Of the four orcs that managed to retreat during the mountain pass massacre, only two made it beyond the gate. Half of their fold bled out from wounds delivered by Katerina's pack, and the others couldn't be bothered to stop and save them. Those unlucky enough to suffered fatal wounds staggered part way through the trip, falling lifeless on the snow long before the gates opened. Their black ichor left an easy trail to follow, but no such hunt was ever conducted.

Instead, Katerina tended to her fallen friends. They had all survived the encounter with the ambush party, though not one had escaped unharmed. Shadow's injuries were the worst, forcing his pack leader to order him away. Robin was just finishing up the last of the orcs when that order was given, still trying to figure out how normal training had increased her combat performance so incredibly. She was about to move over to Katerina to check her vitals once she pulled her head out of those stars, but was, instead, approached by the woman before she could even move.

[b]"Are you sure,"[/b] Robin asked her driver out of worry? She didn't fully believe that Katerina was fine, especially given those bruises around her neck. The young girl's worry soon turned to panic, however, once her friend's magical fire appeared again.

Rather than learn from last time and remain calm, Robin hurriedly stuffed both of her hands into the snow in a vain attempt to extinguish the flames that surrounded them anew. Only seconds later, when it finally occurred to her that she wasn't burning, did she pull them out and actually look with a calm mind. Her forearms, it turned out, were decorated with new vambraces because of the wolf demon, the first pair she had worn since her exile from the Mori family. The flames had been harmless after all.

Of course, being the warrior that she was, Robin didn't stop her mind from racing even after she realized that she had been given a gift. Her first instinct, as with any new element to her arsenal, was to evaluate the effectiveness of her gift from the standpoint of combat efficiency. Unfortunately for Katerina, though, that evaluation was less than favorable.

Robin had never liked spiked armaments. She thought they got caught on surfaces far too often, leading to early item destruction and high replacement bills. The repair fees, in her experience, were also high, because vambraces of the caliber she had been given were frequently either composed of rare materials that were hard to find or were made using elaborate smithing practices not known to common artisans. Either way, the warrior rarely went into battle with pieces like that, at least not without first having them adjusted. She knew she couldn't afford to visit a famous blacksmith every time her equipment got stuck in some unlucky goblin's skull, so she would likely remove the fins from Katerina's gift later on.

Yet being the polite person she was, Robin felt constrained in expressing herself on the matter. She knew it would be rude and dishonorable to reveal her intentions so soon after the receiving the gift, so she kept her mouth shut. For Robin, Katerina was a friend of mine, of her master. That meant she was deserving of respect, so she treated the woman with courtesy far above my standards.

[b]"Thank you,"[/b] she said, ending the conversation with a simple expression of gratitude. Her gaze turned to the orc then, the same one she had just beaten down. He was still unconscious for the moment, but there was no guarantee he would stay that way. [b]"He's definitely not dead; just knocked out. I dislike killing anything that can't defend itself, but I will finish him off if you deem it necessary."[/b]

The Ataiyan fully expected her rescuer to say, "Yes," and so she went to fetch her equipment from the skirmish sites nearby. Her bastard sword, backpack and stray knife were all collected from the battle ground with haste, being re-equipped as needed. The only thing left out of its sheath by the end was the first of these items, and Robin walked up to the unconscious orc with it already poised to strike.

Her intent had been to wait for Katerina's command at that point, but fate had something else in store. Just as Robin paused in front of the orc, a puddle of blood started forming next to him.

[i]'Blood?'[/i] Although confused by this strange occurrence, the woman was no fool. She quickly noticed that there was something odd about that puddle, and dodged back as soon as she saw it begin to boil. A woman's scream shattered the frozen tundra's silence then, marking the arrival of something foul. With six limbs and the face of a woman, a demon emerged from the snow, killing the orc next to her before making a beeline toward Katerina.

[b]"Look out!"[/b] Robin shouted when she saw the spider maiden's intent. She tried to chase after it, but could barely move an inch before a blinding light erupted in the direction of the vault. In an instant, the gates exploded in a fantastic display of magic crashing down to earth, and the vault, which suffered heavy damage, expelled great plumes of exhaust.

Yes, it was at that point that Gifre's curse was lifted. Robin and Katerina were actually late to the vault, arriving long after most had already disembarked to the area. The light that had summoned everyone in the beginning was now collapsing in on itself, coming back down like a bolt from the heavens. Ignius was returning, and for a reason that would likely be lost to the ages.

Of course, the lifting of Gifre's curse didn't banish the spider demon. That was something else. A few short moments after the vault doors erupted in chaos, a faint yell could be heard on the horizon. Flying from inside the bowels of that site was a round shield caught on fire for some inexplicable reason; and, as that shield grew nearer to Robin and Katerina, the volume of the yelling increased.

[color=darkgreen][b]"Ahhhh,"[/b][/color] the shield went as it crashed into the spider demon before she could reach the lone wolf. A gargoyle was careening through the air alongside it, also smashing into the monster, but the fire on the shield appeared to be what offended the spider most. Soon, another deafening screech could be heard, and the abomination that had arrived mere moments ago retreated into the snow.

The source of the yelling appeared soon after: a miniature wyvern with scales as red as the festival dragons back home. He had been inside the body of the shield, flying on it like a discus until now. After the collision, though, he was dizzy and spouting off nonsense while staggering in the snow. [color=darkgreen][b]"I am the great stone dragon! Fear me!"[/b][/color]