

Chapter Ten: A Rude Interruption - Part Two

The air grew hot an instant before a searing red energy splashed over Evan, throwing him off his feet. His breath left him when he crashed back down several yards away. He fought against the pain writhing through his body, a sensation that felt like he'd swallowed hot lava. His blurry eyes saw the huntsman approaching, dark smoke trailing from the golden sceptre. Evan lay as long as he dared, attempting to master himself, before climbing to his feet.

A shrill cry came from the side as Sam finished a flurry of strikes on his opponent, who crumpled to the ground in pained groans, reaching for his bloodied legs. Sam shot a look to James, who was backing away from the sword adlaz. Sam leaped towards James, cutting through the air like a javelin.

Evan's focus shifted back to the huntsman, who was helping the hammer adlaz to his feet. When the adlaz retrieved his large hammer, they both began their approach on Evan.

Let them come, *Evan thought*. Let them see what fate they bring upon themselves.

A pounding sensation pressed against his skull. An image came to him; a horrifying shadow stained on his vision. He shook his head and blinked the image away, refocusing on the approaching enemies. Another shock of energy punched him from within, causing him to falter, but he refused to let it out. He would deal with them through his own means.

Evan sheathed his sword over his back. He raised an arm and called forth the power of wind sorcery. Sorcery had always been less reliable than the blade when his emotions were high, but it was also the more destructive. And also the more satisfying.

The huntsman raised his golden sceptre, channelling his own attack. He pointed an arm towards Sam, sending the hammer adlaz to attack.

A spear of spiralling wind came down from the sky and circled Evan's arm. He raised his other arm and the wind strengthened, building up around his entire body. Through the howling wind he could see the huntsman's sceptre was glowing. Evan maintained the spiralling power, focussing on strengthening it before releasing. He would just have to release his attack before the huntsman did.

Flashes of black lightning weaved through the spiralling wind, shocking Evan. The throbbing sensation returned, bringing with it a familiar presence. A presence that Evan had attempted to hold back so many times before. As the black tendrils increased, the whirlwind faltered, and Evan knew he had to release it now before it got out of control. Before he lost all control.

He finally threw his arms forward with a great cry, and sent the tornado flying towards his enemy.

The huntsman struck his glowing sceptre into the ground. When the vortex met him, a sphere of blue energy blasted out from the sceptre, breaking the heavy gusts apart. An adlaz nearby was not as protected, and was thrown several yards away. The huntsman looked up from his sceptre and smirked at Evan.

He charged at the huntsman, his anger helping him fight through the exhaustion in his mind. His arms ached from the sorcery he had wielded, but he had no time to recover.

A hazy air gathered around the golden sceptre, followed by a rumbling whine that sounded like a far away engine. Red sparks spat out from the jewel at the tip, and a fiery sphere appeared. Tendrils of electricity fluctuated from the spinning ball of fire, which shot out towards Evan.

Evan planted his feet and raised his sword, catching the energy ball on the wide blade. He gripped the sword tight as blasts of hot light blew around him. When the air dissipated, he saw his feet had shifted back several inches in the dirt.

"Not so hot now, are you?" the huntsman called out. "As if you'd be a match for a Sehjaavi's weapon."

Another whining rumble signalled the next fireball, which built up and shot out from the sceptre.

This time Evan was more prepared, and he tapped into his knowledge of Wind sorcery. He spun and swung his wind-imbued sword out. The blade knocked into the energy ball and threw it back. The red ball whistled through the air and struck the ground near the huntsman, the blast almost knocking him off his feet.

The clashing of steel rang through the air as Sam battled the staff wielding adlaz, a volley of strong strikes splitting the staff in two. The hammer adlaz had recovered and was now charging at them, aiming his hammer at James nearby.

Another ball of energy shot towards Evan.

He dashed forward to meet it, swinging his sword out wildly. The blade knocked the sphere back, sending it soaring towards the huntsman. It struck Audlin in the chest with a brilliant shower of red energy and threw him off his feet. Wisps of dissipating energy spiralled away in the wind.

Audlin coughed and sputtered, patting his sleeve that had caught on fire. His shirt and jacket were heavily singed and smoked as he lay on the ground, groaning in pain.

A rush of satisfaction washed over Evan like a healing balm. He stepped towards his fallen foe and raised an arm, channelling his sorcery. A hazy ball of blue wind gathered around his fist and forearm. He enjoyed seeing the racist huntsman writhing in pain at his feet. Now was Evan's chance to teach him a lesson.

"Evan," Sam called out. "No."

Evan ignored him, the sorcery growing around his hand. The force was so strong it could have lifted him off the ground if he allowed it.

"Don't do it," Sam shouted. "He's defeated."

From his side, Evan saw Sam turn towards the huntsman.

"No, he is mine," Evan called out, but Sam was already moving.

The Oneron leapt high into the air, heading towards Audlin.

No! The huntsman was Evan's to deal with alone.

Evan spun towards Sam and pointed his raised arm at him. He channelled a portion of the energy and sent out a wave of wind. As the gust hit Sam, Evan balled his fist and brought his arm down towards the ground. The heavy wind changed direction, thrusting Sam downwards and slamming him into the ground.

Evan turned and raised his arm back to the huntsman. He watched the man through the tumultuous wind over his hand, flexing his fingers, ready to release the energy.

"Evan, it's done." The voice was James's, nearby. "You don't have to do this."

A beautiful face flashed in Evan's mind. Golden curls lay across his mother's pained face, slick with sweat.

It is done, she had said soothingly, knowing her time was short. She lay on what would become her deathbed. Though her illness had taken so much from her, she remained a beacon of purity and goodness, until the very end. A reminder of what a good heart meant. What a *Goodheart* meant.

The air faltered around Evan's arm. His fingers relaxed as he felt the energy ebb away from him. He looked down at the huntsman with contempt. The others had ceased their battling and now watched him, though his focus remained on Audlin.

The man was not worth killing, he had decided. Evan was better than that. His parents would want him to be better than that.

Audlin rose onto an elbow, panting heavily. Suddenly he scrambled on his hands and knees and lunged for the sceptre. Sam was upon him in an instant, his sword pointed at his throat.

Audlin froze, hand hovering over the sceptre, his sweaty face studying Sam.

Evan remained standing there, feeling the rush of hot energy slowly leave his body.

"That's enough," Sam said to Audlin between breaths. "You have two choices. Reach for the sceptre, and it'll be the last thing you do. Leave it, and you can walk away."

"Alright, fella." The huntsman gave a small nod as he slowly rose to his feet. He grimaced and held a hand over his singed chest, and faltered before steadying himself. "I may have overestimated you folk. Looks like I picked the wrong fight. I admit that."

The hammer adlaz approached their leader, wiping blood from his fleshy lip. Across the docking bay, the shorter adlaz supported his kin, whose legs were bloodied and unable to hold his own weight.

"The lengki ain't worth the bother." The huntsman's breath was heavy as he regarded them all, his eyes glaring.

"Call me that once more," Evan said, his voice shaking. "And I *will* be a bother."

The huntsman spat and then shook his head dismissively. When he saw the bloodied legs of his approaching man, he said, "Oh, Rhizz, what've they done to you?" He flapped a hand to Evan and turned away. "Come on, boys. We'll get you all patched up. First drink's on me."

Anger and hatred remained festering within Evan after they had left. He jolted when James laid a hand on his shoulder.

"You okay, Evan?"

Steadying his breath, Evan nodded. But he was far from right, he knew. Waves of hatred fluctuated through him still. He knew he had done the right thing by letting him live. But if he could just get his hands around that huntsman's neck...

Evan sighed and turned to Sam. "I apologise. I should not have turned my attack on you."

Sam regarded him. "No harm done. You were in the heat of the moment."

Evan nodded, glad to have not offended Sam. He found that he respected the Oneron soldier very much, and that made his attack on him all the more regretful.

Sam took a step closer to Evan. His expression was neutral and yet there was a hardness in his eyes. "Understand this, however. I can't have us turning on each other again. We have to work together, from here on out. We have to trust each other. Do you understand?"

Evan held Sam's firm look, feeling the weight of the tension in the moment. He had never seen Sam so serious before. Evan nodded. "I understand."

James shifted beside them, moving towards the golden sceptre on the ground.

"That's some powerful weapon," James said softly.

Sam went to the golden sceptre and lifted it up, before turning back to Evan. "Now we can't just leave this here for any old local to find. I know what to do with it, but, would you carry it until then? It'll be safer in your hands, Evan."

Evan considered this, and knew that Sam was right. Out of the three of them he was most likely to withstand the sorcery imbued in the sceptre, in case anything happened to the carrier. He took the sceptre, surprised he was unable to sense any power from it.

A part of him was pleased that Sam recognised and respected his capabilities. He considered trying to read the Oneron and check his thoughts, but he was drained from the fight and thought it better not to attempt using his gifts in a weakened state.

At least he had managed to contain whatever else was inside him.

"That's enough excitement for today, I believe. I hope." Sam added the last part under his breath. "How about we break up all this fighting with a nice dinner?"

1. How was the fight for you? Too long? Not enough motivation/tension?
2. We got a glimpse of something darker within Evan's magic here (and him learning to give his enemies mercy) - and also showed that our heroes are having trouble working together. Thoughts on those?