Alvenia herself, everyone already with a jug of mead. Of the fourteen members of the guild eight were present at the party, only Glaius and Bah’bi were missing and the last ones left on a trip five years ago, right before Alvenia became the guild master.

The small building was full of cheers, noise, abundant food and alcohol until late at night. The main event of the night, a battle between Ali and Türon, the fighting ground, the strongest dwarven rum Alvenia possessed. A strong mushroom distillate, directly imported from the capital of the neighbor country, the dwarven kingdom.

“Everybody ready?!” No one spoke, everyone was expecting the event, in fact there were some bets, Turön had advantage, a national drink and years of experience with alcohol, while Ali was young, inexperienced, and already slightly drunk, her only advantage was her elf blood, since elves rarely got drunk and large amounts of high grade liquor were needed to do so, making elf liquor rare and expensive.

“I, Albenia Harrison, 8<sup>th</sup> master of Olu’s village Adventurer Guild, at this moment I declare this competition started” And slammed the table with the jugs.

Turön immediately drank it and beckoned to Ali like taunting her. She responded emptying the jug in one sip, *This tastes awful* she thought, but made a sign to pour more.

“Ho, ho, kid! You impress me. Most of them would have already fallen with that”

“Really? This is nothing”

With that short exchange of words the second round came, then the third, fourth, fifth, and so on, the climax came at the fifteenth, both of them had their faces red, but Ali was clearly worse, even sit on her chair she was slightly staggering, her vision was blurry while Turön was on a perfect state. Just then the sixteenth round came. The sound of the jugs on the table was the only thing to be heard. Firstly drank Turön, full of confidence given the status of his rival, that was staring at the jug. *This is it I guess* thought Ali, she grabbed her jug, drank it all and forcefully put the jug on the table, only to find that her rival was not to be found. He had fallen to the ground, that meant victory for her, and impulsed by her emotions she stood up, with a victory pose and people cheered, right before she also fell to the ground.

The party lasted until midnight, then most people left, some wives came for her husbands and even Alvenia’s husband came looking for her, that was almost unable to walk. Meanwhile Markus and Roxanne were carrying a half unconscious Ali through the streets, both were also drunk, making it a titanic task. Once they reached the stairs leading to the second floor of the inn they had no other option rather than pull Ali up, hitting every step. When they finally reached the room they threw Ali to the nearest bed, Markus just felt round to the ground and quickly fell asleep, while Roxanne took her time, removed her boots and lay down on her bed and looked at the sky through her window.

The sky was clear and both moons were full, illuminating with a faint light the rooftops, were she could see clearly see a woman standing on the roof in front of her. She had a snowy white hair, an ebony black dress, swaying with the wind, a tail with scales black as night, shining at the moonlight. Roxanne tried to pick up her bow, a person standing outside, in the darkness, was no good sign anywhere. Just then the woman stared directly at her, she just made a sign with her hand like saying goodbye, and Roxanne began feeling tired and her eyes felt heavy. A smile was drawn on the woman’s face, just before disappearing in a blink of an eye, while Roxanne fell asleep.

The next morning Roxanne was awoken by Markus, she was confused by what she had witnessed last night, she had that Mida’s eyes fixed on her mind, but her thoughts were interrupted by Ali’s snoring. She was drooling on her bed, still KO, but today they had to get things ready for their travel, so they left her in the room and went down to the inn’s entrance, where Glaius and Bah’bi where waiting, or better said, they had been waiting since dawn, and it was already late in the morning.

“Oh? Didn’t the sheets eat you?”

“Don’t be to harsh with the boys”

“*sigh*. Whatever, isn’t one of you missing?”

“I-I don’t think she will be available today” said Markus.

“Yeah, we’ve heard about it. It’s impressive that such young lady could defeat a dwarf” Bah’bi’s eyes were shining, she was really excited.

“*Clap*. Well, you have things to do” Glaius took a note out of a bag on his waist. “Here is the thing you’ll need to get for the travel”

Markus took the note and both of them started reading it.

“But where’s the carriage, we going on foot!?” Markus asked confused.

“Ok, then tell me, do you have the money to even pay for a carriage, a mount, the food, something to repair and maintain your armors and weapons, supply or something like?”

“Well, no...”

“Moreover, what makes you think we will leave without those things? We’re supposed to be your trainers, and experienced adventurers, we have those things, and spare, so don’t worry about everything, kid. You’re here to learn, and I don’t think making you go on a suicidal trip with no money and making you buy everything needed to it’s a good way”

Markus had no words, this man showed no compassion.

“We’ll take care of it” said Roxanne, she just wanted this conversation to end as soon as possible, she knew Markus was impulsive, and if he started a fight she knew he was not going to win. Rather, she was actually afraid of how truly powerful his opponent was.

The kids went buy the two only things that where on the list, dry food and winter clothing, which was weird since was summer. The food was no problem, and Roxanne got a great deal with her polite noble-like manners, while Markus was complaining outside. The winter clothes were harder to find. It was summer so they would be cheaper, but there were two major problems. First, it was off-season so they weren’t much available. Second, the cattle had been recently sheared, so the clothing will take time to be manufactured, meaning they will have to buy some low-quality leftovers from the last year.



“Captain!” A sailor rushed through the deck “Where’s the captain?!” asked to the big man adjusting the halyard.

“I think she’s on her stateroom”

With those words the man rushed towards the captain’s stateroom. When he reached a big man, his captain’s right hand and guard tried helplessly to stop him but the dodged the guard and got into the stateroom.

He found Ali in a bathtub “Captain, I’m sorry for interrupting but we have a problem, we need you at the command bridge”

She calmly answered “Well, you have two problems, but what makes you come so ruthlessly?”

“The second in command got sick and a big storm is approaching”

“Ugh. That’s a mess, who’s at the helm now?”

“Sailor Vise m’lady”

“She’s a good sailor, but I’m sure that girl is gonna torn my ship into pieces. Tell them I’ll be there in a moment, then to tie you to the mainmast”

“At your orders!”

The man got to the bridge and reported the orders. When the captain got to the bridge the man was tied and the storm approached fast and soon the ship was trapped inside. The cloud was big and it slowly everything became darker and darker until everything was pitch black. Strangely she couldn’t even see the ship’s helm, or feel the sea waving the ship.



She was surprised by the sound of footsteps approaching her. Looking in the direction she managed to distinguish the shape of a man walking away until he was already out of vision, just then she felt a knock on her shoulder and turned. She was even more confused at the sight of the man she clearly saw walk away, now standing behind her. The man was wearing a black jacket and pants made of a fabric she did not recognize and had something similar to the ties she knew, but this was longer and thinner and its bright red contrasted with his white shirt and the black of the background.

"Nice to meet you A'lviras Sirlana" the man bowed at her "Please take a seat"

When she noticed there was an elegant chair next to her and when she turned again to the man he was already sitting on a similar chair, gesturing her that she was allowed to sit, and she did.

"Is this still a dream?"

"Well, yes and no. It's not a dream but it's a space that only exists while you're asleep"

She was totally confused and had no idea what was happening.

"Are you real?"

"Oh, that's a nice question, you've won yourself a sticker"

"A what?"

"Just look at your hand" As she did she noticed something like a yellow circle with a smiley face stuck in her hand and removed it in panic. "That's not very nice you know? But, yes I'm real, wanna touch?" The man laughed at his own commentary like it was funny in any way.

"Who are you? What do you want?"

"Oh those are boring questions, aren't you having fun?" She practically growled at him at the comment "By the way, I think we should do something with these clothes of yours, it's no serious be talking with someone dressed as a pirate" Embarrassed she covered herself "Oh, don't worry I don't have planned touching you for now, I'm here of fun" *What does he think?* "You'll know at the right time"

"What!? Did you just...?"

"Indeed, but first things first. *Clap clap*" At the clapping sound a pair of arms appeared and tightly held her arms to the armrests. She tried to resist, but it was worthless "Don't worry it will be over soon" Thousands of arms appeared from nowhere behind her, and began to engulf her until she was totally covered and the man laughed. She couldn't see and was hard to breathe, she was suffocating. Suddenly she heard a mechanical sound and all the arms started to withdraw.

When all were gone she was dressed in her usual armor, and the scenery had changed, now she was sitting right next to the man in a small metallic structure, slowly spinning in a bigger structure, full of lights, with several of these smaller ones while fancy music played.

"Maybe that clothes are not the right ones" With a snap of fingers her armor became her daily use clothes.

"Wait could you do this instead of the hand thing?"

"Yes"

In lack of weapons, she threw a punch to the man, but when she was about to land it, he just appeared sitting at the other bench, and her failed movement made the structure swing, making her lose balance.

"You are so rude, you're gonna break my amusement park"

“C’mon what do you want from me?”

“I’ve come to give my assistance to you”

“Don’t think I’m making deals with devils, I’m not such a fool”

“Ouch, that hurts, I’ve been called devil, evil or monster several times but that’s never nice hearing”

“Aren’t you one?”

“What makes you think so? The pile of severed arms covering you?” At that comment Ali felt nausea while the man just laughed.

The scene changed again, now they were in middle of nowhere.

“So” The man began to disappearing and reappearing over and over.

“Here’s my deal to you”

“I will follow you, maybe sometimes even help you”

“Because one day you will need my power”

“In exchange, one day you will serve as one of my many toys”

“Depending on your developing you may even be a valuable tool”

“What makes you think I would need or want help of such a hideous being?”

“Oh, you will, and I will be there for you. But I shall make sure you don’t speak”

She stepped back “What are you going to do?!” Her answer came soon, with the painful feeling of her left wrist being burned. Magic runes were being craved, there was no physical injury but the very own magic was being twisted over her wrist.

“Well I think we’ll see us later” a grim smile was drawn on his face.

“What!?”

“Look down”

They were floating over Olu, she could even see the lake and the canals used to irrigate the crops.

“What?”

She began falling to the ground. She woke up flurried right before touching the ground, and would have went out looking for her friends if she had the strength to do so, or wasn’t covered in her own vomit. *What a nightmare, but reality is disgusting. What a headache, and for fuck sake I need a bath.* Looking around she didn’t find any of her mates. *Where are they?* She scratched her head but ended up staining her hair in vomit. “Fuck!” She grabbed some spare clothes and headed to the river, it wasn’t a short way so she would have to do a walk of shame until there.

By the way the way she crossed paths with her teammates, coming back from shopping.

“Damn girl, you’re made a mess”

“Oh Markus, shut the fuck up I already know, like, I can *feel* my fucking smell”

“Okay, Markus hold this for me” Roxanne handed over the clothes they had buy earlier “C’mon Ali, we both need a bath”

“Fucking hate you”

“We love you too. Tehehe” Roxanne waved while walking away with Ali.

Once the girls reached a secluded part of the river and got naked, washed their clothes and sat at the river’s edge, chance Ali took to put her arm on Roxanne shoulders.

She turned, with a sober face “Are trying this again seriously?”

“Ehm...Yes?” Roxanne splashed water at her.

“Do you get the hint or shall I say it more directly?”

“I don’t know” She splashed back, starting a water battle.

After a while they intended to go out, but their wearings were again wet “Guess we’ll be here a bit more. Hahah” Both girls laughed joyfully.

Meanwhile Markus was heading to their room, when he spotted Glaius and Bah’bi arguing at the back of a carriage while some armor pieces were being thrown flying. *I better not go near.* Unfortunately Glaius had already spotted him and was calling for him, *Fuck.*

“Are those your clothes?”

“Yeah?”

“Well, you could let them in the carriage if SOMEONE WOULDN’T HAVE DECIDED TO CONVERT IT INA FUCKING WAREHOUSE” and

“Wait a moment you do also keep your books in it”

“Books, only books, and just a few under the seats not more than half the space in the carriage”

Markus was taking a look at the carriage, a simple wooden carriage, covered with a translucent beige leather. It had been clearly modified, the seats had been modified to work also as storage, the ceiling had several hooks, most of them empty only having a spear and a long sword, and the structure was reinforced with some kind of metal strips, it was a practical vehicle.

“Sir Glaius, Lady Bah’bi, it may be impertinent but, what is supposed to pull it?”

“What do you..?” Said Bah’bi before turning around “Fuck Penny not again”

“Penny?”

“Oh yeah, You’ll meet her tomorrow, she always comes back in the morning but please don’t scream”

“What kind of creature you use for pulling a carriage?”asked Markus concerned for pulling the carriage it should be a big predator.

Glaius was the one to answer “One with many claws”

“Why?”

Glaius and Bah’bi looked at each other before answering ““Defence””

“What kind of reasoning leads you to think a creature that may kill you will be a good idea?”

“She is quite calm in reality, moreover, she couldn’t kill any of us”

*That’s amazing* thought Markus, *They could be close to a big predator like nothing, and most of them are said to be able to split a man in half.*

“Just make sure to tell the other two to not scream when they see her, this goes for you too”

*Gulp. How will it be?*

The night had come, the party was on their beds, both girls thought Markus was playing a joke when he spoke of a magic beast pulling a carriage, but it was late and they had to wake early.

Location: fortified village of Olu. North Gate Middy. Day 1 of the 8<sup>th</sup> star. 1268.

With the sunrise the party was heading to the north gate, carrying only the few equipment they had they met Glaius and Bah’bi which where already loading the last bags, but suddenly.

“Eh?” Roxanne suddenly stopped, she was upset, her perception skill was making her feel very unease “Something is wrong” She had the hairs on the back of the neck stand on end.

“What happens?” Asked Ali in confusion.

“Run to the carriage” To the lack of response from her companions she just pulled their arms and ran as fast as she could, taking cover behind the carriage, and close to Bah’bi.

“What’s up with her? She’s pale”

“I don’t know miss Bah’bi she just began acting strange” Responded Markus.

Roxanne was looking around like paranoid, then she just identified where her danger feeling was coming from. This danger was close to the gate they had to cross by. *Oh shit.* Just then a big animal began to peek from one side of the wall, moving slowly to Glaius, who was arranging the front seat for the travel.

The creature, resembling a mix between a cougar and a bear, but bigger than the last, with an extra pairs of front legs, with big razor-sharp claws, a thick grayish brown fur with deep purple stripes and spots. Despite it’s size it moved slowly and quietly towards Glaius. *Ba-dump, Ba-dump, Ba-dump.* Roxanne’s heart was strongly beating as the feline grew closer to Glaius and opened its mouth. She closed her eyes, expecting to hear the creaking of a skull and breaking bones, but instead the playful noises and the stomps made her open them again. She couldn’t believe seeing the beast licking Glaius and jumping on excitement. *What the fuck.*

“Yo Penny you’re back, good girl” Glaius patted the animal’s head.

Then Markus turned the corner of the carriage and looked the scene “I already told you they told me they had a magic beast, but fuck that way worse I expected”

“Well rookies, the carriage is almost ready, you can hop in and leave your equipment somewhere”

Ali and Markus helped Roxanne get into the carriage and tried to put away the weapons under one of the seats, but they found a massive bow three times bigger Roxanne’s one next to a regular sized one. After putting away their belongings in the spare space of the carriage and taking seat, Glaius began driving the carriage, way to the north where their training and maybe their way path to glory, shall take place.