

Within The Roaring Boar, Baldrslund's most popular tavern, sat two of the world's most proficient mages. The deep mage Rhea sat next to the fire mage Dante, her long-time acquaintance, at a wooden round table in the corner of the bar. Dante tried to reserve their most secluded table, but was quickly reminded that they were at capacity. After a long, futile conversation between the fire mage and the owner and a bit of Rhea's "Abyssal persuasion," the owner removed a group from the table they now occupied. When the party contested, the owner insisted it was "for the good of the bar, and himself," and that they'd be given a discount on their next visit. They sat in anticipation of two more guests, and while they waited, Dante started on their "complimentary drinks."

"Mmmm, Mm! I forgot how good the mead was here!" Dante said, having just downed a tanker full of alcohol in one go. He offered another to Rhea. "You really should try some."

She waved the glass away. She rarely ever drank, and whenever she did, she hated how it altered her connection to the Abyss. Besides, Rhea thought, she may need those for the meeting.

Dante shrugged and started on the second glass. "You have nothin' to worry about. I've known Malakai longer than I've known you, and known Cirillia since she was barely two. This'll be fine!" He patted Rhea's shoulder in comfort. It changed nothing.

While waiting for their server to arrive, Rhea took surveillance of the bar. Every table within the tavern was occupied, and nary a seat free at any of them, save for the two vacant stools at theirs. There were at least seventy-five people seated, coming from at least four of the six magical schools. She could feel the energy coming from each person, from the electricity of pure mage Aether, to the strong determination of the holy mages, and to the warm and invigorating aura of the environmental mages. The burning heat from other fire mages in the bar

was much harder for her to find, given Dante's overpowered them all. As she watched the door to see if Dante's friends came in, their server arrived.

"Hello, and welcome to The Roaring Boar! I'm Mala and I'll be your server today!" said the waitress. "I see you've already got drinks figured out. Are you ready to order?"

"Absolutely! I haven't eaten yet, so I'm famished" replied Dante. "I'll take the five-meat platter with a side of potatoes and the vegetable siding."

"Sounds good," Mala said, writing the order down on a piece of parchment. She looked over to Rhea. "And for you?"

"She'll take the Full Boar special with Scorpion Death sauce," Dante answered, turning to Rhea with a smile. She returned a glare. "Oops! That's my bad. I forgot she's cuttin' back. She'll take a side salad." Dante looked back at the deep mage, who nodded with a faint smile.

"Alright," Mala said, scribbling out the order and replacing it with the salad. "I'll have that out for you shortly." She smiled and walked away.

Dante turned back to Rhea. She tilted her in indignation. "C'mon, I gotta have some fun. I'm not gonna just talk to myself the whole time." Rhea shrugged. For someone who talked all the time, and who spent the whole walk to Baldrslund talking to no one, she knew he was lying. In fact, he did it for another five minutes before their guests entered the tavern.

The first to enter was unmistakably a death mage. An elf, with skin as pale as the dead and long hair as black as the night, ducked slightly to get under the doorframe on his way in. His cold, dead stare came from sunken eyes in a face that resembled a serpent. The aura that came from him was cold and draining, and was strong enough to quiet the bar as all eyes focused on the new patron. Behind him was an elven girl, who stood a good foot and a half shorter than her accompaniment. Her large, green eyes shone like emeralds, and her brown hair fell gracefully

upon her shoulders. The aura she gave off was soothing and warm, and while it couldn't overpower the death mage's presence, it seemed to do enough to ease the nerves of the other customers to the point of returning to their meals. She was joined by a large gray wolf, who was almost as big as she was. The host acknowledged the beast and seemed to motion that it had to leave. When the death mage took issue and stepped closer to insist it could stay, the environmental mage pulled him back before saying a few words to her pet, who left and layed down outside the establishment.

"Malakai! Cirillia! We're over here!" Dante shouted across the tavern. The girl beamed when she saw who it was who called them and started towards the table, the death mage following closely behind. As they crossed the floor, many of the eyes in the bar followed them. They sat down at the open stools, seemingly unbothered by the onlookers. "It's been a while since I've seen ya! How've you two been?"

"We've been great!" the girl said with glee. "A lot of things have happened. Mother got me a pet wolf to help protect me on my travels now that I'm old enough to go out. Her name is Loba."

"The wolf's been great. Helps keep some of the attention off me, at least," added the death mage. His gaze quickly shifted to Rhea, whose stare had not left the elf since he entered. "Aren't you going to introduce us?"

"Oh, how silly of me! I'm used to everyone I know knowin' each other." Dante turned to Rhea and motioned to the pair. "This is Cirillia and her brother, Malakai."

Cirillia waved happily at her, while Malakai extended his hand with a forced smile. Rhea accepted, and her palm nearly froze in his grasp. The hairs on her arm stood firmly on end, and

she quickly released her grip and withdrew her hand. She continued to look at him with skepticism.

“My apologies about that. Not a lot I can do about the chills.” Malakai said with some remorse. His monotonous voice made it hard to tell how sincere he was. “I’ve heard of you from Dante, but not much specifically. Where are you from?”

Rhea, still reeling from the handshake, shot a concerned glance at the fire mage. He picked up on the cue. “She traditionally lives in the Basin, but as it stands, she doesn’t have a home. Covenant tried to bag her, but they were horribly outmatched.”

“Ah, now I remember. You’re the deep mage that does not speak. I’ll make note of that,” Malakai replied with a faint smile.

“If you don’t mind me asking, why doesn’t she speak?” Cirillia inquired.

“Don’ know. She never told me,” Dante replied with a chuckle. “I’ve tried on many occasions, but I think I’m gettin’ the silent treatment. Just happy I’m not the only one.”

“Hmm, interesting. How does she communicate?”

Rhea looked at Cirillia and pointed at Dante with a grin. She giggled and nodded. Like with Malakai, Cirillia’s aura was potent, but unlike with the death mage, Rhea was filled with the warmth her joy gave off, which made her break out in a silent laugh.

“Now that the formalities are out of the way, why did you call us here?” Malakai asked.

“Haven’t ya heard the news? It’s spread like wildfire around every town I’ve been in for the past week!” Dante got so excited he nearly burst into flames in the moment. “Talk of the town is that the Allfather is back.”

“Who’s the Allfather?” Cirillia asked.

“He was nothing but a myth,” scoffed Malakai. “A myth as old as time itself, and nothing more.”

Rhea wagged a finger and looked to Dante to elaborate. “Rhea’s right. While it’s considered a myth to most, there’s some truth to it. The Grand Archives holds some extensive records, datin’ all the way back to the foundin’ of the schools. And ya know what they say? The Allfather was the one who made them.”

“How would either of you know what’s in those archives? The only mages allowed in are pure mages, and last I checked...” Malakai said as he glared at Rhea, “you are not allowed anywhere near there.”

Rhea’s right eye twitched and her fists clenched as she took a deep breath, trying her best to keep herself calm. Dante noticed and answered for her. “Ya not wrong, but she and I know someone who’s been in there, and someone who can confirm their records. The Allfather’s in them, clear as day.”

“Alright, fine,” Malakai snarked, “Let’s say you are right and he really did exist. It has been countless centuries since he died, and there has not been a single recorded incident of someone being in tune with any more than two magic schools, let alone all six. Why should I take this supposed ‘Allfather’s’ word, when everyone else who has said they were him has been nothing more than a carny?”

“This goes beyond just the usual incidents, Malakai. This ain’t just a story told by town bards and the local gossipers. This has major backin’, mainly in the Covenant. They’ve always been the first to shut these types of operations down. Now? They say it’s real.”

“And why should I believe any words that come from them, huh? Why should *she* believe them, after all they have done to her and her kind? Why th-”

Rhea slammed her fists on the table and rose from her seat. She began to channel the Abyss, manifesting a thick black sludge from between her hands, which began to crawl up her forearms. Malakai stood up as well, the skin on his hands melting away as he summoned a green flame from them. Dante rose, ready to intervene and counter their magic as best he could with his own fire. As they were about to attack, Cirillia's ear-piercing cry stopped them dead, carried forth by a wave of golden wisps that coated the two opponents. Both mages began breathing heavily, and after a moment, they each backed their magic off and returned to their seats. The tavern, which fell silent when Rhea rose, slowly returned to their business.

"What is wrong with you, Kai? You've been antagonistic of her since the moment you sat down. Why?" Cirillia demanded.

Malakai sighed and leaned back in his chair, eyes locked on the ceiling. "I have a distrust of deep mages. They have done me wrong in the past, done my friends wrong in the past, and most importantly," he lowered his head to meet Cirillia's eyes, "...they've wronged you before."

"I understand that, and I appreciate you looking out for me. Truly, I do," Cirillia said softly. "But I'm not too young to defend myself like before, and father said..."

"Do not lecture me about what he says!" Malakai snapped back, which caused Cirillia to recoil. Malakai, seeing the fear he created in his younger sister, lowered his head in shame. "I'm sorry. That anger was not meant for you."

"I know it wasn't." Cirillia lowered her head to his, and rested her hand gently on the back of his head. "I know your relationship with him is strained at the moment. But he's right in this instance. You don't have to look out for me all the time like before. I can handle myself."

Malakai took in a deep breath before he returned to sitting up. "I know. I'll work on it." He turned to face Rhea, who was taken aback both by Cirillia's powers and Malakai's remorse.

“I am sorry for being jaded. If Dante trusts you enough with this, I can trust you as well. Now, where were we?”

Dante was as stunned as Rhea, so much so he had been silent for two minutes. He cleared his throat before speaking again. “Alright, so the Allfather. They’re sayin’ he’s currently situated somewhere near the town of Yarrion. However, he’s supposed to make a formal address in the city of Mirria in about a month or so. It’s a long trip from here to Mirria, so I wanted to get y’all together and see if ya wanted to come with me to see if it’s true.”

“To what end? Would we just be there to confirm he’s real?” asked Cirillia.

“That’s the fun part. You know how the myth says he picked the best mage in each magic to be the founders of the schools? They say he’s doin’ it again. And since I know no one better for the job, and I know *a lot* of people, I figured we all should go and try to be the new heads of the schools!”

“Interesting. So we are basically going to hand in a resume and hope we become his underlings?” Malakai inquired.

“Eh, pretty much,” Dante answered. “Maybe we can be a package deal of some kind, given we know each other. Well, I know you all and, well...” He droned off before perking back up. “So, are y’all in?”

“I think it sounds like a great time!” Cirillia said with glee. Rhea smirked and shrugged in agreement. They all looked at Malakai, who sighed and nodded.

“Yes! That’s what I was hopin’ to hear!” Dante exclaimed. “This is gonna be great. I’ll get our food to-go and we can set out immediately.” He got up to talk to their server, but turned to Malakai before leaving. “You excited for a road trip, Kai?”

“Don’t call me that,” he replied.