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# A FAREWELL TO KINGS

## by

## Blackfhyre

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Prologue

The cavern walls illuminated green radiation as he approached the source of all of the disturbance, the very center of this cavern created by the destruction that shook these lands less than a moon prior. The traveler came from faraway lands to investigate the anomaly firsthand, but he knew quicker ways of travel than the land took you. From the landing in that wretched forest he traveled out of sight atop Zeira, who now followed closely behind with his travel pack. What terrors they snuck by in that dark land he did not want to imagine, if they were anything like what infested these frozen mountains of death. Beasts of lore stalked these slopes, unaffected by the immobilizing cold which required the traveler’s constant attention to keep his blood flowing. If the subzero chills and knife-like winds that cut through all clothing wasn’t bad enough, some of these fiends had eyes that could penetrate his illusions and cut him in 2 with one nicely aimed swipe. Snow has not ceased to fall here by any record in the histories, but certainly this extreme frost could not be the norm here. Not only that, the place reeked of evil, and the stench grew stronger the closer to

Chapter 1 - A Farewell to Kings

Street lamps made the dimly lit stone visible as their fires danced in the night. The gentle breeze of the mid-summer twists up remnants of garbage and dust not caked into the streets from the day’s revelry. Steins, food trays, torn clothes, and other debris litter the well-traveled pathways after a day of excitement. In the late hour, festival goers still straggle nosily along the way winding roads of the capital city. Inside *the Bird of Prey,* Serge sat at the table with his companions, each heavily in their cups from a log day of celebration. Every year at the Summer Solstice, there is a celebration for all the peace and freedom that has been brought to Aetatis over the past 1200 years by the Kings of this city. The *Festival of Kings* in full swing, the entire **City of Kings** was deep in merriment.

Jugglers and acrobats still occupied some of the street corners to take advantage of the party goers as the more intoxicated they became, the more generous with their coin. Serge looked deep into his wife’s glazed over eyes with passion as the laughed at the antics of Jeifer and Ylle in their drunken glory. Her fire red hair framed her face perfectly as if fell loose past her chest. The top students of the University had reason for celebration aside from the recent marriage of Serge and Rynde, the 8 of them were the brightest the University had seen in centuries.

*The Bird of Prey* was loud and rowdy as the winds picked up outside, no one was aware of the stirring in the shadows. No one inside even batted an eye at Jeifer’s loud and offensive obscenities as he slammed back steins with his friends. The beads of sweat ran down his face like rain drops on a window as he made his mates gasp in laughs. Serge caught the anxious look on Aezi’s olive face as he scanned the room in between his cackles at Jeifer’s buffoonery, always on alert. He looked odd not wearing his pointy tan hat which could always been seen sitting atop his long black hair. I detected nothing in the room that would draw anyone’s suspicion, but he kept on guard. “Serge?” Gimza interrupted, clearly picking up on the uneasiness in the air too. Maybe it was just the knight in them. The room erupted once again in glee as music filled the common room of the tavern.

The elation was broken as the windows shattered like a confetti of broken glass into the room, Gimza and Serge jumped to their feet as Rynde and Qeles leapt onto the table that they all just drank at. Aezi and Zid immediately got into a defensive stance as Jeifer and Ylle emptied their cups to not waste a drop before entering the fray. Shadowy figures danced into the room as Serge, Gimza, Zid, and Aezi hacked away at the intruders. Rynde and Qeles tried to strengthen the patrons as they tried to fight off the intruders to no avail. As the crue worked to keep each other alive, the common folk fell to their deaths like glats at the slaughter. As the seconds ticked on, it became more and more clear that the common room was now a death trap and if they wanted to make it through the night, they would have to escape the tavern immediately. Serge and Gimza whistled as they swung around towards the front door and chopped a path for the others to follow.

The scene outside was worse than inside the tavern. Shadowy figures beat down the streets’ wanderers like wolves in a chicken coop. Common folk could provide no sort of resistance against this sort on onslaught. Serge could make out the figures of what looked like great wolves and the distinct look of skeletons walking upright. From the ground beneath him, big rats, the size of feral cats bit at his legs. The red of the wolves' eyes was the only distinct feature that separated their black grizzled fur which camouflaged them so well into the night's darkness. The skeletons fire red eyes stood out as well from their greyish, smoke colored bones that hid them in the evening’s shadow as well. Evil lurked this night.

Serge could see Gimza’s attention turn toward the city’s castle; his shoulder length blonde hair hiding the grim look on his face carved from stone - both his residence, and where his father, King <King> would be under minimal guard on this festive night. But the path to the castle was too dense with fiends, and smoke could already be seen twisting up from the castle towers and windows. The city was being overrun, and if the friends did not find a place to endure the night, they would fall with it. Still, Serge led the 8 on an attempt to make it to the castle walls, but it was to no avail. Even Aezi’s fire magicks seemed to only provide a slight discomfort to this evening’s unwanted guests. They needed to get what they could from the manor and leave the center city.

Their manor sat on the outside of the city, just away a few blocks from *the Bird of Prey*. Outside of the main avenues, the screams of dying party-goers could be heard from where the slaughter was worst. Screams and the light of burning flames could be heard from the manor as they littered the way all the way up the main road to the castle gates. The castle was starting to crumble under the assault of the night’s invaders, and the screams began to get louder, apparently getting closer now to the outskirts of the city. The manors along the road shared by theirs, seemed untouched by conflict; but that would not be for long as the commotion grew nearer still.

The 8 companions all lived in the manor, except Gimza who was heir to the throne and was required to live on castle grounds, but most of his time was also spent at the manor or at the University training and bonding with everyone. The other 7 grew up in a crumbling house in the slums which they warmly referred to as ‘the orphanage’. All orphans of a previous war, they were as good as blood. All started attending the University soon after establishing a family together, and Gimza quickly joined their crue as they became inseparable over the ensuing years. Serge’s attention drawn quickly back to the terror at hand, he gathered what could as he could hear banging and scraping now at the manor. The sound of their livestock’s life coming to an end signaled their time here was up and all rushed out of the manor with everything they could fit in their packs and under their arms. The 8 all hopped on their **kyoros** and rode off towards the outskirts of the **City of Kings**.

As they raced towards the fringes of **City of Kings**, the screams grew fainter, but never died. The outskirts of **City of Kings** was unharmed, there seemed to be no order to the assault aside from amassing as much death as bloody imaginable. The activity would be contained to the most populated areas as these fiends lusted for blood in the most substantial way possible.

“*Diablos*!” Zid spat in disgust. “I’ve heard of the like before.” He spat again. Zid was the eldest of the crue and a mild historian at that. In the history books there were vague mentions of such fiends that would terrorize civilizations in ages past. But none had been seen by man for over a millennium, they were as good as folk-lore, things to scare children. But we had all seen this with our own eyes.

“Diablos!”, Jeifer japed. “Next you’ll say they rode in with Chandrian, Trollocs, Wulfen, and the fae as well! What do I look like, a damn half-wit Zid.”

“Now we all saw what happened Jeif. Those weren’t the Children of Hope. And we all saw the comet the other night to the North past Zek. I’m not a little child either, but you can’t ignore what we see!” Ylle rushed to the defense of Zid. Now the party had come to a halt to have a discussion.

“If we go by logic, it is more likely some mad wizard whom finally figured out how to summon an army of the dead got some balls. It’s really not that hard if you just tri-“

“A mad wizard? That makes no sense” Jeifer said, now more argumentive than earlier. “I say it was a dragon and a princess’s wart dun crossed with a fallen knight on the wrong moon cycle.”

“Dio’s ashes!” Serge blurted in. “Do I always have to do this? Who the bloody hell knows what that was we only got a quick glimpse. Everyone! Now do we want to stand here all night and argue while these scum catch up and fuck us to death? Or are we going to find shelter you blithering fools?” Gimza nodded.

“Yes, yes, you’re right”, Zid said.

“Yes sir” Jeif slurred

“Of course, we must be on our way at once.” Aezi thought out loud.

“Now who’s going to get fucked to death?” an unfamiliar voice interrupted.

“What’s it to you?” Jeif scoffed.

Serge gave Jeif a look that shut him up. “What he meant was what are you doing here? It’s dangerous. Are you heading into the city?”

“Aye – well I was but it seems I’m too late. I just couldn’t get here fast enough. I came from…” he trailed off as his eyes met with the fires of what was the city’s castle. “I was heading to the castle but” he sighed “there’s nothing that can be done now.” The man was shrouded in the night as he sat atop his equally camouflaged kyoro. His eyes the only thing visible in the smoky evening.

“You are not from here – what business do you have at the castle?” Gimza eyed the mysterious man cautiously as he considered the stranger.

The man eyed the center city. “I ride from Zek carrying dire news, yet I am too late. I –“

“From Zek?!” Jeif laughed. “Did you bring back some scrael as well? He must have been drinking more than I. We can’t be jerk-“He was cut off as a sledge mallet slammed into his shoulder. He fell from his kyoro as the intruder whaled a wicked cackle. Before it could finish the kill, it was drove to the ground by yet another unseen interloper.

What was left was a pile of dull grey bones and a happy bark. “That’s my boy **Wind**!” The man exclaimed as he hugged what can now be seen as a wolf on the ground. “We need to get to a safer place before we are overrun. The edge of the city is unharmed, we will be ok if we can make it there." Before the last word was out of his mouth, a flash glimmer left his hand and found a wicked beast not 5 yards from Qeles completely unaware. “We must move, now!”

“Right right” Gimza echoed in agreeance for everyone to hear. “On me” he rode as everyone followed, the newcomer taking up the rear in the shadows.

They rode for an hour, hard, southwest. After another few minutes, Gimza halted at an uninhabited barn, the years hadn’t been kind, but it stood strong in the evening fog. Its well-rusted frame caught shines of the moonlight as the dilapidated building stood before them. “We’re here” Serge proclaimed. He knew the structure. He and Gimza had trained uncountable nights here on the fringe of their city. “As good a place as any I suppose. We should fortify the perimeter.” He eyed Jeifer and Zid before they could argue with one another about how to do it. “Just do it.” They obeyed without banter, this was no time for frolicking or choosing who to take orders from.

Everyone started about their own so to establish a perimeter around their safehaven, when the familiar sound of commotion disrupted the otherwise silent immediate area. “I said no cockery you t-“ Serge was interrupted as he saw that the noise was not his friends, rather the unwelcome invaders from beforehand were afoot. Not too concentrated around their newfound refuge but they had been too noisy in their work however the murky night may conceal additional fiends.

“We have company” Gimza was heard across the perimeter. They were surrounded as expected when the encompassing circumference alit in flame. Aezi, Qeles, and Ylle had united their magicks to form a ring of flame around the comrades. A perfect collaboration as the 3 linked fire, nature, and wind just as in exercise, augmenting their combined learnings in hostility was accomplished without faltering. The trespassers enclosed inside the fiery boundary were easily hacked down by Gimza, Zid, Serge, and Jeif as Rynde could be see keeping the company invigorated near the heart of mêlée. Collaborating magicks together was as easy as having a conversation with one another; if that conversation took place mentally and while multitasking with another task as simple as focusing on the same object or joining altogether mid-conflict fixing on several separate adversaries simultaneously. Serge understood it at the basics and had even done so in exercise with Gimza or Rynde or Aezi or Qel. His thoughts were once again drawn back to the skirmish at hand as a flamboyant intimidating battle-cry came from the northeast of the periphery. A skeleton, the height of mid-aged Yral wood tree stood at its source. Rather than taking a moment to realize that nothing like this actually existed in all of Aetatis, Serge and the rest of the crue formed a regiment in perfect nonagonal imposition; the new comrade included, as he’d fought alongside them hitherto.

The ash blackened skeleton roared in the night as the company engaged it in its lunacy. Its furnace ridden eyes blazed as the frame of the atrocity towered over their congregation. It let out another screech as flame ascended directly toward them amassing from the mouth of its colossal head. The coalition split in two, surrounding the goliath; Serge, Gimza, and Zid focusing on the torso and head as Jeif aligned himself perfectly behind it for maximum efficacy. Aezi, Qel, and Ylle were still allied in their entwining as Rynde was now illumining down direct light unto the terror. It was always taught in class that any magick intended to restore life would by hook or crook harm the dead. Well the dead never walked, but this creature juddered in agreement as the light washed down on the bones. Still the scoundrel battled adamantly as glimmers of radiant pewter could be seen striking their mark on the foe’s joints initiating from their shadowed friend, his wolf buddy galloping upon the skeleton tearing at every stride. No one could say how long the battle raged as the skeleton fell to the ground in one final gasp for air as a final hammer of flames crushing it to the earth.

From the cloud of ash out arose the 4 warriors, covered in grey head to foot. “It’s right dead!” Zid announced happily. His white teeth could be seen through the smoke colored film concealing him elsewise.

Before the dust could settle, Aezi darted to the corpse, taking samples from what seemed like each and every bone. “There isn’t even a brain.” He called from the haze, which seemed to be diffusing out to the entire grounds by now. Aezi could be heard muttering to himself where the ash was still dense. It was not ash that enclosed the night, but a heavy veil of fog which appeared to encase the entire city.

“Don’t tarry man!” Serge directed to the wizard, who now did don his immense sunburned hat; it could be faintly seen now as the ash almost completely settled to the ground around the corpse. “We’ve to reinforce the barn so we can get some rest.”

The newcomer was already inspecting the exterior of the barn, placing several items at the corners and medians of the walls. “I’ve got that.” He said to the group. When a few of them gave him a sideways look, he replied back “Wards. They can be casted as a spell on the spot or enchanted into an item. *Diablos* would rather run headfirst into a fire than approach these wards. I’ve the best in the land.” He muttered some incantation and appeared satisfied. “Tis safe.”

“Just who are you?” Jeif asked the man apprehensively. “Wards and all – Aezi, can you even make a ward?” Aezi is the most skilled wizard in the University, or was until tonight when the whole of it likely lay in ash and ruin.

“I’ve studied wards, but there’s been no use for centuries except to thwart eavesdropping or prevent spying or the like. Who’ve thought we’d need it for the next thousand years? I suppose it is a blunder on our part. If the city was warded against *diablos* this would have been impossible,” he said as he looked back on his fallen home.

“Yeah *who* would’ve thought” Jeif accused as he eyed the newcomer once again.

“Enough again. We need to get inside the barn.” Serge complained as if talking to a child. “You can bitch in there where it’s safe.”

“Why should we believe it’s safe in there after he said some words to some *relics*? It could be a trap. Aezi or Qeles should make sure it’s safe for sure.” Jeif barked back.

But Aezi was already considering the wards, unable to contain his excitement. “These are incantations even I can’t comprehend, they’re considerably more advanced than I’ve encountered even in the libraries of the University. Just astounding!”

“But are they safe? Can we-” Jeif was cut off as Gimza cut in.

“Come now you simpleton, they’re safe. Look, he and Serge are already inside. Have a hint.” Gimza stated as he followed the rest of the group in ahead of Jeifer.

Inside, a fire blazed in the hearth and the two had already arranged seating about the inglenook. “Have a seat, listen to what … We haven’t got your name.” Serge motioned to the outsider.

“I guess now is an appropriate time to introduce myself. I am Egde, I am from the once established republic of Taedas.”

“Taedas? Is that a real place? Isn’t that where ninjas were supposed to have once trained? I always thought it was fiction, you know, from the novels.” Zid asked.

“I never paid attention in history.” Jeifer scoffed “A village of ninjas? What is this – *The Chrono Tales*?” he laughed.

Egde cleared his throat to quiet the room. “My village of *yes, ninjas,* once resided in the eastern forest of . We lived in peaceful seclusion from the rest of Aetatis until about 4 years ago. That was when something happened. It was almost as if the forest around us was rejecting our residence; almost as if as a whole it was consciously inhibiting our existence. We sent out scouts to the rest of Aetatis, myself included. I returned 8 moons later with what I experienced, but I could not find Taedas. It was as if it had never existed, I traced over its location to my wit’s end to no avail. It wasn’t easy, but I tracked *something* northeast into Zek. My senses told me that it was not my companions, but I had to follow it anyway. Once in Zek physicks act awry, causing it nearly impossible to track anything and the sensation of always being watched is always evident. The trail was almost immediately lost, but I saw it headed north towards the mountains. The closer I got to the mountains the more skewwhiff the environment became, twisted trees and stunted shrubs; mutated rabid animals with glowing eyes of all colors. I spent many moons in and out of Zek with my boy Wind; one cannot spend an extended amount of time within the confines of that cursed land or you will go rabid like those animals. Alone, I could never make it through the northern areas of Zek and certainly not into those snow-covered mountains- the closer I got the thicker the shrubbery and fiendish animals became. Rats the size of bobcats and wolves with blood red eyes- exactly what I saw here tonight. *Diablos.* Then the green comet pierced our world and struck the northern mountains. I could obviously not investigate, but I knew the significance and I rode immediately to get an audience with the king but even in all haste was too late. I saw the shadow of *Umbrae* with my own eyes and it is spreading. It will consume this city before long.” He studied his spectators. “I’ve not seen another of my kind since I left my village.” Sadness filled his being as he finished his tale.

“A horrid tale.” Qeles spoke for the first time. “I’ve never seen a ninja.” The word was still foreign on her tongue. Everyone had read about ninjas in the history books and their amazing acrobatic way of life. The flames painted his cowl crimson as he studied the men and women studying him. None of us had seen a ninja in person before. We all assumed they existed, but to see one in person was almost too much to take in at once at the moment of realization. It was said that you could be staring directly at a ninja and not even notice their presence. I’d never believed in their stealth until seeing this man in front of me tonight, his movements deceptive to the eye. I would not have believed a lot of things had I not seen them with my own sight tonight.

“So where do we go from here?” Zid asked no one in particular. The screams had become fewer as the sounds of fiends causing mischief came and went. The city was dying and as the night aged into morning, any hope of fighting the reaper’s stay with the cries of help which faded to insignificance.

“These *diablos* have an aversion to the light. They don’t avoid it completely but are much less active and prefer to rest during the hours of light in any darkness they can find. Hence the ever-enshrouding mist which darkens the forest of Zek north of us. It’s like a living entity attracted to these creatures of the night. One will form over your city as well if they form a residence here. I picked up a what I would call faint radiation of this mist in  where Taedas once stood. I don’t know what happened there but there was an *Umbrae* presence at some time to cause it. The morning’s light should allow a search of the city. We’ll be safe to rest inside these wards.” He eyed a sleeping Jeifer and within an instant the man was asleep with his wolf, Wind. He looked as if he would spring up at any time, even in his rest.

One by one everyone made their arrangements, the 8 of us all nestled in the safety of one another. During this mid-summer night, a certain coldness had taken to the air. The gales of wind in the night had overtaken the howls of the fiends for a time, and rest was finally given to all.

\* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

As light rays awoke the sleepers, the stark silence was resounding. Serge, Gimza, and Aezi were already outside staring at the ruins of a once proud city. The stench of filth and ash dominated all incoming scents. The city was dead and there was not a living soul inside it.

“There will be no rescue mission.” Serge stated dismissively. “No one lives in there anymore. We must leave at once.”

“Edge?” Was a question from Ylle.

“Gone with the morning. I’m not surprised. The nearest town is Y.” Serge looked back at everyone, then his wife Rinde.

Chapter 2 - A Farewell to Kings

Appendix A

Appendix A will be a glossary of terms used in *A Farewell to Kings.*

**Aetatis –** The entire known world.

**Children of Hope –** The knighthood which defends and spreads the word of His Holy Majesty. Even the thought of magicks, musicks, science, and philosophy are sins the carry the punishment of death.

**The Chrono Tales –** A popular account of the history of Aetatis mainly believed to be mostly myth.

**City of Kings –** Established around year 50 of the Standard Era, it’s exact founding date is lost in history. Founded by King Cecil I, the City of Kings was founded on moral pillars such as liberty, equality, education, musicks & magicks, and free enterprise. Quickly the city became a capital of Aetatis and a center of all activity. It has been ruled by fair minded kings ever since with no rebellion to date.

**Glats –** for lack of a better term, lambs

**Kroyos –** A bird-like reptile commonly used for travel by folk who can afford such a luxury. The bond between a kyoro and their trainer is one of intense power and it is said that some can even communicate telepathically. Since kyoros typically outlive their trainer, if a kyoro dies before the trainer, it is rare that the trainer can handle the mental anguish to train another. In some extreme cases, the trainer is said to even go mad, usually fleeing into a life alone in the wilderness until taken by death.

**Measurement** – Foedera is a unit is measurement

**Zek –** An untraveled forest to the North of the City of Kings. Its rumored to be haunted and adventurers who venture up that way are never heard from again. It’s been an untraveled territory for well over 1000 years, and everything North of Zek is completely uncharted.