

IN THE BEGINNING...

Narrator: In the beginning, in the timeless realms, there was only One: The Merciless Hunger, a force that consumed all life that desired to break free. It was the First Carnivore. But in the greatest miracle of all, the First Life found a way to escape; the selfless amongst them sacrificed themselves to fight the Merciless Hunger, so that their brethren could live on. These were the Dragon Muses. In time, the stronger dragons rejected the selflessness that had birthed them, and instead oppressed the weaker dragons to stave off the Merciless Hunger, growing rich yet vain. Only the great dragon Batova was brave enough to fight against this oppression. He opened the eyes of the others to the realization that they were too riddled with sin and greed. Knowing that the Dragon Muses were an imperfect race, Batova created the first humans, a race that was more naturally inclined towards selflessness, and was less tempted towards power. These humans were given life through the dreams of dragons; in their slumber, they gave rise to a new and foreign realm: the realm of Time.

But the dragon trickster Avadi- the strongest and most prideful of them all- was jealous of the humans, and sought to destroy them. Batova and his Four Generals gave their lives to seal Avadi away. They fell into an eternal slumber, marking the beginning of the world of humans. But Avadi's power, Sadistyx, was not fully imprisoned, and it tempted the human descendants of the Four Generals, the Nobles, into taking the land for themselves. The First Humans were dependent on the dragons for guidance; now, they had to live on their own. Only by swearing obedience to the God Batova were the humans able to repent for their sins and resist the will of Sadistyx, prospering in peace on the continent of Myonkos. Each human was given an inescapable destiny to ensure a harmonious world; should this destiny somehow be defied, unpredictable and dangerous consequences would eventuate.

One day, a noble disobeyed these laws, and set forth a malignant Curse upon the Four Kingdoms, plaguing the commoners with an unspeakable illness, terrifying them with Cursed Beasts, and enslaving three kingdoms under the Vanot Empire. Legends proclaimed that only one could stop the Curse: Princess Rivia, a young descendant of Tarkla, the Red Dragon General. But before she could reach her destiny, she disappeared.

Over three hundred years have passed, and all hope seems to be lost for Myonkos...

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## FIRE EMBLEM: DYAD OF TIME

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MYONKOS, UMBER TOWN- 1349 MR

[A thin 11-year-old boy with curly, wavy orange hair, dressed in rags, runs through the dirty streets. Everywhere, people are coughing. They live in squalor; beggars litter the streets, most disfigured and in pain. For hundreds of years, the Cursed plague has caused much suffering and despair.]

Vanot soldier: STOP THAT KID! HE'S A THIEF!

Young Josef: [Panting] Damn, they've sent more guys after me this time. [He runs into an alleyway to hide, but trips.] Ow!

[He looks up and sees a mean looking kid with a buzz cut, wearing a worn white shirt and grey work pants, crouching over him. The mean looking kid stands up to walk away, and then leans against a wall while smoking a pipe. Josef pushes himself up and glares at the stranger.]

Young Josef: Yo, a little help here?

Mean looking kid: ...

Young Josef: Oh, so that's how it is. Too scared to fight against Vanot?

Mean looking kid: I've got no business with 'em.

Young Josef: Don't kid yourself. Everyone's got business with Vanot. That's cuz they try to own everything we've got. Why you out here on the streets, anyways? I'm betting they kicked your family out of your own home.

Mean looking kid: Just mind your own business.

Vanot Soldier: There he is!

Young Josef: Oh crap, I gotta scam!

[He runs out of the alleyway and into another one, but bumps into a nobly dressed young boy in regal, dark lavender armor. There are no soldiers next to him. He seems a year older than Josef, but instead of being impulsive, he is calm, tall and composed. He has light blue hair and solemn eyes.]

Young Josef: What's some high noble doing down in these slums? You here for that piece of bread I took on my way outta the temple?

Young Markus: My name is Prince Markus of House Vanot. And I do not care for bread. I need the antidote that you've stolen.

Young Josef: Tch, I'M the thief? You guys took my dad's only house away. Then you made him so sick that he can't even go back to work in the mines! He NEEDS THIS!

Young Markus: I'm sorry to hear that. But that doesn't mean you can take what doesn't belong to you. You don't know how much the antidote means to me.

Young Josef: Wait, why does a noble need this kind of medicine? You guys keep yourselves boarded up in the palace walls and got some immunities to the plague. Unless... someone close to you's been infected?

Young Markus: ...

Mean looking kid: [steps out of the alleyway] Hey. He doesn't have it.

Young Markus: Huh?

Young Josef: Yeah, whatcha talkin' about?

Mean looking kid: He stole the wrong thing. I saw a glimpse of what he had in his pouch, and it's not the meds. It's just something that looks like it.

Young Josef: No way. [He takes the 'medicine' out, and Markus closely inspects it.]

Young Markus: ... He took the cooking herbs.

Young Josef: Darn, not again. I was in a rush...

Young Markus: The Vanot soldiers must have heard a break-in and assumed the medicine was stolen, as that's the only reason anyone would break into that temple. They didn't have time to double check and immediately sent out patrols.

Young Josef: I don't need this stuff. Here, take it back with ya. [He tosses it to Markus]

Young Markus: I see. Then I bid you goodbye.

Young Josef: You're not gonna arrest me for stealing?

Young Markus: I heard your story. You have too much to deal with, as it is. [He starts to walk away]

Young Josef: [To the mean looking kid] Yo, thanks for the help, there. The name's Josef, by the way.

Mean looking kid: Carlo. [He nods his head down towards his pouch and opens it. Josef sees something familiar inside.]

Young Josef [whispering]: Wait... it's the medicine! When did you swipe it from me?

Young Carlo: When you fell. I swapped it with some lookalike cooking herbs. Always keep them on me in case I need to steal some meds.

[From the shadows of the rooftops, a figure emerges above]

Vanot scout: Thought you could get away? I overheard everything.

Young Josef: Ugh, where did you come from? How'd you get under our noses?

Vanot scout: It's a concealing technique only nobles know. A filthy commoner- a Rithilu- like you wouldn't get how it works. [He unsheathes his blade]. Now, hand it over.

Young Carlo: I've always wanted to learn how to fight a Vanot scout. [He performs a hand motion to ignite his hand with a green, blazing aura]

Young Josef: [He takes a small handaxe from his waist and readies it] No noble's gonna use that slur on commoners and get away with it. And filthy? You don't know who you're messing with. I'm a descendant of long lost royals.

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## PROLOGUE, PART 1: THE DRUNKARD'S SON

MYONKOS, UMBER TOWN- 1356 MR

[A skinny guy with wavy, curly orange hair and a lean yet muscular, mean looking guy with a buzz cut are sitting down on filthy cobblestone streets outside of closed, rugged shops. Both are wearing bandit clothes and rugged, light armor. They are playing Imps, a game of both strategy and chance. They sit

around a magically conjured arena, the size of a board game, and the two move Imp pieces around to try to gain a better hand. They are coming up with strategies to use in future games.]

Josef: Why don't we move the green Imps here? I know they've got a cooldown that will definitely get the spades in my hand next turn.

Carlo: That won't work. By the laws of chance-

Josef: I mean, it's worked all of last week!

Carlo: And it's failed just as many times last week, too.

Josef: Damn it... you're right, as always. But I'm not gonna give up on my Luck. I know mines is something else.

Angry shopkeeper man: [opens his shop's door and yells] Hey, what are you two lowlifes bickering about? Streets are closed here for the ceremony tomorrow!

Josef: Got a problem with us, old man?

Angry man: Hah, I figured it was you again. Before your drunkard father kicked the bucket, he'd always be out on the streets when he wasn't supposed to. I bet that's what the prophets said you'd do, too. Like father, like son.

Josef: You take your stupid words back!

Carlo: At least his old man didn't go about screwing his coins into every brothel in town.

Angry man: Grrr... alright, you two have pissed me off too much this time. Just get the hell out of here.

Josef: We can't. We got a meeting to attend to.

Angry man: A meeting? With who, the rats? You two don't even have jobs!

Josef: Oh, you'll see.

[From the alleyway next to the Angry Man, a tough, muscular gang leader wearing a bandana on his head, and having a scar run down his face, walks in with several gang members]

Okrah gang leader: I didn't think you'd have the conviction to actually show up.

Angry man: Okrahs? Holy hell, you're insane! I'm outta here!

Josef: Yeah, and don't look back!

Carlo: Guy's probably running to go hide in the nearest brothel.

Okrah gang leader: Cut the chatter. You said you'd be here to settle your debts after losing to us in Imps. Hold up your end of the deal and give us whatever coins you got.

Josef: Heh...

Okrah gang leader: What's so funny?

Josef: What's so funny? I'm laughing at you bozos! You fell right into our trap!

Okrah gang leader: A trap? Huh... wait, what the hell are you talking about?

Josef: You see, I know some people in town. And we all got a bone to pick with you and your gang. Just stand back and you'll see what I mean. Alright guys, it's time to show them who's boss!

Carlo: I'm here for you, pal.

Okrah gang leader: [waits for a moment, but nothing else happens] .... That's it? You and all one of your friends?

Josef: What the hell?

Okrah gang leader: Hahaha! Looks like no one showed up! Okrahs- let's run these idiots down!

Carlo: It's just you and me, again. Well, just keep your cool. We're more than enough for them.

Josef: Those damn liars, they said they'd be here! Guess I just gotta rely on fate now.

[The Imps arena disappears, and the first tutorial commences. Josef is a Marauder, Carlo is a Mage Thief. During the battle, Carlo will provide some tips on strategy. Tutorial tips may be turned on/off.]

Josef: Darn, I had the perfect trap to take out these guys, if only enough people showed up to where I told them to go.

[later in the tutorial]

Carlo: We might be outnumbered, but don't let their numbers scare ya. A good tactician who uses the environment can take out 5 of those guys with just 2 units.

[A few turns in, a 20-year-old girl comes up next to an enemy unit. She has tired eyes, with pale blonde hair in a braid that hangs over her shoulder and down her front. She is wearing an archer's clothes, and is carrying a bow in her hand.]

Irene: Hey dude, is this Rivetstone Corner?

Okrah Gang Member: What the- get lost, girl! The Okrahs are having an important business meeting with some curly haired idiot!

Irene: Curly haired idiot? Well then, I guess I am in the right place. [She shoots an arrow at the gang member]

Okrah Gang Member: ARGH! [He falls.]

Josef: Hey Carlo, that's Irene, right?

Carlo: Should be.

Josef: Hey Irene!

Irene: Yo.

Josef: Way to be late. AGAIN.

Irene: [yawns]. I just had some errands to run.

Josef: Horsecrock. Well, I guess it doesn't matter now. Just get over here and shoot some guys.

Irene [mumbles to herself]: That bastard told a tall tale again. There's nothing here but ugly, poor scoundrels. I better find some good loot and hot knights by the time I'm through.

[Irene joins as an Archer]

[As they fight their way through, Josef passes by the window of a house, where he is watched by an old woman and her 7-year-old granddaughter. The young girl has a throbbing purple scar, resembling a vein, running down her neck. She is fatigued and ill.]

Josef: [To himself] Damn, those guys are tough. I didn't even find the time to steal a loaf of bread before this. I could use a hot meal or two...

[The door of the house opens, and Josef is greeted by the old woman]

Klifa: Josef, is that you?

Josef: Klifa! And hey, it's your granddaughter Bethany.

Klifa: You seem malnourished. Why don't you come in for some hot soup? We have lentils.

Josef: Er... I'm kinda busy at the moment. Did you hear the ruckus from the fight that broke out? Yeah, that was me.

Bethany: Wow, you're as tough as always. Are you winning?

Josef: Heh, you could say that. Oh yeah, I was gonna give you this the next time I saw you.

Bethany: Whoa, it's a Vanot locket! It looks so cool!

Josef: I swiped it from a Vanot soldier last week. Make sure you don't let them see it, though.

Bethany: Thanks so much! I know just what to put in it! [she departs back into the house]

Klifa: Thank you, Josef; this means so much to her. Bethany's health has been getting worse, as I fear the Cursed plague is growing stronger. It's the first time in days I've seen her smile. Please take this; it's all I can offer at this time.

[Josef received 3 vulneraries]

Josef: Thanks a bunch! I'll find a way to repay ya, too. Once I get rich enough from playing Imps, I'll buy you a new house. I won't back out of my promise; I've got my ancestor's hero blood running through me.

Klifa: Oh, don't worry about it. The other townspeople may think less of you, but I've always known you to have your heart in the right place.

Josef: I mean, going off what the prophets at your temple said my fate is, I figured you'd think that.

Klifa: Oh child, I do believe the prophets carry out the will of Batova. But even before they foretold your future, I saw the good in you.

Josef: Hah, you always say that. Anyways, it doesn't matter what they said I'd end up as. I know what I want to do.

Klifa: Ah, I see. Well, all I can say is that Batova's will works in a way I do not understand, but I have my full faith in Him. May the Forgiving Saint keep you safe.

[After a few more turns in the tutorial, enemy reinforcements show up. Among them is Marsello, a 16-year-old beefy dude with straight, spiky bluish chestnut hair, clad in old armor he scavenged from the streets. He is carrying a lance that he found lying around, but which has since been refined and tuned many times by its determined owner.]

Shady Okrah Recruiter: Alright, runts. If you wanna join the Okrahs, you're gonna have to pass some rites. Mow down those three idiots right there, and whoever does it first will have guaranteed membership.

Marsello: Three idiots? They don't mean- damn, just as I thought. Josef... I'm not gonna hold back.

[From behind the recruits: Yuma, an 18-year-old tough looking, short and skinny girl with mean sunken eyes and a bandana, appears as a neutral unit. Strands of dirty indigo hair pop out from underneath her headwear. She wears baggy brown pants and a torn white shirt, with worn leathered armor. Strips of oversized belts and old pads cover her torso and chest, as typical of a poor bandit. Her gloves are also too big for her hands, one of which grasps a large axe.]

Yuma: Yo! Marsello!

Marsello: Yuma? Hey, get out of here! I'm doing something important!

Yuma: Huh, so you're tryna act the older one now? I might be your sister but I've got 2 years on you! And Mom's said we gotta be back by evening to help neighbor Jaune care for her kids!

[The enemies snicker]

Marsello: What are you idiots sniggering at? You know I'm big enough to take all of you at once with one arm. [They stop snickering.]

Shady Okrah Recruiter: Who's this? Someone else wants in? Whatever- anyone's got a shot. Not like any of you are special anyways.

Yuma: Oh... another gang initiation ritual. Who's it on, this time?

Marsello: It's Josef.

Yuma: Josef? Wait, Marsello, you can't do this.

Marsello: What, you think he's a friend? Guy's a scammer. Just go back to Mom.

Yuma: No- he's NOT a friend. Just- you can't let him see you.

Marsello: I don't care what he sees. Leave me alone.

Yuma: MARSELLO! I am NOT leaving you alone to play robbers and barons, you dumb brat! HEY!

[Marsello heads down the map towards the player while Yuma chases after him. When they reach the player's vicinity, Josef calls out to them.]

Josef: Yuma? Marsello? Hey, you two actually came!

Yuma: Oh, drats.

Marsello: What's he talking about? He didn't try to recruit you for one of his schemes again, did he?

Yuma: What do you think?

Marsello: ... You turned him down, right?

Yuma: ... He said we would be fighting against Vanot knights, and they'd be lots of gold. You don't get it, I was really bored and was just shooting some words off.

Marsello: Oh, and PLEASE tell me you didn't say I'd come, too?

Yuma: I thought it'd be funny. I didn't actually expect we'd be here. That's why I tried to drag you out!

Shady Okrah Recruiter: Hey, what's the meaning of this? You two working with this clown?  
Backstabbers!

Yuma: Well, I'd rather work with the clown than a couple of bandits who take themselves too seriously.

[Yuma joins as a Bandit.]

Marsello: Grr, no way I'm with him. I'll prove I'm an Okrah! [He approaches Josef, ready to attack]

Josef: You just gonna turn on me and your sis like that?

Yuma: Yeah, bro. What's mom gonna think when she hears you tried to stab me?

Marsello: I just- UGH. Damn it! If you two weren't here, I definitely wouldn't hesitate to put a lance through whoever they tell me to do in!

Josef: So, I guess you're with us?

Marsello: There's other gangs out there. Better than Okrahs, anyways. Just stay out of their way or next time, I'd be too pissed off to listen to whatever you gotta say.

Yuma: Okay, bro.

[Marsello joins as an Armor.]

Josef: Thanks for coming along, man. You too, Yuma.

Yuma: I just came here by accident.

Marsello: Josef, after we get out of here- if we get out- you better stay out of my way.

Josef: You two are the ones complaining? Me and Carlo over here were the ones who got our promises broken!

Yuma: [In genuine apology] Yeah, sorry about that.



Irene [To Yuma]: What are you apologizing for? I know you came here for the knights, too. I'm so bored right now. But I guess for you, it's the most entertaining thing you've done all week.

Yuma: Shut it, Irene.

Irene: You actually wanted to be here, didn't you? If I knew you were coming, I'd tell you to bring someone other than Marsello.

Yuma: Just keep firing your arrows, or I'll put an axe to your throat.

Irene: At least that'd liven things up here, a bit.

[Player gets to the boss fight]

Okrah gang leader: Well lookie here, you guys made it. Hate to tell you this, but those were all fresh recruits. You won't get pass someone like me. I'll make you see just how 'tough' you and your band of outcasts really are!

[They fight, and the Okrah boss is defeated]

Okrah gang leader: Ughh... you curly haired runt... [He falls.]

Josef: Whew, what a battle. But I'm glad you all came.

Marsello: Vanderblims, Commas... and now the Okrahs. Damn it, Josef! I definitely had it in this time! I was born to be an Okrah!

Carlo: I bet they didn't even bat an eye at you. You just have an active imagination.

Marsello: Why, you-

Yuma: You know, he's got a point.

Marsello: Don't egg with him. He only THINKS he has one.

Yuma: C'mon, let's get out of here. Mom's waiting.

Josef: Fine guys, leave or whatever, I don't care. Me, Carlo, and Irene will take all the loot for ourselves. Isn't that right, I-rene... uh, Carlo, where'd she go?

Carlo: She told me she saw someone cool to talk to, then ran off to find him.

Josef: ... Not again.

Carlo: Well, that's Irene. You know she just uses us.

Yuma: I've always said that you gotta ditch her. Though this time- I mean, you guys did lie and say they'd be rich knights here.

Josef: True, but there aren't any around. I made sure of that. Unless, she must have known they'd... wait, everyone shut the hell up. You hear that?

[Armor clangs in the distance. A knightly voice is heard.]

Knightly voice [shouting]: This is where the disruption is! Men, ready your arms. Those gangs may be untrained, but they're like rats. They'll swarm ya.

Josef: Aw, crap.

Yuma [whispering]: Vanot knights.

Marsello [whispering]: Not just any Vanot knights- it's the elite guard, we don't stand a chance! Someone must've reported that there's a fight breaking out. They're here to round up the gangs. Screw this, Yuma- let's scam!

[Before they can leave, however, a fearsome legion of Vanot knights emerge from the alleyways and surround them.]

Vanot Elite General: Thought you could get away with your scuffles?

Josef: Hey, listen here, bud. We're not gang members. We're just a bunch of ruffians who happened to wander into a fight.

Vanot Elite General: I don't care. A commotion is a commotion. This is where nobles from the Geminal district will be walking through tomorrow for their ceremony! And you dared bloody it with your lowlife blood?

Josef: If we're just a bunch of lowlives, why'd Vanot have to sic the elite guard on us, huh? And I dunno about them, but I'm NO commoner! I'm the last direct descendant of the House of Tarkla!

Yuma [whispering]: Why is he like this.

Marsello [whispering]: We're total goners this time.

Vanot Elite General: Don't make me laugh! Tarkla has been gone for centuries. Every drunkard on the street claims to have their royal blood.

Josef: But I've got the mark to prove it! [He unfurls his shoulder sleeve to reveal a faintly, hard-to-see mark. It barely resembles the Tarkla crest.]

Vanot Elite General: Thompson. Tell me, what does that look like to you?

Thompson: Looks like someone branded themselves with piss and called it a birth mark.

Josef: Don't any of you DARE screw with my family's name like that! I'm a descendant of Rivia- the heroine who was destined to save this god forsaken land from its Curse!

Vanot Elite General: Tch. If you weren't so off your rocker, we'd have you put down on the spot. Telling tall tales of Rivia is a crime of the highest order. She was nothing more than an ordinary princess.

Carlo: No one knows for sure if those stories are real or not. You just call them myths because they undermine Vanot authority.

Vanot Elite General: Insolent. We're doing you all a favor, you know? It's actually because they fill commoners' heads with muck and garbage.

Josef: My dad may have only been a miner, but at least he wasn't some bootlicker like you. There's no doubt in my mind that he had royal blood running in him.

Vanot Elite General: Ah, what kind of royal blood? Whisky, or ale?

Josef: Okay, that's it. [Josef charges at the Vanot elite guard, but another one knocks him out with the back of his lance. Before he passes out, he hears the knights yell, "After them all! Let not a single one escape!"]

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[Time passes. Josef has a flashback to 7 years ago, just after he and Carlo fight the Vanot soldiers]

Young Josef: [lying weary on the ground surrounded by Vanot soldiers] Ugh...

Young Carlo: [also beaten down] Why'd you do that... I signaled to you behind my back that I was bluffing. That concealing spell was meant for us to run away...

Young Josef: He called us Rithilus... I hate that word. They always get away with it... I couldn't let it happen this time too...

Young Markus: [He walks into the scene and looks at Carlo] You put up a convincing performance.

Vanot scout: Heh, I know his type. Quiet, but brags about his smarts when he thinks he's outwitted us. [He turns to Josef] And you! You can keep this worthless piece of bread you stole. A malnourished runt like you can use it. [He throws the soggy bread that Josef stole down on the dirt in front of him. Josef scowls back.]

Vanot soldier: My prince, what are we going to do with them? Round them up for prison?

Young Markus: ... No. If they're dispatched this easily, they don't pose a threat to anyone. We have what we need; no longer should Vanot abuse its power and arrest those who are committing crimes just to save their loved ones. I will not be like my Father.

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[The flashback ends, and more time passes. Then, in a dream-like world, Josef hears a voice. Neither of the two can see one another, but they can listen...]

??? [In the voice of a young girl]: Josef! Can you hear me?

Josef: Ugh... oh, it's you.

???: You're hurt. Are you okay?

Josef: I screwed up again. Even though that bastard had it coming, I messed it all up. Carlo, Yuma, Marsello... what's happening to them? Damn it, if any of them got hurt because of me... no, I won't let this happen. I can't lose them like this. Voice of Light, if I can just find a way to go back and stop myself from being such an idiot, I'll never play a game of Imps again! Just give me a chance!

???: I'm sorry. What has been done is done.

Josef: Then I'll do better next time. I'm done with Imps. What you got for me?

???: All we can do is pray to the Dragon God Batova. We must believe in Him and ask Him to lend us strength.

Josef: If he does, I know I can fix everything I've screwed up. I just want to fix it all!

???: Please, have patience, I will find a way. If it's for you... [her voice fades away]

## PROLOGUE, PART 2: THE PRIESTESS AND HER PRINCESS

[The scene changes, and it is now the past]

### KINGDOM OF TARKLA- 841 MR

[The Kingdom of Tarkla descends from the Red Dragon; its crimson colors pay tribute to this founder. It is surrounded by hot beaches and blue oceans. White castles and houses, decorated by gold and covered by orange rooftops, stand tall against the radiating sun. Its people are cheerful and friendly, dressed in loose garments to stay cool in the heat, though even the sweltering warmth cannot stop them from dancing to the music played in the streets, strummed along by arcane musicians on dark sitars.]

[In a lofty and fancy bed chamber, a young priestess with wintergreen hair that is partly tied in a knot hanging down her shoulder, and dressed in a humble white robe, sits on a bed in a trance. A spoiled princess with a wild red ponytail, and wearing a flowery dress, walks in. She wears several thin necklaces, but some are tucked beneath the top of her dress.]

Rivia: Oh, Sophia!

Sophia: [Frantically breaking out of her trance] Princess Rivia! What's wrong?

Rivia: [Plopping down on the bed next to her servant] It's the Springs. They aren't running properly again.

Sophia: [Breathing a sigh of relief] Well, did you try the incantations I taught you?

Rivia: Yes, but I forgot how to do 'em.

Sophia: You haven't been practicing?

Rivia: Um... well, to be honest, I found them kinda boring.

Sophia: Ah, I see.

Rivia: Um, I hate to ask this, I know you've been really busy but-

Sophia: No worries, Princess Rivia. I will do those incantations for you.

Rivia: Oh Sophia, thank you! [She hugs her friend.] You're the best!

Sophia: Your appreciation is enough. [She smiles, but only faintly].

Rivia: Sophia, you've been really tired lately. The other nobles been overworking ya? Just tell me who and I'll put them in their place!

Sophia: Ah, no, it's just that I've been having these... visions, lately, for the past few months.

Rivia: Visions? I thought you were just doing some meditations or whatever you call 'em. Sophia, you could've told me earlier!

Sophia: It's alright, Princess Rivia. I have not been troubled by them.

Rivia: But what do you see in them? You can tell me.

Sophia: I just-

Revecca: [shouting at a servant in the distance, outside of the chambers] HEY. I thought I told you to get here earlier?

Servant: [trembling] Pr-princess Revecca, I'm sorry-

[A slap is heard. Rivia stands up firm.]

[A noble girl walks into the chambers. She's an 11-year-old girl with a scarfed cloth diagonally wrapped around half of her face, and a robe's cowl covering the top of her head, though her mouth is uncovered. Scattered strands of red hair fall from beneath the cowl onto her face, which is mostly hidden, as the girl wants to hide as much of herself from others as she can.]

Revecca: So, you've been here all along. You said you were gonna get Sophia to come fix the Springs.

Rivia: Just hold it, okay? She's coming.

Revecca: I don't see her at the Springs.

Sophia: Princess Revecca-

Revecca: I didn't say YOU could speak!

Rivia: I've told you before- you have NO RIGHT to speak to her that way!

Revecca: Grr, you are so annoying! She's just a servant! Father speaks to her that way all the time!

Rivia: That's because our father, the KING, has got a lot to manage and the stress gets to him. He's not like you!

Revecca: Yeah, yeah, you keep on thinking that... [suddenly, an aching pain comes across Revecca's face] Ow, owwww... [She holds her hand over her scarfed face]

Sophia: Princess Revecca! [she walks over and places a hand over the young girl's face, and a warm, soothing light is emitted over it] Rivia, please ask the other Sisters to deal with the Spring. They are busy tending to the Gardens, but tell them that this is an emergency. Princess Revecca's ailments need to be tended to.

Revecca: Yeah... yeah, go do that... [she groans in pain]

Rivia: Thank you, Sophia. [Glares down at Revecca] Before I come back, you better not lay a SINGLE finger on her or any other of our servants. Got that?

Revecca: Ow... it hurts...

[Rivia struts out of the room and into the Garden, where she asks the other priestesses to drop what they're doing and go to the Springs. Then she sees her mother with a young noble standing the garden.]

Rivia: Mother. What are you doing here?

Hilatia: Oh, Rivia. I'm just here to show this young noble around our palace. He's visiting from the Kingdom of Bereverant.

Young noble: I am honored to meet you, Princess Rivia. You can call me Sir Gerald.

Rivia: And what kinda business has he got here?

Hilatia: [irritated but masking it] He's just here to see how nice our Kingdom is.

Rivia: Cause he wants it for himself, right?

Gerald: Princess Rivia, I find these Gardens very beautiful. Much like your-

Rivia: Yawn. Another suitor?

Hilatia: Rivia!

Rivia: I told you, Mother. I'm not interested.

Hilatia: Rivia...

[King Sonin walks in. He has a long, pale beard. His frame is skeletal and frail. He dresses in long, incredibly exuberant robes fit for a desert noble, and wears a tall crown-like hat.]

Sonin: Oh! I didn't expect you two to be here. And Sir Gerald of House Dunner. Such lovely company...

Hilatia: My King, I thought you were at an urgent court meeting.

Sonin: Yes, well, um, I ended it a bit early. Peasant revolts and all that; those lesser nobles can be so nagging. Nothing important. [He walks over to the gardens]. Ah, such fragrant roses. Best at this time of the year.

Hilatia: Ahem. Well, Sir Gerald, I apologize for these strange events. Please, help yourself to the food in our dining chambers. Our servants will tend to your every need.

Gerald: But your Highness, I am not bothered by-

Hilatia: Go.

[Gerald departs]

Rivia: At least this one wasn't as creepy as the others. Younger, too.

Hilatia: Rivia... please, for once, just give them a chance.

Rivia: Why me? Why not Revecca?

Hilatia: She is far too young.

Rivia: Oh please. You've been throwing these suitors at me ever since I was 13. You probably woulda done it to me younger too if I hadn't been bedridden as a kid. Bringing other teenage boys over for playdates or whatnot. You thought I was too dumb to see what you were doing?

Hilatia: I know you are smart enough to know the answers to your own questions! Revecca... she was born with those wounds on her face. The boys are too afraid to even look at her.

Rivia: Well. She wasn't born with a pick in her mouth. Or maybe she was. Who knows.

Hilatia: [sighs] Some things just can't be helped.

Sonin: Revecca is just a young girl. I'm sure she will change.

Rivia: Sure she will...

Hilatia: Rivia, we just want to give you the best life we can. Your father and I have tried to give you that which is the most bountiful and beautiful within these palace walls. We do not want you to marry for a political purpose. We want you to find someone who can treat you well.

Rivia: Well, I don't want any of that. It's just irritating. [She pauses] I want to become a great knight and see what's outside of the Kingdom. To visit the Lakes of Clo Eternal. The streets of Baltovia. The Lapis Deserts! I was one of the top students in tactical training, so why can't I have a shot at using what I've learned in the real world?

Hilatia: I'm sorry, Rivia, but the land is not what it once was before your time. The Curse is far too dangerous. The people suffer under it. You will be in danger if you venture to lands outside of the Holy Caravans.

Rivia: I don't care. Aren't I different than them? Maybe the curse won't affect me.

Hilatia: Won't affect you? It has driven nobles in several Houses mad- made them hungry for power! You are lucky that your father and I have not be afflicted! Not only that, but we are nearing war with the Vanot Kingdom!

Rivia: I just don't get why I can't take the risk. You rode with the Lustrous Knights for decades! Did you forget that you were the Silver Knight?

Hilatia: I had to put away such things when I took up the title as Queen. One day, you may be Queen, too. And you will learn that you must sacrifice what you love for the betterment of the Kingdom.

Rivia: Why? Just because we're nobles?

Hilatia: Batova has gifted us with the blood of his generals. All nobles are descended from the First Dragon Muses. More so, you are a direct descendant of the Muse Tarkla. Your duty is repayment for the life you have been given.

Rivia: A gift? I never even asked for this gift! I never asked to be cropped up in these chambers! I can't believe you think this is a blessing. Maybe you just can't see that this is the real curse.

Hilatia: Rivia-

[Rivia storms off]

Sonin: My dear, she is far too young to appreciate these gifts. This beautiful Garden. Please don't burden her with so much stress.

Hilatia: She has just turned 18. She is not too young.

Sonin: Yes, but-

Hilatia: It's not her age. Even some who claim they are 'mature' are too blind to respect what they've been given.

[The Queen departs, leaving Sonin alone in the Gardens. In an oblivious fashion, he takes a moment to forget what just transpired and focuses back on the flowers. Meanwhile, Hilatia walks through the palace halls and into one of Rivia's bedchambers. Rivia is not there. Instead, Hilatia is there to talk to Sophia. The priestess is healing Revecca, who is now asleep.]

Hilatia: Sister Sophia, thank you. How is Revecca doing?

Sophia: She will be fine. Once the Springs flow again, the water will keep her safe for the rest of the day.

Hilatia: Please don't overwork yourself. The magic you use to soothe her pains takes a great toll on you.

Sophia: It is no matter to me, Queen Hilatia. I must give part of myself for the greater good of the Kingdom.

Hilatia: We think alike, Sister Sophia. You and I are among the few who understand. If only the others did, too...

[It is now nighttime. Rivia is alone in her main bedroom chambers, with only the candlelight illuminating her face. She takes a deep breath, standing over a royal axe in her room]

Rivia: [She tries to talk some courage into herself] Okay, Rivia. You've been preparing for this for months. You gotta show Mother that you've got the bravery of a real knight in you. Stop being so scared and just do it!

[Taking a few of her belongings in pouches, and wearing clothes less regal than the ones she usually wears, she dons a robe and sneaks out of the chambers, stealthily climbing over guarded walls and masking her presence with magic. She is just about to head into the pegasi stables when she hears a voice whisper to her from nearby.]

Sophia: Princess Rivia?

Rivia: Sophia! Didn't we already say goodbye? I- I thought I told you that I would be leaving today. Or did I say it was next week? I'm so sorry if I mixed up my dates...

Sophia: No, Princess Rivia, you did not make a mistake. I have been thinking of this ever since we parted ways. And now I have just come to tell you something that comes from my heart.

Rivia: You want to stop me from leaving, too?

Sophia: I want to come with you.



Rivia: Sophia! You mustn't! If the nobles heard that a servant left, who knows what they'd do to you! And you can't go against the wishes of Batova! All Sisters swore to obey the King, as it is-

Sophia: -in accordance to Fate. A few months ago, that is what you thought me to have believed, right? But these visions... something in them is guiding me to do things I would never have done. To open me to new feelings. To go against Fate itself.

Rivia: What? Sophia, are you okay? This isn't like you!

Sophia: Please, Princess Rivia. You must believe what I say. Do it for me.

Rivia: [pauses] I'm so sorry, Sophia. But this is what is best for you. Please keep yourself safe before I come back for you. You are my dearest friend. [She rides on a Pegasus and flies away].

Sophia: Is this truly what is best for me?... [She closes her eyes, and whispers, as if in a trance] Josef...

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[Present Day: Josef wakes up to find him and the others in a large cage. There are also several strangers. Marsello and Yuma are in a separate cage. Each cage is on top of a creature acting as a caravan. They are moving through a bluish desert, and it is night.]

Josef: Ugh... where are we?

Carlo: We're cooped up with all the criminals they've rounded up today. They're making sure none of us escape the town prisons during the ceremony, so they're transporting us all to another one nearby. Right now, we're crossing over the Lapis Deserts.

Klifa: Josef, you're awake.

Josef: Klifa...? They took you, too?

Carlo: It's a good thing she's here. She's been treating your concussion.

Josef: But why would they take her? She's not a criminal. And they took a bunch of kids too, along with guys I know would rather rob a buffet than a store.

Klifa: They claimed I had no right to my land. They say all land belongs to the nobles and they merely let us live on it, so when I refused to leave, they arrested me. They want to tear down my home and make it into a temple for noble priests. That's why the ceremony is held in our poor district- to bless our town grounds in preparations for these new temples.

Josef: What?!? How are you gonna raise Bethany without a house? Those dastards don't give a damn about anyone other than the nobles. I swear that I'll find a way to stop them.

Grumpy Man: [overhearing conversation] Tch, as if someone like you could ever do that.

Josef: You deaf? I said I swore that I will. I swear on my ancestor Rivia.

Grumpy Man: Would you shut up about Rivia for just once? All you ever do is yap about her! The only upside to this whole thing is that our town will never have to listen to another one of your tall tales again!

Josef [talking smack as the man turns away]: Grumpy old man. Someone didn't have his morning oats today. [pauses, then says to Carlo] This was all my fault.

Carlo: Yeah.

Josef: So, how are we escaping this one?

Carlo: It's gonna be tricky. This time, Vanot sent the elite guard down because they needed to make sure not a single criminal would escape. The ceremony is too important. But you see those scruffy looking guys over there? [Carlo nudges his head and Josef sees a bunch of dirty criminals huddled around an arena]

Josef: Hey- that's Imps, isn't it? Hah, well I'm just itching for a game.

Carlo: Not just that, but look what they're betting. Those are mage thieves who each, using portals, hid pieces of an ancient weapon they robbed from tombs. They each have a different piece, and they need to piece them all together. But each one of 'em is too greedy and don't wanna give the weapon away to one person. They want it for themselves. Also, they've shrouded our presence under a cloaking spell, so the guards don't know what they're plotting.

Josef: Why's the weapon in pieces?

Carlo: None of them came from the same group. They all found the pieces separately and sent out a signal to get the others in one location, so they could use their own tricks to get them to give their pieces up. The Vanot sages locked onto their signals and rounded them all up, not knowing what each of their motives were. Luckily for them- and us- they all agreed to bet the pieces in games of Imps. The winner would win the entire weapon, bust everyone out to freedom, and keep the prize, too. Not even a legion of elite guards can stand a chance against that weapon.

Josef: So, I'm guessing that the Vanot sages confiscated everything they hid in portals except for these weapon pieces, cause they were stashed away using forbidden incantations that would be too dangerous to use to hide anything else?

Carlo: Yeah.

Josef: Know what weapon they're betting?

Carlo: You're not gonna believe it... but it's Heraldin.

Josef: No. Way. The lost Holy Axe of House Tarkla? And those bozos have got it right next to us?

Carlo: They all seem pretty sure of it.

Josef: Got it. So, what are you waiting for? Go join them!

Carlo: I couldn't start a game without my right-hand man.

Josef: I figured. I've got the luck you need.

[After they huddle together for a plan, Josef and Carlo saunter over to the group of three thieves with their hands in their pockets, looking tough.]

Josef: Place a hand down for me and my friend here.

Mysterious Mage Thief: Hmm? Whatcha gotta bet?

Josef: This bad boy right here. [He pulls out a charm. The thieves barely glance at it, and all look at one another like it's a kind of joke.]

Veteran Mage Thief: Get lost. If you don't got a Heraldin piece, you're worth nothin' in this game.

Josef: I know what your plans are. Get the Heraldin together, bust out. But how are y'all gonna evade the guards once Heraldin's power runs out? It's gonna fizz out after you give it a few kicks. The only way to get away after the first shockwave is with sheer luck.

Veteran Mage Thief: [grumbles] Hmph. So, you know a thing or two about Heraldin. Who told you your stuff?

Josef: It's a family heirloom. [He shows them his mark, but they laugh at it]

Younger Mage thief: It's far too faint. But you got a point. What's your charm gotta do with this?

Josef: It's a Tarkla Xan. Tie this onto Heraldin, and you can give it more than a swing or two. Far more. Here, take a look at it yourselves. I'm sure you guys are all vetted archeologists. [He holds the charm over a beam of light, illuminating its details.]

Veteran Mage Thief: Hmm, seems legit. None of us think you're actually Tarkla, but that IS a Tarkla Xan. Doesn't matter how you got it. Bet it down, we don't got time to waste.

Josef: Happy to join you guys. [He sits down, gets a hand, but doesn't start just yet] Before we start, can you give me a minute?

[The mage thieves look at one another and raise brows, but the Veteran Mage Thief gestures to allow Josef a minute. Josef starts whispering a prayer to himself, his eyes shut.]

Mysterious Mage Thief: Hey, look at this kid. Mumbling some sort of prayer to the gods. He must be afraid to lose.

Josef: [his eyes still shut but smirking] I saw your hand in the game before this. Someone as bad at Imps as you could use this prayer.

Mysterious Mage Thief: Tch. The only place you'll be praying at when we're done is below my feet.

[The second tutorial begins. Imps is a very short mini-game that teaches the player a few more tactics on how to play the game. It focuses on making moves that increase the probability of out-guessing and countering the opponent.]

PROLOGUE, PART 3: PRINCE OF VANOT

[Past day: Through the Lapis Runes. A barren ground, with white-blue broken porcelain-like arches and pillars from a civilization long gone. Not a pretty sight, but a depressing one.]

Rivia: Ugh... I've been flying for hours now. This has to be the right way to Calciergia. Unless I've messed up Sophia's estimations... AGAIN...

[She buries herself into her pegasus's mane. Sunset turns into dusk, and then night. Rivia is asleep, but just then, she is woken up by shimmering, blue light. She is flying over the Lapis Deserts.]

Rivia: Wha- what is that? No way... I'm here. [She takes a moment to let it all sink in]. I've never seen something like this before. It's nothing like I ever could have imagined. Even more beautiful than how Mother described them in her bedtime stories.

[Suddenly, an arrow is shot at her pegasus, and it falls from the sky.]

Rivia: NO! APHRONITA!

[At the last moment, she puts up a magic barrier to break her fall into the dark azure sand dunes below.]

Rivia [weakened]: Aphronita... Aphronita, wake up.

[A hand grasps Rivia's mouth from behind and pulls her into the shadows of a sand cave]

??? [In a cool, playful and laidback male voice]: Shh...

[Rivia breaks free, draws her sword out and points it at the figure before her. She sees a fit young man with spiky brownish-auburn hair, a gaunt face, and branded seals over his neck and forearms. He is dressed in mercenary clothes.]

Rivia: Let go of me! Never lay a hand on me again!

??? : Sorry, I had to. Can't let those Vanot soldiers know we're here.

Rivia: Why are they after us?

??? : I'm guessing you're just collateral damage. Or maybe they saw the Tarkla insignias on your pegasus and marked you as an enemy.

Rivia: So, you're the one they're actually after. Who are you? A wanted criminal?

??? : The name's Devin. And only as of 2 months ago.

Rivia: Devin... why does that sound so familiar? Wait, you're the missing prince of Vanot!

Devin: And you're... one of the princesses of Tarkla?

Rivia: What? How did you know? [Her grip around her blade tightens]

Devin: You're not very good at hiding things. Happens when you've led a sheltered life. But are you Revecca or Rivia...? Hard to tell.

Rivia: Oh really.

Devin: I kid.

Rivia: My Pegasus just got shot down and you're joking around at a time like this?

Devin: I'm trying to get you to loosen up to me. We're gonna have to trust each other if we're gonna get out of here. I've got some friends nearby. We'll find a way to regroup with them.

Rivia: But wait, just why is Vanot after you? How did you even go missing?

Vanot soldier: Out of the caves! We have you all surrounded!

Devin: No time to explain now. Let's fight our way out!

[After fighting some enemies, the two come across a tricky situation, and Devin begins to propose a plan]

Devin: Let's use that passageway there to lure them in. We'll take them out one by one.

Rivia: No, that won't work.

Devin: How come?

Rivia: All they'll do is wear us down. But if we attack them first, we'd have the advantage of first strike.

Devin: [thinks for a moment] Huh. You're right. Never expected that out of you.

Rivia: Only a few Tarkla nobles are taught tactical techniques. I was bedridden as a kid, so I couldn't play outside for a few years. I pushed my parents to get me instructors, and they eventually said yes. I was pretty good. But after I finished my training, neither of them wanted me to use what I'd learned.

Devin: You must've been disappointed.

Rivia: Yeah. That's why I gotta show them what I've got.

Devin: [to himself] I gotta say, those skills she's got are kinda cool. [to Rivia] Seems like you've got a better sense of these tactics than I do. Well then, princess, lead the way.

[Third part of the tutorial begins. Rivia is a Princess. Devin is a Mercenary.]

Devin: So, what you leaving home by yourself for?

Rivia: All the court wants to do is keep me in the palace, so I snuck out. Now I'm heading to Calciergia.

Devin: Why there? It's been raging on in battles for weeks.

Rivia: That's why I have to go! I have to prove that I can handle myself in battle! And then the court will see I'm fit to be a real knight.

Devin: Aren't real knights loyal to the throne? You'd do best to obey your kingdom's orders if you wanna show you can take the oath.

Rivia: I'm sure Mother and Father can bend the rules for me. I don't need to show I'm loyal. I just need to show them that I'm not as dainty as they think I am!

Devin: [To himself] Man, I don't think even the King can make exceptions to the Knight's Oath. This girl must've been raised to get anything she wants as long as she throws a big enough tantrum. Just how spoiled is she?

[During a fight, Devin takes a needle pick out, clutches another with his mouth, and brands some sort of seal on his arm]

Rivia: OH MY GOD. WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO YOURSELF?

Devin: [He takes the needle in his mouth out with one hand] Hmm? You've never seen a Brander working his craft before?

Rivia: Oh, it's Branding... I mean, of COURSE I know what that is! I just never knew it looked so dirty.

Devin: It's not dirty. It's art. And not just that, but you can do some cool tricks with it.

Rivia: Like what?

Devin: I'll be glad to show you.

[Devin enhances his stats and also gains a few other skills, then defeats an enemy with ease.]

Rivia: That's... interesting.

Devin: I'm happy you like it.

Rivia: I don't like it. I just said it's interesting.

Devin: Want me to give you one?

Rivia: NO. Don't let that needle come anywhere near me.

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[Present Day: The prisoners play Imps. Josef and Carlo struggle but manage to go to the top after several rounds]

Josef: Damn Carlo, back in Umber Town, I really should've listened to your advice about those green Imps. If I did, we wouldn't have lost to those Orkahs.

Carlo: Heh. Well, so far, so good. Just a bit more and we've got the Holy Axe right where we want it.

Josef: I can't believe this. It's too good to be true.

[As he whispers one final prayer for the last round, the Mysterious Mage Thief listens in closely and carefully]

Josef: [in a hush]

"To Batova, may you guard us from the Merciless Hunger;

To the Four Generals, may your strength enliven us to resist temptation;

And though we ask for your gifts;

Humans are and forever will be tainted by sin;

To be righteous, we must walk in the footsteps of the paragons of lore;

For it is the Forgiving Saint's sacrifice that will save us."

[Upon hearing the final line, the Mysterious Mage Thief becomes stricken.]

Mysterious Mage Thief: Oh, so that's what you've been whisperin'?

Josef: What?

Mysterious Mage Thief: Forget it. Let's just keep playin'.

[They play, and through gritted determination, the Umber Town ruffians win.]

Josef: I can't believe it.

Carlo: It's really happening! Alright folks, you know the drill. Thieves' code of honor.

Mysterious Mage Thief: HOLD ON! I've got one last bet to make.

Carlo: What could you possibly have that will make us want to risk giving up Heraldin?

Mysterious Mage Thief: See for yourself. [He uncovers the coverings over his right forearm to reveal a nearly broken, faded pendant on a wrist cuff. Though it looks worthless, something about it speaks to Josef.]

Josef: What's that?

Mysterious Mage Thief: An Emblem. Far more ancient than even Heraldin. I found it ages ago in some buried tomb, but I don't want it anymore. The winner of this final round can have both the Emblem and Heraldin... should ya choose to play.

Carlo: Hah. No one's ever heard of such a thing. What makes you think we're gonna believe you, ya scammer? Right, Josef?

[Josef stares at the Emblem. There is something about it that draws him towards it.]

Josef: [pauses] Carlo.

Carlo: What's up?

Josef: I'm in.

Carlo: Josef, are you mad?

Josef: Probably. But I told you to trust me and my Luck instincts, didn't I?

Carlo: Yeah, but those don't work all the time.

Josef: This time, it's stronger than anything I've felt before. Plus, I'm the one making the bets. I've got the Xan to offer.

Carlo: Damn it Josef...

[Suddenly, there's a cold wind, and dark blue descends upon the desert. It is as if a horrifying beast is hovering over the caravan, but nothing can be seen in the sky.]

Younger Mage thief: What the hell is happening?

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[Past day: During the tutorial, Rivia and Devin have regrouped with a few other units, who joined one by one.]

Devin: Guys, this is Rivia. She's a pretty good tactician. Rivia, I'd like you to meet a few of my colleagues. This here's Esteban, he's a pretty tough sellsword.

[Esteban has olive skin and slick back purple hair. He has a faint scar that's hardly visible, and tries to dress as well as he can using the few clothes he can afford. He joins as an Archer.]

Esteban: Nice to meet ya, princess.

Rivia: You too? How does everyone know I'm a princess? I'm dressed in rags!

Devin: Those... are a bit too nice to be rags.

Rivia: Hmph, maybe to someone like you.

Esteban: Sheesh, she's got a mouth on her.

Devin: Oookay, so moving on, this here's my pal Jordan. He's one of the mages who put up cloaking spells for our guild. And his girlfriend Lyra. She gets us in through some tight spots.

[Jordan is a fat, laidback man with a bushy hair and beard; he is dressed in clean blue robes. He joins as a Mage. Lyra is thin and has dark, sunken eyes, along with eye bags indicating a lack of sleep. However, she is energetic and cheerful. She joins as a Thief.]

Jordan: Pleasure to meet ya.

Lyra: Howdy!

Rivia: Hey. [Turns to Devin] So how'd you meet these guys, anyways? You guys seem too close to have met just 2 months ago.

Devin: Well, every once in a while, I'd do my own thing away from the court. I'd go off to travel the lands, meet a couple of new faces, or catch up with ones I've befriended before.

Rivia: Your father lets you do that?

Devin: It's not what he wants. But it's not like he can stop me, either. I'm a prince, after all.

Rivia: That's what I tell my mother! And she always says a noble's gotta tend to the palace, or something.

Devin: Maybe Tarkla just has different traditions. Anyhow, after I finish doing my princely duties, I just take a few weeks on horseback to rest up in the Springs in Clo, or visit the markets of Bereverant.

Rivia: That sounds amazing. I wish my mother would let me do that. Still though... it doesn't sound very princely. I'm sure your people don't like it when you go.

Devin: I'll give my life to protect them. But I'm not really bothered by what they think.

[Suddenly, a cold wind descends upon the group, and darkness envelops the sands beneath their feet. Shivers run down Rivia's spine.]

Rivia: Wh- what is that?

Devin: Dang, it's here, too?

Rivia: What is?

Lyra: How'd you not know? The Curse, of course!

[A loud howl shrieks in the distance]

Rivia: The Curse? Oh, by the gods... it's more terrifying than I could have ever imagined...

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[Present day. The prisoners and their captors feel their nerves trembling before the cold, dark winds. There is an ominous presence within them.]

Veteran Mage Thief: Sadistyx. The Curse.

Younger Mage thief: I-impossible! The Vanot wards should've repelled it!

Veteran Mage Thief: The Curse must have gone stronger. And it's getting even worse by the second. What're you fools waiting for? Either give that kid what he's earned, or let's play the last round of the night!

Josef: I'll make this quick.

[They start playing the game.]

Mysterious Mage Thief: [As they assemble the new board] Not gonna need another prayer?

Josef: Don't got the time.

Mysterious Mage Thief: Trust me. You're gonna need it on this one.

[Josef raises a brow towards him, but knows he's right. He starts chanting twice as fast as before as the game begins. This time, Josef and Carlo are at a disadvantage. The Mysterious Mage Thief has the upper hand, and seems to be winning. But just as he gets it, the shadow descends. And all is covered in darkness. Josef seems to be transported into another realm. He feels the presence of the voice of light.]

Josef: [pauses] I couldn't live up to my promise, could I? Imps was what got us into this in the first place. I said I wouldn't play again. But I just did. It's all over.

???: [To herself] Why does this setting feel so familiar? Did I see it in my dreams? If so, then that means... [To Josef] Josef, please, you have to listen to me. You have to win!

Josef: What?

???: You have to win the Emblem!

Josef: So that's why I've been drawn to it. You've been wanting me to take it this entire time. Is that how we're gonna fix things?

???: I- I believe so.

Josef: Believe so? I thought you were a voice from the gods or something! How can you not know?

???: I feel the blessings of the gods upon me. They have told me how you can win. Look at the board...

[The mysterious voice guides Josef to reveal the winning strategy, which depends on an incredibly risky move that has almost no chance of winning. There is a great gamble involved, but the voice reassures him]

???: Please. Just believe in me.

[The shadow dissipates, and Josef plays one final move. When everything is finally clear, the mages see that Josef has won.]

Mysterious Mage Thief [to himself]: Just as I thought. There's no mistake that he's the one. He'll take care of that Emblem better than I ever could've.

[But a second later, they hear screams from outside the cage.]

Veteran Mage Thief: The monsters of the Curse took out those Vanot knights! We've got bigger problems than our captors now!

Mysterious Mage Thief: TAKE IT, BOY! IT'S ALL YOURS!

[All the mage thieves reach their hands out and summon pieces from the portal. The pieces assemble into the Holy Axe Heraldin, and with one fell swoop, Josef swings it to break open the cages that hold the prisoners captive. The Vanot knights guarding them do not care for their escape, however, as they are being assaulted by dark creatures all around them. Josef tries to swing again, but realizes now that the Axe's powers are greatly weakened]

Mysterious Mage Thief: FOOL! YOU FORGOT TO ENCHANT IT WITH THE XAN!

Josef: I- ERGH! Carlo, you see Klifa?

Carlo: [He shakes his head] No.

Josef: Damn! What about Yuma or Marsello?

Carlo: I can't see anyone; we can't go about searching for them with all these beasts around! We gotta go hide!

[The shadows descend, and the mages erect towering waves of sand to shield against incoming attacks. The prisoners run into a maze of giant sand dunes and caverns to hide, but it is too late for some. Josef, Carlo, and the Mysterious Mage Thief run into a cavern, but before they can get in, a flying shadow throws a piercing shard towards Josef. Before it hits, the Mysterious Mage Thief takes the blow for him, and it strikes through his heart. The three enter the cavern. The Mysterious Mage Thief lies against a rocky wall, taking his last breaths]

Josef: Damn man, why'd you do that? You don't even know me!

Mysterious Mage Thief: [whispering] To Batova... may you guard us...

Josef: What?

Mysterious Mage Thief: The prayer. [coughs] It's all coming back to me. I want to hear its words one last time.

Josef: You knew the Prayer of the Forgiving Saint?

Mysterious Mage Thief: Everyone round these parts knows it by heart. My pops used to recite it all the time. Course [coughs], I lost faith in it after it couldn't save him from death. Couldn't give him luck when he needed it the most.

[The dying thief finishes reciting the rest of the prayer]

Josef: You knew it the whole time.

Mysterious Mage Thief: [coughs again] May you be granted safe passageway... through this accursed world... with that beautiful priestess's prayer.

[The Mysterious Mage Thief dies]

#### PROLOGUE, PART 4: DYAD OF TIME

[Past day]

Vanot commander: Damn it, we can't track the exiled prince and fight these monsters at the same time. Soldiers, focus your efforts on those abominations of Batova!

Devin: The Curse is attacking the Vanot soldiers. This is our chance to escape.

[The group makes its way through the desert, hiding in the sand dunes whenever there is danger. However, the journey is long and treacherous, and even at night, the heat is unbearable. Rivia starts to see something in the distance.]

Rivia: What is that...? I hear screaming...

Esteban: Nah, you're just imagining things.

Devin: She's not. That's one of the Mirage Villages right there.

Rivia: A village?

[From the sky, dark creatures descend into the village]

Rivia: The Curse is heading there! We have to go save it!

Esteban: No way, we gotta get out of here!

Devin: Rivia, it's too dangerous. Those Beasts are far too tricky and unpredictable; we don't know how to counter their strategies. The only way we can get the upper hand is if we're one step ahead of them.

Rivia: [To herself] Darn, why can't I talk back? Do I think he's right? I want to help them but something in me just wants to run away, too!

[A winged creature flies down from the sky. At first, the shadows of the night cloak it, and Rivia believes it is a winged Beast. But as the moonlight illuminates it, Rivia recognizes it as a pegasus. Using a spell, it is able to negate attacks firing upon it.]

Rivia: Sharna? Then that must mean- SOPHIA!

Sophia: Princess Rivia, I'm sorry. But I had to.

Rivia: Sophia, you can't be here!

Sophia: I have already made my decision. I must save that village.

Rivia: We- we were just talking about that. How did you know?

Sophia: It was in my dreams- they foretold this moment, and showed me a way. But you have to trust every word I tell you.

Rivia: If you say so... then I will.

Esteban: Who's this? We're just gonna blindly follow her around?

Devin: I don't like where this is headed either...

Rivia: Trust me, she's served me since we were kids. She just stopped one of those winged Beasts' attacks! If anyone can help us and the village, it's her.

Devin: Well, if there's a shot, we can't let that village burn to the ground. Esteban, you in?

Esteban: [sighs and tries to look on the bright side] A village in the Lapis Deserts must got some rare valuables to pay out. Count me in.

Lyra: Jordan and the rest of us are, too.

Devin: Glad to hear it.

Sophia: [To Rivia] Sharna is too hurt to fight. We have to let her fly away and go by foot under a cloaking spell.

Rivia: Okay. I trust you; lead the way.

[Sophia joins as a Cleric. Clerics cannot attack; they heal and conjure spells.]

[They head towards the village. As they are walking, Rivia and Sophia have a private conversation]

Sophia: Are you alright, my Princess?

Rivia: Yeah. It's just. I dunno. I really want to save 'em. But I haven't done anything like this before.

Sophia: Are you scared?

Rivia: A little. No, I take that back. A lot.

Sophia: I'm here to keep you safe. If your heart still troubles you, I can sing you your mother's lullaby.

Rivia: Thanks. I think having you next to me is all I need to work through it. [pauses] Sophia, I've been meaning to tell you this since I saw you again, but I'm sorry I didn't make the time to listen to what you were gonna say about those visions.

Sophia: It's alright.

Rivia: So, just, what are they?

Sophia: [takes a deep breath] In some dreams, I see a boy. I can never see his face, but I hear his voice. In other dreams, another voice- a hauntingly familiar one- speaks to me, telling me about his future. It's as if I need to guide him. There was something else in my dream, too. An artifact- [But out of nowhere, Sophia gasps]

[The group is halfway there, and have just stepped onto fertile soil.]

Sophia: I feel faint...

Rivia: Sophia! What's wrong?

Esteban: She don't look so good.

Devin: She need some food or something?

Sophia: It's the trance; it's happening again.

Rivia: No, no- SOPHIA!

[The priestess falls into a deep trance]

~~~~~

[Present day]

Carlo: So, this is where it ends. In a desert grotto, dined upon by Beasts under the pale blue moonlight.

Josef: You've been thinking up those words instead of thinking of a way outta this?

Carlo: Hey man, I've thought of everything I can. There's just no way.

Josef: Well I won't give up that easily. We WILL find a-

[Suddenly there is a rumbling, and shadows seep into the cave, making black shards rain down. One of them hits Josef in the shoulder]

Josef: Uggh!!!

Carlo: HEY! I told you to watch it, man... [he takes out a vulnerary and tries to heal him] It's no use. The wound won't seal and you're losing blood way too fast. Josef? JOSEF!

[Josef finds himself back in the light of the dream]

???: Please, Josef, please hear my voice.

Josef [weakened]: Voice of Light!

???: I sense that you are hurt. I can help you!

Josef: Just... tell me what I gotta do...

???: You must leave the cave. Head northwest towards the Ruins of the Twisted Lion.

Josef: But there's nothing there... nothing but sand worms and quicksand...

???: Believe in me. I will never lead you astray.

Josef: I... I will...

[Josef awakens]

Carlo: Yo man, you scared the crap out of me. I thought you were gone!

Josef: I got a plan. But we gotta head towards the Twisted Lion.

Carlo: Hah, but I'm sorry man. You're delirious.

Josef: You gonna listen to me or die in some cave like some coward?

Carlo: You got a point there.

[The fourth and final tutorial begins. The two exit the cave, spot the stripped ruins that resemble a lion, and run towards it. Along the way, they hide in a cavern, and see the Veteran Mage Thief]

Josef: How you holding up?

Veteran Mage Thief: Could be better.

Carlo: Where's the other guy?

Veteran Mage Thief: Couldn't make it. What about you two?

Josef: We're heading towards the Twisted Lion.

Veteran Mage Thief: And tell me, why in the hell would you want to do that?

Josef: I just... got a vision of sorts.

Veteran Mage Thief: You truly are insane. Not just in Imps; you're insane all around. But I saw how you played. I've gone through all the possibilities, and it's a damn miracle you won that final round. By the Grace of Batova, just what kind of prayers have you been saying?

Josef: I don't know, either. I just do stuff. It's my Luck.

Veteran Mage Thief: Well if that's all we got right now, then let me lend you my knife.

Josef: I dunno, Carlo. Does he seem trustworthy?

Carlo: He did hold up his end of the deal after we won that game. Seems like a guy who follows the Thieves Code of Honor.

Veteran Mage Thief: Then I look forward to working with ya. I'm Eren, a cradle robber. Let's just say I know a thing or two about desert ruins.

[Eren joins as a Sage Thief. When they spot an opening, they head out and go towards the ruins. But the Beasts swarm them.]

Carlo: Damn, this is crazy! They're flying right above us!

Josef: Almost... there...

[Beasts surround them on all sides]

Eren: Grr...

Carlo: [getting in battle position] At least you were right on one thing: it's much better to die fighting than on my knees.

[Josef's wounds are bleeding faster, and he begins to get light-headed again]

Josef: [weakened] Voice of Light...

[In his dream-like trance]

???: Did you get there? To the ruins of the Twisted Lion?

Josef: I did all you told me to. All it's done is get us surrounded by Beasts!

???: I-I'm sorry.

Josef: You said you'd never lead me astray. Don't break your promise!

???: I- I... [gasps] What is that you wear around your wrist?

Josef: How can you see my wrist? And that rusted Emblem? You were the one who told me to- WHOA!

???: The Emblem... it's changed form and become reinvigorated.

Josef: It definitely did not look like that when I last saw it.

???: I recognize its markings. This must be the legendary Fire Emblem; I have only heard of what it does in myths. If they are true, then I know what I must do.

[From the light, an outline of a young girl emerges. For the first time, Josef sees not a voice, but a figure reaching towards him with her hand. It touches the Emblem, and at last, they see each other. The girl is Sophia.]

Josef: [shocked] You're not at all who I imagined. You're just some ordinary girl. You sure you can save us?

Sophia: On Batova's Name, I promise. [pauses] When you awaken, find a patch of red bell-flowers near you, and drink from it.

Josef: Patch of red bell-flowers? There weren't any red bell-flowers back there. Hell, there wasn't anything at all except dirt!

Sophia: Forgive me, for I was not able to give you reassurance; but this time, I won't let you down! I swear to Batova!

~~~~~

[Past day. Sophia wakes up from her trance]

Sophia: I- I'm sorry Rivia. I didn't mean to.

Rivia: It's okay. Let's just continue walking.

Sophia: Please excuse me. [She walks away from them, then walks around in a wide circle, bending down every one in a while, taking something out of her pouch then patting her hands down on the ground. The others look at each other in complete confusion.]

Devin: What in the world-

[Sophia is seen planting seeds in soil]

Esteban: You're stopping to plant seeds in the ground? You priestesses are insane!

[She returns to the center of the circle and takes out a strange item- a drink- then puts a seed into it. She buries it into the ground, too]

Esteban: And now you're wasting an elixir? Just what is running through that head of yours?

Sophia: [She closes her eyes, going into another trance] I'm offering a gift to the gods.

~~~~~

[Present day]

Carlo: Man, they're closing in. It was an honor to fight with you.

Eren: Right back at ya, kid.

[Just then, time and space appear to bend into warps. All around them, pockets of space twist into an incredibly fast time lapse of images over hundreds of years. From the roots of the soil, trees grow all around, until a forest appears and surrounds them. Carlo and Eren sidestep roots sprouting beneath their feet; Carlo puts a still unconscious Josef on his back as they dance around the changing landscape. When the changes are finished, the three find themselves in an enchanted forest, one blessed with incantations that ward off Cursed Beasts]

Carlo: What the hell?

[Josef wakes up]

Carlo: Hey, you seeing this?

Josef: She kept her promise after all... then that means... [He pushes himself off Carlo and crawls through the ground]

Josef: Red bell-flowers... red... flowers...

Carlo: Hey Josef, what are you doing?

Josef: Found 'em. [He digs into them, and starts to drink their nectar. The wounds on his shoulders close up, and he collapses on his back, rejuvenated]

Eren: By the dragon gods! In all my decades of travel, I have never come across this sort of magic. What sort of sorcery is this?

[In the distance, Marsello, Yuma and other prisoners are fighting off Beasts while jumping from collapsing cave to collapsing cave. They see the sudden emergence of a new forest]

Marsello: What is THAT?

Yuma: It looks like- [she squints further]- a Sacred Forest.

Marsello: A what? Holy hell, the Beasts are running away from it! And you see that? It's burning some of them up!

Yuma: We gotta get to it; it'll keep us safe. C'mon!

[Back at the main party]

Carlo: So, you good to fight?

Josef: Ready more than ever.

Eren: We're almost at the ruins. Who cares where this forest came from; if it's in our favor, I won't ask questions.

~~~~~

[Past day. The player advances Rivia's group.]

Esteban: Well, that was just bizarre.

Rivia: Sophia, are you okay? What did you just do?

Sophia: It's hard for me to explain now. But I promise I will tell you later.

Devin: Damn, those dastards are persistent. But we're almost there.

[Present day. As both past and present journey into the village, Cursed Beasts continue to attack]

Carlo: Surrounded again! Josef, get us another one of those forests!

Josef [to himself]: How am I ever gonna do that? Wait; the Fire Emblem was what saved us before. I gotta try it again.

[He touches the Fire Emblem, and sees Sophia]

Josef: I don't know what you just did, but we could use a little help here!

Sophia: I will do what I can.

[More forests appear. Now, the player must alternate between past and present-day maps to advance. Since Josef's group spends time fighting in the forests, Yuma and Marsello are able to catch up.]

Yuma: Josef!

Josef: Yuma? Marsello? You guys made it!

Marsello: You bastard! You dragged us into being captured as prisoners, so you better drag us out!

Yuma: Josef, what's happening with all these forests?

Josef: I don't know. But we gotta get to those ruins.

Yuma: Why...?

Josef: Just trust me! It's something to do with this Emblem right here.

Yuma: Well, that just sounds nuts, but if you got a plan out of this, then lead the way.

[Yuma and Marsello rejoin the group as player units.]

[Eventually, the player arrives near the ruins, and see a faint image of a ruined village in the ruins]

Josef: What is that? A mirage?

Carlo: No, I see it, too.

Eren: That's no mirage. By the gods, it's real. One of the hidden villages in the Lapis Sands.

[They enter, but do not find anything other than a ruined, abandoned village torn apart by monsters from long ago.]

Eren: The hell? There's nothing here! How's this supposed to keep us safe?

Marsello: I'm getting the chills.

Yuma: I-it's no big deal...

Carlo: Guys, the Beasts are here, too!

[Josef touches the Emblem and sees Sophia. The past group has reached the village, which is under attack]

Josef: What is this place? A graveyard? Why did you lead us here?!? Wait a minute- I can see where you are. Those buildings. This looks like the same village! But it's not in shambles, and there's actually people in it!

Sophia: So, it is true. The Fire Emblem allows those from the future to speak to those from the past. I finally understand why those dreams have led me to this village.

Josef: I'm from your future? Just who are you?

Sophia: My name is Sophia. Right now, we must help these villagers. Once they are saved, you will be saved, too.

Josef: How?

Sophia: The Cursed Beasts that walk the deserts in your time have grown far stronger than they were in our time. Yet we still cannot best them in our time and must rely on predicting their strategies and movements. However, the aftermaths of their battles leave marks on the earth. If you can inform us what strategies they used, we can counter them!

Josef: So, by getting rid of these beasts in the past, we can get rid of them in the future, too.

Sophia: Some of them. Each one has a unique identifying mark. We can coordinate to match the past and future counterparts together.

Josef: And saving this village is gonna help us, too?

Sophia: Once it overcomes this, the village is sure to fortify itself to prepare for future attacks. If the myths I heard were correct, then the more parts of the village we save, the more reinforcements you should have in the future. Then, over the next few hundred years, the people of this village will extinguish the ancestors of the Cursed Beasts.

Josef: It sounds like there's a million things wrong with that, but I'll go with it for now.

[The player coordinates between the two maps and defeats the enemies on it]

[Past day]

Devin: Yeah, we got 'em.

Esteban: I can't believe we got out of that one alive. It's a miracle.

Villager: [To Rivia] We cannot repay you enough. Our village has cut itself off from the rest of the world for centuries, as we protect these rare pegasi from falling into the wrong hands. Please, allow us to gift each and every one of you with them. There are dozens of them, which should be enough for the twenty or so mercenaries and mages in your ranks.

Rivia: Thank you. [She receives a pegasus, then says to herself] But Aphronita, I don't know if I'm ready for another pegasus...

Sophia: [To the villager] I, too, thank you for the gift.

Rivia [whispering to Sophia]: How did you know how those Beasts would attack?

Sophia: It was... [She then realizes that it's too sudden to explain it in detail] ... a blessing by the gods.

Rivia: Then I give them my utmost gratitude. Wait... I see someone in the distance. Vanot soldiers!

~~~~~

[Present day]

Eren: I don't know what just happened, but I'm grateful to whatever helped us. Never thought I'd say those words ever again...

Marsello: Man, this day sucks!

Yuma: Guys, I don't think we can celebrate just yet. Look!

Carlo: The Vanot wardens... we saved everyone from the Cursed Beasts, and now they're back!

Josef [to himself]: This time's gonna be different. You Vanot scum have no idea what kind of power I've got on my side now.

PROLOGUE: AFTERMATH

[Present day. Vanot soldiers surround the group in the village.]

Vanot Elite Guard #1: I don't think I've properly introduced myself. I am Fegalis, a general of the Vanot Elite Guard. So, you've managed to survive the Cursed Beasts.

Josef: Yeah, and we're ready to take you on, too!

Yuma [whispering]: We? Everyone's worn out from that fight! You can barely even lift your shoulder!

Josef [whispering]: Hey, didn't you see all that magic stuff happen in our fight? I've got this.

Eren: I wouldn't be so sure about that, kid. Look up.

[A winged battalion of wyvern knights descends upon the battlefield]

Carlo: They called in reinforcements when the Cursed Beasts came.

Marsello: Crap, we don't stand a chance against 'em.

Josef: Don't worry, guys.

[Josef touches the Fire Emblem and speaks to Sophia]

Josef: You seeing this? A buncha wyverns. Got anything in mind? I'd say we can probably move those rocks around with magic and let the tectonic plates make a mountain or something to block 'em...

Sophia: Josef...

Josef: Hold on, you guys are surrounded by Vanot soldiers, too?

Sophia: And we are all worn out. We must retreat.

Josef: But we've got the Fire Emblem on our side! We've got them next to the rocks; we can't give up now!

Sophia: I... I will think of what we can do...

[Josef returns back to the material realm]

Fegalis: Wait... something seems off. It was like I was in a trance when I came here, but now I remember. This village didn't exist here before; our scouts have surveyed this land in the past and only found ruins. And those forests... wherever you went, they appeared. Do you plan to use the same tricks on us, too?

Josef: [To himself] What...? We changed the past and now it's like two separate timelines are messing with one another...

Fegalis: This is the work of demons! Guards, bring them out!

[The guards bring out re-captured prisoners. Among them is Klifa]

Klifa: J-Josef? Help us...

Fegalis: We're certain some of these are your neighbors and allies. Pull another sorcerer's trick on us and we shall kill these criminals.

Josef: DON'T YOU DARE!

~~~~~

[The past. The group is also surrounded by Vanot soldiers.]

Vanot Elite Commander: Devin, this is the end for you! Your insolence will not go on any further!

Devin: Really? All this just because I pointed out the obvious...

Rivia: What did you even do to make them hate you? I can't even begin to imagine.

[A horned, gigantic wyvern descends into the village. Its rider, clad in dark Vanot armor, looks nearly identical to Devin except his hair is shorter, his face is sterner and more aggressive, and he has no branded seals. This intimidating young man speaks.]

Cavone: Brother.

Devin: ...

Rivia: [whispering to Devin] That's- that's Prince Cavone! I've heard of him! He's the one who's after you? You two look almost the same...

Devin: We're twin brothers. But we're nothing alike. Wanna take a guess why?

Rivia: Well, he looks far more composed and determined. And the knights around him all seem so loyal, like they'll give their lives up for him without hesitation. He doesn't have any advisors or right-hand generals, unlike every other commander I've seen. He's just on the front line... alone.

Devin: That stuff's what everyone thinks at first. But don't let it all distract you. Just listen to him closely. You'll see.

Cavone: Devin. Tell me how you defeated those monsters.

Devin: I was blessed by the gods.

Cavone: So, my assumptions were correct. Dumb luck is the only way someone like you could have ever pulled off such a feat. [turning away from Devin, and whispering to himself] What does he truly mean? This is a trap, isn't it? He's bluffing... you must tell me what to do. Tell me, and I shall repay you.

Rivia: What's he doing?

Devin: He does that sometimes. Consults out loud to himself. Or with whatever voices he hears in his head.

Rivia: What?

Cavone: [booming to all] Then it is decided. This village will be of strategic use for our conquest of the Four Kingdoms. Now that it is free from the dangers of the Curse, we will make good use of it.

Rivia: Prince Cavone! Do you know who I am?

Cavone: [to himself] Who is that? A commoner? No- she bears the brand of a Tarkla royal. [to Rivia] What business does a Tarkla Royal have with my traitorous brother?

Rivia: I'm Princess Rivia of House Tarkla! I know our Kingdoms are at war, but I also know we've been discussing peace treaties for some time! The officials say this is neutral land- if you take it, the other two neutral kingdoms will know you've broken your promises, and they won't trust Vanot anymore!

Cavone: If you are the princess of House Tarkla, then has Tarkla allied themselves with a Vanot criminal?

Rivia: No! We just met; I didn't even know he'd be here! I'm not on some political mission or anything!

Cavone: Then you do not speak for Tarkla. Only your ineffectual King has the final word. And he has given up those treaties of peace.

Rivia: Liar! Father couldn't have!

Devin: It's true. I'm guessing you're not involved with court politics. But everyone knows King Sonin doesn't care about the lands around him.

Rivia: But- but... no... Father...

Cavone: Seize this village and take it under Vanot control. Then, capture my traitorous brother and his conspirators.

Jordan: Scary guy. Looks like he could use a herbal drink or two.

Lyra: I definitely need one of those right now.

Esteban: Screw this! I don't get paid enough to deal with Vanot dastards!

Sophia: What should I do? We can't stay here, but Josef needs me more than ever...

~~~~~

[Present day. Another wyvern, bigger and grander than all the rest, descends upon the land. Its rider has light blue short hair and sunken eyes, tired from stress and pressure. But he stands tall and noble, giving off the quintessential disposition of a prince.]

Markus: Fegalis.

Fegalis: Prince Markus! This village. These villagers. They shouldn't exist. Those Rithilus did this with some sort of dark, forbidden magic!

Markus: I noticed it too. [He looks towards Josef] Wait... he looks familiar. But from where?

Josef [to Carlo]: It's that guy from 7 years ago- it's that holier-than-thou prince!

Carlo: I remember he was more level headed than the rest, but this time, we're not in it for some petty crime.

Josef: Yo, Markus! Remember me?

Fegalis: Insolent whelp! That is no way to address the prince!

Markus: I seem to. How do you know me?

Josef: 7 years ago, in that alleyway. The meds for my dad, remember that?

Markus: ... I do.

Josef: Then if you're a man of your word- if you really don't wanna be like your scumbag dad- let those prisoners go!

Markus: I'm afraid I cannot do that.

Josef: Tch, just like I thought. Looks like you couldn't keep it up. You've become just like him!

Markus: I do not wish to harm these prisoners before they are put on fair trials. But you pose far too much of a threat. Explain where this village came from, lay down your weapons, and we shall not harm them.

Josef: Alright, alright. See this? Us 'commoners' might not know it, but I heard you nobles were taught all about it in your myths. [he shows his wrist cuff pendant to Markus]

Markus: [To himself] What's that? I seem to recognize it from the texts I was taught. [To Josef] That's the Fire Emblem!

Josef: If you clowns don't stand down, I'm gonna mess with the past and make sure none of you were even born!

Carlo: Mess with the past? [Thinks for a moment] It's so crazy, but it all makes sense now.

Eren: That's why he needed me to decipher those runes. Could he truly have changed the past...?

Fegalis: [To himself] This is madness! Such dark and evil powers- that boy dare believe he can harness such an uncontrollable might? [To Josef] You are in over your head, fool!

Josef: Heh, looks like you're scared-

[Suddenly, distortions in space and time appear throughout the village]

Josef: What's happening?

Fegalis: THE DEMONIC FORCES!

~~~~~

[The past]

Villager: Please, your highness, we will trade you whatever you need, just do not pull our village into war!

Cavone: That is not for you to decide. A unified land can only become stronger. Under a single noble ruling class, Myonkos shall prosper.

Devin: [To Rivia] Our mages can use a cloaking spell and hold them off. This is our only chance to get away.

Rivia: [trembling] But those villagers-

Devin: We're all worn out, there's nothing else we can do! At least we saved them from being killed by those monsters!

Rivia [To herself]: I'm sorry, guys. I guess this is as far I can help. [To Sophia] Sophia?

Sophia: This can't be... I have to help him...

Rivia: Sophia, we gotta get outta here! We've done enough for them! We gotta think of ourselves!

Sophia: [shuts her eyes] How could a priestess of Batova abandon people in their time of need?

Rivia: But what about me? If anything happens to you, I can't go on. Please, Sophia.

Sophia: ... then I will go. I serve House Tarkla above all else. [To herself] Josef, you must escape, too.

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[The present]

Markus: Fegalis, steady yourself! This is not how a commander should act!

Fegalis: No, no, this is no ordinary matter! Tell that boy to stand down RIGHT NOW!

Markus: Josef, stop this at once!

Josef: But I'm not doing anything!

Fegalis: Lies! ALL LIES!

Klifa: Josef, what is happening?

Josef: Klifa! Just wait a damn second, Fegalis, I'll have your head if you point even just the tip of your lance at her!

Eren: Kid, don't provoke him any further!

Markus: Fegalis, I forbid you from giving any more orders!

Fegalis: You- you, prince, do not have the authority to do so, anymore. The King has had enough of your numerous acts of disobedience, for all these years. He has instilled a clause that gives us generals the right to override you should we vote in majority. And now, they are all on my side!

Markus: How did I not know of this? [He looks around and sees all the other generals have sided with Fegalis] That scoundrel!

Fegalis: THIS IS YOUR LAST WARNING! GUARDS!

Markus: FEGALIS, NO!

[The guards ready themselves, and one by one, they stab the hearts of the prisoners with their lances]

Klifa: Oh, Great Batova, who watches us in his dreams, grant us mer- AAAAAAHHHHHH!

[Klifa dies]

Josef: FEGALIS, I'LL KILL YOU!

Carlo: Josef, wait!

[Josef runs ahead, Heraldin in hand, towards the wyverns and paladins, but suddenly, villagers brandish swords and step in front of him]

Josef: What are you all doing? Let me go!

Villager #1: Lay down your weapon before our Kingdom!

Josef: Your kingdom? You guys are just a village in the middle of nowhere!

Villager #2: Don't question our loyalty! Our village has served the Vanot Kingdom for hundreds of years! We will die protecting it!

Josef: Hundreds of years? But-

Carlo: [running up next to Josef] I get it now. That's how all the forests appeared. That's how this village didn't bust up into ruins. You've been talkin' with the past and preventing bad stuff from happening. But I think I know what's up with these villagers. Vanot must've taken it over after you saved it and turned it into its lapdog.

Josef: It can't be. Then that mean Sophia- oh god.

Eren: Let's GO!

Josef: Grrrr- THOSE VANOT BASTARDS. I'll be back! Mark my words!

[The group tries to escape, but just when they get to the forests, wyverns block their path]

Josef: SOPHIA!

[Josef enters the dream world through the Fire Emblem]

Sophia: Josef, you're safe!

Josef: The village. It was taken over, wasn't it?

Sophia: Yes. And now we, too, must retreat.

Josef: You gotta help us. Wyverns are blocking our way!

Sophia: I... [She thinks for a moment, and devises a brave plan]. I will. Lend me a lock of your hair.

Josef: Um, whatever you say. [Josef hands Sophia a small glass knife, and she places her hands on his body and head, then cuts a lock off to take with her] Do- do you actually think we can send items into the past?

Sophia: I don't know. But I will transform it into a new form. [She uses a spell to turn the hair into an aura, which disappears into her]

Josef: What do you need it for?

Sophia: The pegasi.

Josef: Pegasi?

[Past day. Dozens of mercenaries and mages, riding on pegasi, fall to the wyverns as they try to escape]

Rivia: [riding on a Pegasus] Sophia, why are you stopping? [gasps] A trance? Please, wake up!

[Sophia awakens on her own Pegasus]

Sophia: [Whispering to herself] Can I truly do this? Is my heart and soul ready? I- I have to. [To Rivia] Fly on without me.

Rivia: No! I won't leave your side!

Sophia: Princess Rivia, I'm sorry. But I must disobey my Sisterly Vows. [To her pegasus, she hovers her hand over and lets an aura fall onto her while singing a lullaby] There. This is the aura of someone you can trust. Just as you serve me, you and all your descendants shall serve him, too. But I must let you go. Join those fallen Pegasus who have escaped into the wild once their masters fell. You do not have to serve me any longer.

[Sophia descends on the ground, and departs from her mount. Her pegasus leaves to safety. Using an artifact, she alters the environment such that the forests are hexed with a strange aura]

Devin: C'mon, we gotta go!

Rivia: No! We can't leave her!

[But just then, the mages who are holding Cavone back cause avalanches to fall on the wyverns. The stream of rocks block Devin and Rivia from Sophia]

Devin: Pegasus who serves Rivia! There's no use staying here! Lead your master to safety!

[Rivia's pegasus begins to follow Devin's as they escape]

Rivia: NO!

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[Present day. The wyverns are about to snatch Josef up.]

Yuma: JOSEF!

[Suddenly, an ominous aura shines from the forests and out into the village. It stuns the wyverns]

Josef: [running towards the rest of the group into the forests] What is that?

Eren: Someone must've hexed those trees with a ward against wyverns. They're stunned, but not gone!

Yuma: [she points up in the sky] Whoa, incoming!

[A group of pegasi descend, and gesture to the group that they serve Josef]

Carlo: I think they're telling you to give them orders.

Josef: I get it now. Sophia, that was pretty clever. [to the pegasi] Alright. These guys are all with me. Fly us outta here!

[Eventually, the group retreats into safety]

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[The past]

Rivia: [To her pegasus] I order you to go back! GO!

Devin: She's not gonna listen to let her master override her survival instincts! She knows your heart is still with your old pegasus!

Rivia: But Sophia...

[Just then, a wyvern breaks through the falling avalanches above and dives down with its lance pointed at Rivia]

Devin: Rivia! [he thrusts his Pegasus towards her, but is too far away]

[Just then, from up of the stream of falling rocks below, a rider on a silver pegasus flies upwards and attacks the wyvern with a majestic lance, and the wyvern's rider falls into the abyss beneath it. The light of the auras that the mages summoned obscure the rider's identity.]

Rivia: [astonished] A silver pegasus? Could it be?

Devin: Let's move!

[The silver pegasus, along with Rivia and Devin, escape from the Lapis Deserts, and the group lands far away in another desert, this one crimson and gold. There are numerous caverns and dunes that provide them with good hiding spots. It is still nighttime. Rivia descends onto the warm sands outside, collapses onto her side, and grabs a handful of the desert's grains, whispering, "Sophia..." But just then, she notices a familiar presence]

Rivia: Sophia?

[She sees the priestess. Without saying a word, Rivia, holding back tears, runs up and embraces her friend]

Sophia: I am here for you, my Princess.

Rivia: But who saved you?

[From above, the glimmer of the crimson moonlit sky shines upon the Silver Pegasus, and onto the glistening armor of its rider. Rivia tilts her head above Sophia to look towards the stars. The rider takes off her helmet, and Rivia is shocked.]

Rivia: Mother! You came for us! [gasps] I- I can explain. None of it was Sophia's idea. I, um-

Hilatia: Rivia, we will talk about what you have done later. Blessed be by the gods we are all safe. There is another matter I must discuss with you. I have been brought here by the will of Batova.

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[The present. The group has also landed in the golden crimson desert. They are beside a fire in a cave, and no one wants to talk. Eren is sharpening a knife, while Josef leans against a wall, away from the fire and the others. Carlo comes up beside him.]

Carlo: Hey.

Josef: [seething] They got away with it. They always do.

Carlo: We'll get them back. You need anything?

Josef: [listless and bottling up anger inside] Just some time alone.

Carlo: Got it.

[Josef closes his eyes and touches the Fire Emblem. He sees Sophia.]

Josef: Vanot. They're always been such bastards, haven't they?

Sophia: The Vanot Kingdom is known for instigating wars. However, for many centuries, our continent has been at peace. Only in the past several years have my Kingdom Tarkla and Vanot been nearing a war. Ever since the Curse began nearly a decade ago, some nobles have become power-hungry, and have disrupted the peace that the Four Kingdoms have sought to maintain.

Josef: You were there when the Curse all started. And you're Tarkla?

Sophia: Only a lesser noble. I serve House Tarkla as a priestess.

Josef: I never got to know who you are. Who were those people you were fighting with?

Sophia: One was an exiled prince of Vanot, who has recently joined a band of mercenaries. Another was my master, Princess Rivia of House Tarkla.

Josef: Princess Rivia?!? The heroine who was supposed to end the Curse that made everyone sick and drove Vanot mad?

Sophia: I have never heard of such a thing. I only know her as a princess.

Josef: No way. My dad used to tell me about her all the time. How she was one of the bravest and most gallant heroines to ever live. How she wouldn't hesitate to give her life to stop evil from spreading.

Sophia: That... is very interesting. How did you hear of this? Who else knows of it?

Josef: My family's been passing down these stories for hundreds of years. They're forbidden by Vanot cause they don't want the commoners to know anything about history, but we don't care. It's a family heirloom. I'm a descendant of Rivia!

Sophia: You are? Then you must have the Tarkla birthmark.

Josef: Yeah. Let me show you!

[Josef shows her the mark, but it's unconvincing]

Sophia: Oh...

Josef: [sighs] Yeah, no one ever believes it. But I do. And I've got a ton of things to ask her. Something happened to her that stopped her from ending the Curse.

Sophia: [gasps] Rivia is in danger?

Josef: I don't know what from, but I'll figure out what did her in. I gotta meet her!

Sophia: [She shuts her eyes] Unfortunately, it is almost impossible to use the Fire Emblem to create significant changes in the present; if Rivia's fate is to disappear... [She pauses, trying to hide her emotions]... we may not be able to save her.

Josef: [He shakes his head.] Ever since I was a kid, all these old priests and prophets have been saying the same thing to me. About how everyone's fate has already been written by Batova. They told me I'd never be who I wanted to be. But I never believed a single thing they said. They're not gods; they can't know everything.

Sophia: But Batova's will has never been wrong. It is what maintains the fabric of our reality. Attempting to alter the past too much may result in horrible changes- you might not even be born. That is why we are unable to permute it drastically. The dreams of the dragon gods will sacrifice small changes leading up to your time to continue to maintain the overall picture of what was already there.

Josef: So you're saying we can't stop the Curse or Vanot from doing what it's already done. That doesn't mean we can't use the past to stop them in my time. And just because Tarkla falls, it doesn't mean we can't save Rivia. Plus, if Batova's destiny is so strong, shouldn't Rivia have stopped the curse?

Sophia: I do not know if the prophecy you have heard was told according to Batova's will. We will only know once we have heard it from its origin. [She ponders for a moment.] Rivia must know of this too, so I will see if I can arrange a meeting. But Josef, you must be careful when it comes to altering time. I was able to do so to save you, as my dreams told me to save the one I was linked to. But we priestesses have also been taught of the dark side of the Fire Emblem, too. The dreams of the dragon gods work to maintain naturally cyclical patterns- they are what uphold the fabric of our reality. When a small change is made to the past, it can do little to fight against altering the whole desired outcome of Fate; only the Fire Emblem that allows these small changes to live on.

Josef: That's just really confusing. What kind of small changes are you even talking about?

Sophia: Let me see if an example can help. If a seed is planted back in time, it will grow into a tree, but it will not greatly alter the world surrounding it. Even though, in the hundreds of years from my time to yours, the existence of that tree should generate an impact that would affect many things, most of the

things in your time would not be altered due to the strong patterns maintained by the dragon gods' threads of dreams. A small change would not ripple into a bigger one.

Josef: Huh, I kinda get it now. But how come we still remember these changes? Shouldn't we forget about the old present?

Sophia: The minds of those in the present have yet to 'catch up' to these changes. And perhaps they never will. In order to ensure that these changes are made in the first place, the old present must still be maintained somewhere. And I am assuming that it lives on in the minds of people. Both the old present and new present will plant themselves into people's consciousness.

Josef: There's just... so many things wrong with that. So new memories are made, just like that, when I change something?

Sophia: I believe so.

Josef: That's wild. But whatever, I don't care. [pauses] If the Fire Emblem really can change the past, then I've gotta use it to defeat Vanot and get rid of this curse!

Sophia: That is a gargantuan task. The dreams of the gods will fight against you to try to maintain what has occurred.

Josef: As I said- I don't care. For too long, Vanot has screwed up our lives. Those nobles think they can just use us to build their palaces while they ignore the Curse that's right in our faces! They think they're invincible and can treat us 'commoners' like dirt. But not anymore. I'm gonna prove that I AM the descendant of Rivia. I'll use what I know about the future to change the past and defeat Vanot. I'll lead Rivia outta whatever stopped her, and towards what she was destined to do- to stop the Curse, whether it's in her time or mines!

Sophia: [somewhat invigorated by Josef's words, and though she does not fully have faith in him, she is filled with hope] I, too, have personally been affected by the Curse. Since I was a child, I have dreamed of traveling the lands to aid people who have been afflicted by it. If you are determined to abolish it, then I shall put faith in you, too.

Josef: Great! So, just how far can this Fire Emblem go?

Sophia: I'm afraid that its powers are limited. It requires a link between one in the past and one in the present. And once that link is established, the present cannot go further before or beyond where the past person is.

Josef: Wait, so you're saying that from now on, I can only speak to people at your point in time?

Sophia: Yes. I still do not know how these links are established. But the Fire Emblem links these two souls together and allows their two planes to move parallel to one another.

Josef: Damn it... and back in the Desert, it was just a coincidence that I was in the same spot you were in. You and Rivia got your own battles to fight and can't always be where I am.

Sophia: That may not be so.

Josef: What do you mean?

Sophia: I am well versed in the historical texts. It is believed by many scholars that events are cyclical, due to the patterns of the dragons' dreams. These cyclical events mirror experiences that the dragons lived through in their nearly infinite lifetimes before they succumbed to eternal slumber. It is said that two people in two separate planes in time are more inclined to be linked when they share the same cycle. That is, both of them will experience analogous events in parallel, in the same time intervals.

Josef: Uh, okay. That just means that we'll often be at the same places at the same time?

Sophia: I pray to Batova that is the case.

Josef: Well, it better be. Cause if it is, Vanot's not gonna stand a chance. I'll make them pay for what they've done. For wiping out the Tarkla name, and disgracing my father. For messing with our town. I'll do it for Klifa! Vanot won't win the war in your lifetime, and they'll never take over our lands. Sophia, we're gonna do this together!

[The Fire Emblem Intro Cinematic plays]

#### ACT 1, CHAPTER 0: THE BLOOD REBELLION

[The past. Daytime. The player now has control over Rivia, who can roam an open world base in the desert. The player is free to explore any place they want, though they must complete certain objectives to advance. To finish the main objective, the player moves Rivia into a cavern.]

[Hilatia is in the cavern and has set up a meeting with her daughter. They are speaking alone.]

Rivia: So, Mother. What'd you want to speak to me about?

Hilatia: Vanot has broken the peace treaties. Though Tarkla has been at war with Vanot, it has not been a full-scale war of military might, but rather one of political tension. Battles have rarely been fought; only territories have been defended. But now, we have good reason to believe that Vanot is gathering an army to lay waste upon our Kingdom. The entire court has turned to your father for guidance. But since you left, all he's done is worry about you. He can't think of anything else.

Rivia: I get it. So, you want me to head back.

Hilatia: I do not.

Rivia: What?

Hilatia: Before, I doubted your abilities to fend for yourself. But now that I have seen you strike alliances with mercenaries and even princes from other kingdoms, using your military training to command them on the field of battle, I believe you will be of great help in saving Tarkla. It is time for you to learn how to properly be a ruler. Then you will understand what it means to repay Batova's gifts through sacrifice for your people.

Rivia: What. Oh my god. That is not what I expected you to say.

Hilatia: As of now, Tarkla is too weak to defend itself. Its military has sworn to obey the king. What we should be doing is reaching out to gather allies. But your father refuses to take up command. He would

rather accept negotiation offers from Vanot Houses that stave off the up and coming war. Either he doesn't want to believe that a war is brewing, or-

Rivia: Or he just doesn't care.

Hilatia: Rivia...

Rivia: I heard what the outsiders said about Father. I didn't wanna believe it, but I think it just might be true. Father doesn't care about the people. He only cares about keeping his palace safe, along with the trade routes that ship him goods from far off lands.

Hilatia: Since when did you become so worldly?

Rivia: Well, I guess this is what happens when you let your girl get out and explore what's outside.

Hilatia: Hmm. Well, regardless of your original intentions, I am now glad you have left the palace and proven me wrong. For several months, I have spoken to former generals of the Lustrous Knights, and have coordinated an effort to gather allies for Tarkla. If we are to defend our Kingdom, we must operate outside of its laws.

Rivia: Mother! What am I even hearing? The Noble Queen Hilatia, goin' against the laws? Does Father know?

Hilatia: He would not care. Rivia, we are doing this for the people. If we are not here to defend them, no one else will.

Rivia: Wow, this is gonna take some time to sink in...

[Devin enters]

Devin: Ahhh, sorry to interrupt. Queen Hilatia. [He bows with confidence]

Hilatia: I believe you are the exiled prince of Vanot?

Devin: That's right. And I've got some info that'd help you against my crazy brother.

Rivia: What, did your unsavory Branding customers tip you off?

Devin: Hey, all we ever talk about is what seals they should wear. You can't judge a seal before you know the story behind it. A Brand isn't just an extension of oneself; it comes with some incredible gifts.

Rivia: I wouldn't care.

Hilatia: Well I, for one, am actually curious. What seal would you recommend us?

Rivia: Mother!

Devin: [Squinting towards Rivia with his hands brushing his chin] You've got that strong Tarkla mark and aura, much like your mother. Something tells me that you're not someone to be messed with. There's a shade of red... like a ruby... [he closes one eye and tries to frame a picture around Rivia with his fingers]. Eh, it's too hard to see for now.

Rivia: That's probably because you've got bad eyes.



Hilatia: [chuckling] So, Prince of Vanot, I have a meeting with my knights to attend to. But afterwards, I will meet with you. If you have information on Prince Cavone's plan of attack, that will be invaluable to us.

Devin: No problem. Just tell me when and where.

[Devin departs]

Hilatia: He seems like a nice fellow.

Rivia: Seems a bit too irresponsible.

Hilatia: I thought you said you didn't like all those stuffy, boring suitors?

Rivia: Yeah, but... he's got totally different problems. Told me he just does the bare minimum his father asks him to do and then just. Runs off. To who knows where.

Hilatia: Well, remember, there are plenty out there in the sea. Just follow your heart.

Rivia: Don't you have a meeting to go to?

[Rivia leaves the cavern, and walks through the glistening, golden-red desert. It is daytime, and the warmth of the desert sands calms the princess down, reminding her of happier times back in the palace walls. Just then, she bumps into Devin]

Rivia: Oh. Hey there.

Devin: Sorry if I pushed some boundaries. I just thought you'd want to give seals a second chance. It often takes some time for people to warm up to 'em.

Rivia: I don't care about your seals. There's something else on my mind.

Devin: Or someone?

Rivia: How did you know?

Devin: I didn't, I just took a guess. It's not me, is it?

Rivia: NO! It's Cavone!

Devin: You can't stop thinking about him?

Rivia: Yes... wait, but not in that way!

Devin: You want to know what's driven him so mad and lusting after power?

Rivia: When my eyes were caught by his on the battlefield, there was something in them that I couldn't shake. A strong determination. A fire. Like he was being driven by something. I think I was... scared.

Devin: He always was a competitive guy. Wasn't always like this, though.

Rivia: Do you think it was- the, um-

Devin: The Curse?

Rivia: Yeah.

Devin: Could be. I've known a few nobles who went down with it. They became paranoid and aggressive, just like him. But none of them talk to 'voices' the way he does.

Rivia: Just what are those voices? What does he say to them?

Devin: [sighs] He doesn't trust any advisers. He thinks they'll turn against him. So, he consults these voices from god knows where. No one ever questioned him, except me and our father. Our uncle Javier, who's been Cursed for some time now- or he's just a blowhard at heart- is the worst at enabling him. Before he passed away, our father declared me as his successor, much to the surprise of some other court officials. Javier, who took over as King, objected. Cavone did, too. They held a meeting to argue against my father's claim, saying he was in the clutches of illness and not in the right state of mind. Everyone in the room knew Cavone was a hypocrite, but they weren't gonna speak against him. And they definitely were not gonna knock King Javier and his ego down. So, I took it on my shoulders to point out the obvious.

Rivia: It sucks that they'd throw you out just for stating the facts.

Devin: That's just the way the world works. Well, it was nice talking with you, princess. I've got some business to take care of.

Rivia: See ya. [To herself] So, he does care about being a prince, after all. Still, he's got a long way before he can be any sort of king...

[Sophia walks in]

Sophia: Princess Rivia, I must speak to you. It is about the battle in the Lapis Deserts.

Rivia: Hmm? Oh right, you said we won because of the gods.

Sophia: Actually, there is more. Yes, it was the gods, but they did not intervene directly. They linked me to someone in the future; we would not have won without his help. He believes himself to be your descendant.

Rivia: My WHAT?

[Sophia gives the whole story to Rivia.]

Rivia: That's... that's crazy. You sure it's the future?

Sophia: Based on the changes we made in our time, and how they affected the other world I saw, I am sure of it.

Rivia: And you're saying I'm gonna be a great heroine? That sounds awesome! Well, except for the part where I disappear... I hope nothing bad really happens to me...

Sophia: So, do you wish to meet this boy? Given what I have learned of the Fire Emblem, I may be able to use it to set up a trance so that you two may speak directly to one another through me.

Rivia: Um, holy cow, uh, sure! I just gotta... prep myself up first... Excuse me for a moment.

Sophia: Ah, yes, princess.

Rivia: [She starts to leave, but there's another thing on her mind.] Oh, and Sophia, I wanted to ask you about something else. I just met with Mother. I couldn't believe it- she wants me to travel with her. She's like a totally different person now. Just... what happened?

Sophia: Queen Hilatia has always been a very practical person. The reason she did not want you to leave was not due to irrational fears, but because she truly assessed that you were not ready. But I believe that you have now proven her wrong, and she is open to change.

Rivia: Really? I always thought Mother just had something against me going out. Huh... I guess there's a side of her I don't really know.

Sophia: Yes. There are many things about Queen Hilatia and her past that even I am not aware of.

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[Some time passes. In the dream-like world, Josef and Sophia speak]

Sophia: I have thought over the consequences. If what you are saying is true, then it is best that you meet with her, so that you may guide her away from the fate that befalls her. We must risk altering time to save her.

Josef: Alright! So, when's the meeting?

Sophia: Well, whenever you are ready.

Josef: I'm ready any time. [To himself] This is it. What should I even say? Nah, I'm overthinking it. Just be yourself and she'll see the hero in you.

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[The past]

Sophia: I have set up the trance. In just a few moments, we will-

Rivia: Wait! Not yet!

Sophia: What's wrong?

Rivia: I was taking some time back there to practice how I'd do this. Can you tell me how I sound?

Sophia: Well, um yes, sure.

Rivia: Okay, here I go. [She takes a deep breath.] Hello, young sir. Yes, it is I, the great heroine Rivia, the conqueror of Evil, the guardian of House Tarkla, the Princess who defeated Vanot! Fear not, for I have got your back. You are good. [She breathes a sigh of relief.] Whew. How was that?

Sophia: [Feeling awkward] Princess Rivia, I know you are trying your best, but...

Rivia: It sounded a bit forced?

Sophia: To be fair and truthful, yes.

Rivia: Oh gosh, I didn't sound like Mother, did I?

Sophia: Oh, by the heavens, no! Princess Rivia, please do not worry. I can assure you, the boy will not have high expectations; all he looks forward to is meeting you.

Rivia: But I WANT him to have high expectations! I'm supposed to be some sort of legend, aren't I? And he's got the Fire Emblem with him. He must be some sort of hero already.

Sophia: Well, he is not quite there, yet.

Rivia: Ah... well... okay. Alright, let's just do this.

[She reaches her hand out and puts it in Sophia's palm. Sophia returns with a soft smile, giving reassurance to her friend. The priestess chants an incantation, and Rivia finds herself with Sophia in a dream-like world. She is still in the red desert, but now, past and present appear to have clashed, trying to merge into one. Rivia gasps when she sees space becoming distorted, attempting to reconcile the differences between the two planes of time. And then, she sees Josef.]

Josef: It's her...

Rivia: [To herself] Oh no, I forgot my lines! [To Josef] Ahhhhh...

Josef: Wow.

Rivia: Ahhhh... Ah yes, the hero of Myonkos. Josef.

Josef: [To himself] Damn, this is going better than I expected! [To Rivia] Yeah, that's me.

Rivia: [mumbling] 'Yeah, that's me?' Shoot, I mean- [She re-postures herself] I see you have got some courage in you. That is good.

Josef: It sure is.

Rivia: ...

Josef: ...

Rivia: ... Uh...

Sophia: [To herself] Oh gods, I cannot take this anymore. [To Josef] My apologies, Josef, but the link to the past is fading. We must end early.

Rivia: Yes. Yes, we must. Go forth, hero of the Fire Emblem! Go forth and do heroic things!

[She fades away from the dream-like trance.]

Sophia: [blushing red] ...

Josef: Wow, she was everything I thought she'd be. Amazing.

Sophia: She was? Um, yes, if that is the way you see her...

Josef: That was the first time ANYONE'S ever called me a hero! Man, I feel totally different. Nothing can stop me now. I've got Rivia believing in me!

Sophia: Josef, I- [gasps]

[Suddenly, the trance fades away, and Sophia awakens in the past. As it was the first time such a trance had been established, the priestess could not maintain it for long. She sees Rivia next to her, looking down and gloomy.]

Rivia: So, what'd he think?

Sophia: He believes you are a great heroine and your words have filled him with hope.

Rivia: He- WHAT? Geez, he seems kinda dense... But if I got to him, I guess I really do have what it takes to be a great heroine.

Sophia: Princess Rivia, I think it will be best of you to just speak normally.

Rivia: Really? I gotta be a great knight, though! I gotta give it another shot! Alright, time to go practice! [She leaves]

Sophia: Princess Ri- Ah, and she is gone. Sometimes, you are just too stubborn...

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[The present. The player now has control over Josef, who can explore the nighttime desert. When he sets off to the desert, he says a short prayer to the Forgiving Saint.]

[Josef and Carlo are walking through the desert, bringing back meat that they hunted, when they come across a narrow corridor of a mountain pass. In the shadows, they notice someone is leaning against the mountain.]

Carlo: Tch. Must be a bandit looking to rob us.

Josef: Today's not his lucky day, then.

[Josef takes a closer look, and notices that something is off about the figure. It is tall and long limbed, as if it wasn't human, but a ghostly creature. However, it is covered by shadows, and its features cannot be seen.]

Josef: Move it, ugly. We don't got time for you.

???: I am not giving you a choice.

[The figure steps out and reveals its full face. He is a man in his late 20s, a beautiful but haunting creature. Makeup, in a traditional ritualistic fashion, has been carefully applied to his face to accentuate his sharp and noble features. White and green lines trace delicate patterns on his cheeks. He is wearing a dark green robe with gold patterned outlines. Light battle armor wraps around him in chains.]

Josef: What do you want with us, punk?

???: You should not be asking the questions.

Carlo: No, let's start with you. Your name- spit it out.

???: I am Lord Kogyo of House Gita, the rightful heir to the Kingdom of Clo.

Josef: What? Clo's gone! It's got no nobles left!

Carlo: Prove it.

[Kogyo unfurls his sleeves to reveal a mark beneath his forearm. Unlike Josef's, it sears bright, though only when Kogyo decides to make it glow. There is no mistaking it- it is a genuine mark.]

Josef: No way.

Carlo: What the...

Kogyo: Since Vanot eradicated the other three Kingdoms, a hidden Order has preserved its bloodlines. Before the Houses fell, its nobles met in secret and concealed their identities. For generations forth, in cities concealed by magic, we have preserved our traditions against Vanot's efforts to destroy us. Nobles have continued to marry other nobles; that is why my mark has not been diluted by a drop of commoner's blood.

Carlo: Huh. A secret society of exiles.

Kogyo: We are not simply exiles. For hundreds of years, we have been preparing to fight against Vanot.

Carlo: So, why haven't you guys made a move?

Kogyo: Vanot is still too powerful. Though we have numerous spies and allies within the Vanot Empire, we cannot risk being rash and destroying all that we have preserved. We must only strike when the time is right.

Josef: Which Houses have survived? Is Tarkla there?

Kogyo: Tarkla has long perished.

Josef: Heh. Then you're in for a surprise.

[He is about to show him his mark, but Kogyo steps in.]

Kogyo: Stop. I do not need to see your mark. I already know it is nothing to waste my time on.

Josef: The hell? Then can you explain why fate gave me THIS? [He takes Heraldin off from his back]

Kogyo: I see. The Holy Axe Heraldin of House Tarkla.

Josef: If I wasn't Tarkla, how come I've got the axe?

Kogyo: The nobles' gifts have passed through the hands of thieves for generations; I have no reason to believe fate has given it to you. You have a commoner's face. None of your features have a hint of Tarkla to them. I am certain- I have been raised to tell who the hidden nobles are, so that I may tell them of our secret society.

Josef: You looking for a fight? [He begins to reach for the Fire Emblem on his wrist.]

Kogyo: So that is where the aura around him comes from... hold, I do not wish to fight. If that truly is yours, then you must be the ones who fended off Vanot in the Lapis Deserts.

Carlo: You heard right.

Kogyo: My scouts reported what occurred. Pegasi coming to the aid of prisoners fighting against wyverns, forests conjured out of thin air. How?

Josef: Tch, I thought a noble would know what this is. Markus had no trouble with it.

Kogyo: That artifact? It cannot be... the Fire Emblem?

Josef: That's right.

Kogyo: There is no doubt. Its markings are genuine. I feel its claws upon the threads of Time. Such... magnificent power...

Josef: Yeah, well hands off- it's mine.

Kogyo: I do not wish to possess it. There is a greater cause that needs it. Do you wish to fight against Vanot?

Josef: Hell yeah. That's what we've been doing, and that's what we're gonna continue doing.

Kogyo: Then what is the next step in your plan?

Josef: ...

Carlo: We're gonna get our allies in the past to take Gissel Harbor, their weak point. Once we got their ships down, we can sneak our way into their Capital.

Kogyo: A brave plan. But also, a foolish one.

Carlo: You know something we don't?

Kogyo: Vanot has intentionally spread misinformation to make commoners believe that Gissel Harbor is weak. It is nothing more than a trap for those who seek to overthrow the Empire. But the Blood Rebellion has carefully listened in to Vanot's true weaknesses and have put together strategies of attack. Unfortunately, we lack the resources and openings to enact them.

Josef: Oh yeah? Name one of them.

Kogyo: The Dragon Lands. These are said to be the most connected to the dragon gods' dreams. Those who possess them are said to be granted with immense resources and power. They are also strategic areas of defense and attack. As Vanot conquered them in the past, they are how Vanot has been able to become nearly invincible for hundreds of years.

Josef: Tch, no one knows where the Dragon Lands are, anymore. Vanot guards that knowledge with everything they've got.

Kogyo: You are wrong. Our spies have deciphered their locations.

Josef: Then tell us where they are. If you really do know about the Fire Emblem, you'd know what I can do with it. I can stop Vanot from ever conquering each and every one of 'em.

Kogyo: And with what army will you take them back, with?

Josef: I've been talking with someone in the past. Ever hear of Rivia? Yeah- she's my ancestor. She's working up an army.

Kogyo: So, you plan to guide this Rivia to take the Dragon Lands. You will have to obtain the information needed to help her avoid the mistakes she made that held her from victory. But all the commoners' historical texts have been destroyed by Vanot. The only way you can deduce what occurred is by using Revealing Magic upon the land's ruins to learn what transpired in battles of old. And that would mean you must be on the battlefields, too.

Carlo: ... that's true.

Kogyo: Once Vanot sees you on these lands, they will attack you with their full might. You will not stand a chance.

Josef: ...

Kogyo: I offer you an alliance. Join the Blood Rebellion and use the Fire Emblem to aid our cause.

Josef: Why don't you just take it for yourself?

Kogyo: All true nobles know the Fire Emblem chooses its wielder. If it has granted you victory in your possession, then fate must see you as a worthy tactician.

Josef: Or, a royal hero.

Kogyo: One does not need to be a royal hero to use the Fire Emblem. Only a capable tactician. Now, will you accept my offer?

Josef: Arrogant dastard... you've got our hands tied. Give us a minute.

[Josef and Carlo huddle together.]

Carlo: He's got a point.

Josef: Yeah, figured you'd say that. Think we can trust him?

Carlo: Let's get the others to come with us. If he pulls anything fishy, we'll fight our way out.

[They turn back to Kogyo]

Josef: Alright, ugly. You've got a deal.

Kogyo: Then let us make haste. Return the meat you have hunted to your camp and gather your group. Then, I shall lead you to the city beneath these sands.

ACT 1, CHAPTER 1: THE LIBRARY OF ARUNA

[Present day. Josef, Carlo, and the other 3 escaped prisoners are trudging through the red desert sands. It is nighttime. Kogyo, who had already informed the Blood Rebellion that he would be bringing new recruits along, travels just a few feet ahead of the group.]

Marsello: We've been walking for ages! This better not go nowhere like one of his pyramid schemes again. He said they'd be real food and beds where we're going. But if we don't get anywhere next minute, we're leaving. Right, Yuma?

Yuma: ...

[She is not paying attention. Instead, she gazes upon the reddish dunes. She is drawn into their curves, their soft shades of crimson. The bandit is lost in her thoughts.]

Marsello: YUMA!

Yuma: YO! PUT A SOCK IN IT, I'M BUSY!

Marsello: Oh yeah, busy dozing off again, aren't you?

Eren: Would you two shut up? I swear, kids these days. Back when I was a young thief I'd walk for hours, without yapping, through hot desert sands, and on my two bare feet...

Marsello: We wouldn't need to walk if we still had those pegasi.

Eren: Fool, those pegasi were never ours to begin with. They only helped us when we were in their home. All they wanna do is live in the Lapis Deserts.

[Up ahead, Kogyo leads the way, and Josef and Carlo follow right behind him, making sure he doesn't pull off anything suspicious.]

Marsello: Hey, Josef! Ask that ghost over there how much longer we've got!

Josef: You heard him, ghost man. How much longer?

Kogyo: Patience.

Josef: You didn't answer my question. I said-

[But Kogyo continues to ignore him, and instead, stops. He closes his eyes and brushes his hand beneath the sand. Josef and Carlo feel a rumbling beneath their feet. Kogyo traces a pattern in the sand with his fingers, and in the next moment, a roaring is heard.]

Marsello: Wh-what is that?

Carlo: Now I get how it works.

Yuma: Wow...

[The sands beneath them part, and suddenly, everyone is rapidly dragged down into the sands below.]

Marsello: OH MY GOOOOOODD!!!

[The former prisoners hit the ground bluntly, but Kogyo gracefully lands, stepping over the falling sands with gentle footsteps. The sand does not fall with the acceleration of the earth's pull, now; in these underground chambers, it flows like water, and seems to have a life of its own, moving like snakes. Yuma is in awe, so stunned that she can hardly gasp.]

Josef: Tch, could've used a warning. So, what next?

Kogyo: Follow me.

[He leads the group through the dark, dimly lit tunnels, and into a vast, immersive city underground. It is like a giant mine, but with crystal-like houses and buildings, and ropes and ziplines nearly everywhere. Streets are paved with sands and rocks. Children run about in rags, sitting upon boulders as if they were their 'territories'. Grains of sand flow through streams like water.]

Yuma: This... is one of the Lost Cities of the Royal Exiles?

Kogyo: Its name is Jumavifa. And it is my home.

Yuma: Amazing.

Josef: It's alright.

Kogyo: There is more to see. This is only one district. Let me show you the one that belongs to Clo.

[Kogyo leads the group further in, and into depths which appear to resemble crystal mines. All the buildings and roads appear translucent, giving off various colored auras of light. Nearly all the sand and rocks are gone.]

Kogyo: General Gesiri, I have returned!

[A stern, portly general with a buzz cut and dark raven hair descends from a crystal building with several other generals. She is clad in heavy armor.]

Gesiri: You brought the boy with the Fire Emblem?

Josef: Yo.

Gesiri: Skinny lad. But beneath those eyes, I can tell you've got some fire.

Josef: Huh, I like her already. So, what noble House are you from?

Gesiri: Cardigal.

Josef: Cardigal? Hold on, my pops talked about 'em. That's a lesser House in the Tarkla Kingdom. Kogyo, you said Tarkla was wiped out!

Kogyo: The main royal House of Tarkla is gone. But the lesser Houses remain. Unfortunately, these Houses do not descend from Tarkla, but from the Red Dragon's siblings. They have no claim to the Tarkla throne.

Gesiri: Hmph. Well, let's get down to business. You kids ready to fight for the Blood Rebellion? Oh, and you, too, old man- didn't see you there.

Eren: Eh, don't worry about it. I'm just here to steal stuff from Vanot.

Marsello: Hold on, no one said we'd be fighting for some rebellion! What're y'all, a bunch of knights? I'm NO knight! I've fought for gangs my whole life!

Carlo: You just butted yourself in 'em when no one wanted you 'round.

Marsello: Yeah, well better to have hung around gangs than mess around with Imps all day. They taught me some street smarts.

Gesiri: [She walks up to Marsello with an intimidating presence, then folds her arms.] So, you don't think we're as tough as those gangs, do ya?

Marsello: [His face is stern and scowling, but he doesn't look her in the eyes.] No. Just said it's not what I'm meant to be.

Gesiri: And how'd you know that? A street urchin like you's never had the chance to try anything else. Hell, you're wearing knights' armor already!

Marsello: Found it in some garbage. I just needed it to fend off some blows.

Gesiri: What 'bout that lance? That garbage, too?

Marsello: [He finally looks at her straight in the eyes; his own are ablaze.] No way! It may have belonged to some Vanot scumbag before I found it, but I fine-tuned it myself!

Gesiri: Ah, I see. Gangs usually don't like lances. A lance is a knight's weapon. Maybe that's why they rejected ya.

Marsello: Grrr... watch what you say...

Gesiri: I ain't biting ya down. Take a look at this big guy. [She takes a lance from her back, and Marsello is in awe at its craftsmanship.]

Marsello: Whoa...

Gesiri: You're not gonna fine-tune a lance as good as this in some backalley shop. You gotta use the finest smithing equipment Myonkos has to offer. And guess what? The Blood Rebellion's got it. Tell you what, kid. I'll show you 'round the blacksmith workshops. And if you like 'em, stick around, and I'll give you whatever equipment you need.

Marsello: Damn, that sounds badass. [He sees the blacksmith workshops up ahead, noticing the powerful steams they're fuming out. He doesn't need to look inside to tell they're legit.] But know this- this is just a temporary job. Once I'm through being a knight, I'm going back to Umber Town, and taking over a gang. Yuma, what about you?

Yuma: [She snaps back into reality after gazing off at the crystalline structures around her] Huh? Oh yeah. I'm in, whatever.

Gesiri: That's settled, then. All of you's are now Blood Rebellion knights. Skinny lad, and mean kid over there, I heard you were the brains of the operation. The generals and I have come a thing or two to discuss with ya.

[Josef and Carlo follow Kogyo, Gesiri, and the other Rebellion generals into a building. In it, they discuss the plan of attack. After a long meeting, they are nearing completion.]

Gesiri: ... Aruna's gonna be a strategic turning point. If we can pull off a miracle and make sure this land was never taken over, Vanot won't know what hit 'em.

Carlo: Got it. So, they razed an entire jungle and turned it into a library.

Kogyo: Vanot cares not for the natural beauty of the jungle. It was a sacred land, where magic ran through its lakes and up into the roots of its trees. But Vanot decimated all of it. And left behind a prison where they stored many secrets of the world...

Carlo: Vanot won't let commoners get even a page of a history book, but it's gotta store them somewhere, in case they're needed to solve some issue. So this is one of the places they've been hiding.

Gesiri: Ever since we found where it's at, we've been thinkin' of ways to get into it. But it's just too heavily guarded. It's all up to the Fire Emblem to break it open, now. You listening, Josef?

Josef: Huh? Oh yeah.

Gesiri: You got something on your mind, lad?

Josef: So, I just gotta tell Rivia to get her army to these coordinates and pummel some Vanot scoundrels. Can't be hard.

Gesiri: You seem unsure. You sure she's gonna listen to everything you say?

Josef: Tch, yeah.

Gesiri: Well, she and her army better. Cause if not, I don't think you'd be of any value to the cause.

Josef: Heh. Harsh words.

Gesiri: I'm not usually a mean gal. But a war's a war. Alright, soldiers, meeting's over. Get a good night's sleep, and let's march out tomorrow!

[Everyone leaves except for Gesiri and Kogyo. Just before Kogyo is about to depart, Gesiri speaks up.]

Gesiri: I know what you're thinkin'.

Kogyo: It only briefly crossed my mind.

Gesiri: General, you're an honest man. But if worse comes to worst-

Kogyo: I know. Do what you must do. I will give my life to restore the Kingdoms.

[Josef is by himself, sleeping in the barracks. However, he can't sleep. He reaches towards the Fire Emblem.]

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[In the dream-like world]

Sophia: Josef! Did you decide where you will go?

Josef: It's a long story. I basically met this weird looking ghost dude, and...

[He tells what happened to Sophia.]

Sophia: I see. So, the theory is correct.

Josef: Hold on, you guys are also going to Aruna?

Sophia: Yes. To the same coordinates. But back in my time, it was not Aruna. We called it the Kronos Jungle, where Clo mages lived as one with nature.

Josef: It used to be Clo territory?

Sophia: One of the most beautiful places I have ever seen. I have only visited it once during the pilgrimages.

Josef: If it's Clo territory, then Kogyo must got some special connection to it.

Sophia: The Kingdom of Clo prides itself upon its magic. It houses secrets of this world that many outsiders do not know or are not worthy of handling. I cannot even imagine how devastated its people must have become to have lost such culture to Vanot...

Josef: Good thing you've got me on your side. I won't let you guys lose that battle. Thank the gods that you were right about us moving side by side.

Sophia: The Cyclical Fates truly do exist.

Josef: And you said it's night time on your side too, right? That means time is also moving side by side. [Yawning] Looks like I'm finally tired. Talkin' to you was a great help.

Sophia: I am glad I could do good for you.

Josef: Oh yeah, how's Rivia doing? I'm gonna have to talk to her about this whole thing.

Sophia: I think it best if I inform them first before they meet you. I am close with Queen Hilatia; they would ease up to you better if I tell them.

Josef: Good call. You can reach me whenever?

Sophia: Just as you can reach me through the Fire Emblem, I can reach you just through my thoughts.

Josef: Cool. [yawns] Ah, I've gotta say my prayers to the Forgiving Saint.

Sophia: The Forgiving Saint?

Josef: You've never heard of her? Guess she must be after your time.

Sophia: What was she like?

Josef: Vanot destroyed all public records about her life, so I can't say. But I'm sure some library's got them somewhere.

Sophia: I see. Her title sounds beautiful, though.

Josef: It does, doesn't it? Well, night.

Sophia: Good night, Josef.

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[Past day. It is now morning, and Hilatia has gathered an army of former Tarkla soldiers, knights from lesser territories outside of the Four Kingdoms, and mercenaries. Hilatia, Rivia, and all the other player units are huddled in a tent. They have just finished listening to Sophia inform them about the Fire Emblem and Josef.]

Devin: That's bonkers. But it all make sense. Those myths must've been true after all.

Esteban: Wooow. What kinda crazy stuff goes on with these nobles?

Rivia: All of it's true. I even spoke with the guy, too.

Sophia: Yes. He is someone we can trust; I feel Batova's blessing upon him. Though I am not aware of any prophecy that claims Princess Rivia to be the one to stop the curse, I am certain we will come across one, soon. Ever since I was informed of it, I have had symbolic visions that appear to support this claim.

Lyra: So, when can we all meet him?

Sophia: Unfortunately, I have not learned how to create a stable bridge between our planes, yet. I was able to briefly link him and Princess Rivia. But I have not been able to replicate that spell. There are subtleties in it that I must meditate upon.

Hilatia: [Deep in thought. She has not said a word during Sophia's explanation, as it is a delicate matter to handle. But finally, she has made up her mind.] Very well, then. If the Curse truly does exist in his time, then something must have occurred that stopped Princess Rivia from fulfilling her destiny. We must do all we can to help her achieve her goal.

Rivia: Mother...

Hilatia: The young man claims that Kronos Jungles, where we are to march to today, will fall. Thus, I want everyone to be vigilant about any suspicious activities surrounding it. We will first enter only to discuss diplomatic alliances. If, however, we discover any threats, then we will fight.

Rivia: The Fire Emblem protected us back in the Lapis Deserts. I'm sure it'll help us a lot in this one, if it comes down to fighting.

Hilatia: Then let us proceed.

[The meeting adjourns. The army sets forth to the Kronos Jungles. They are now marching through thick vegetations and vines towards where the Clo mages reside.]

Devin: So, a legendary heroine, eh?

Rivia: Hah. You couldn't tell when you first met me?

Devin: I gotta say, I was impressed by your tactical skills on the battlefield.

Rivia: [blushing] O-oh? Really?

Devin: Yup. Didn't think one would be scared of being branded, though.

Rivia: I told you, I am NOT scared of being branded! I just thought it looked dirty!

Devin: Even after you asked Sophia about my seals and she said they were totally safe?

Rivia: Well, anyone would've thought they were dirty if they didn't study on needles.

Devin: So, if you know they're safe now, you just don't like how they look. Or you're still kinda scared.

Rivia: I said I'm not! Ugh. Alright then, just to shut you up.

Devin: What are you... HEY!

[Rivia rips off the entire sleeve covering her right arm]

Devin: You didn't have to rip the whole thing off!

Rivia: These starchy poor people's clothes are so hard to curl up. Mother's servants have brought many other dresses for me, anyways.

Devin: [sighs] Alright. Just hold still...

Rivia: Ow... ermf... [She tries to keep her eyes open, but squints too much and ends up shutting them tight for the rest of the ordeal.]

[After a few moments...]

Devin: I'm finished. You can open your eyes now.

Rivia: [She is still shutting her eyes tight] Oh. [She opens her eyes]

Devin: What'd ya think?

[A bright red seal is etched onto her shoulder, next to her mark. Its laces are intertwined with the Tarkla emblem, wrapped around the tongues of the dragon-like face it resembles. It is ablaze and glows burning hot, but there is no pain at all.]

Rivia: It's... [She's speechless.]

Devin: Dragon got your tongue?

Rivia: ...Not as bad as I thought. [Her face doesn't show a smile.]

Devin: Ah, okay. Well, at least you were brave enough to try it. Seals aren't for everyone, but it's worth givin' one a shot. [He departs the conversation and marches upwards to join his mercenary friends.]

Rivia: [Whispering to herself] It's stunning...

[Hilatia, who rides up next to Rivia, sees her daughter with a new seal]

Hilatia: Oh, so you got one after all.

Rivia: Mother! I just wanted to shut him up!

Hilatia: [Smiling] I believe you. [But right after, her face falls solemn and sad. She tries to hide it, but Rivia knows that Hilatia is worried about her.]

Rivia: Did you ever think your daughter would grow up to be a legendary heroine?

Hilatia: Well, we do not know if that prophecy is true yet, nor do we know where it came from. But if it is, I will be very proud of you. Prophecies are gifts from Batova's dreams themselves. Those heroes whom Fate chooses must be very great indeed, as Fate will never lead us astray.

Rivia: Wordy as always. I just wanted to hear the first part. You were always so overprotective of me and never let me show you what I could do. And after hearing that I'd be doomed to disappear or something, you're worried about me more than ever, right?

Hilatia: When the time comes, only you may be able to save yourself. I can only hope I raised you well enough to know what you must do.

[The army suddenly reaches an alcove. Before them is a waterfall, and many luscious green tropical trees. Monks and mages tend to the vegetation and look up in surprise when they see the new arrivals. It is a paradise that welcomes anyone who is willing to visit.]

Sophia: It has become even more beautiful since I last saw it.

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[The present]

Eren: By the gods.

Yuma: Oh no.... what happened to this place?

[Before the Blood Rebellion is a vast expanse of dead vines, with steel chains wrapped around them and sinking deep into the ground below. The trees are still upright but have become covered in death and disease. The skies are dark and red; there is only silence, and the haunting ghosts of long gone winds.]

Josef: This used to be a jungle?

Gesiri: Aye. We don't know how, but Vanot razed it all.

Carlo: Then that must be the Library of Aruna.

[The fogs and shadows dissipate. Before them is a looming, incredibly large sanctuary with white, marble walls. It is held up by cathedral-like pillars and domes.]

Eren: Such an architectural wonder... in such a barren wasteland.

[Josef looks towards Kogyo. The Lord's face is emotionless, and he remains silent.]

Josef: [To himself] He must hate the guts of Vanot for doing this to his people...

Gesiri: Alright, soldiers, as we planned! We will take the guard towers in the front, and find a way for the lad and his troops to sneak in. Eren, you ready?

Eren: Revealing Magic's tough to use, but we'll find just what happened in the past. Kid, you remember what I taught you?

Carlo: Yeah.



[The battle begins, though the player is not in control of the units yet. The Blood Rebellion fights the Vanot guards and creates a distraction to let Josef and the player's units sneak inside the library. Its interiors are frighteningly imposing; organs and chorus music, sung by the Vanot monks inside, echo throughout.]

Marsello: So, they got us to do the dirty work?

Eren: Heh. They say it's cause we know our tactician better, but the truth is, we're expendable. If we can't do it, they'll just send the next squadron in. All we've gotta do is make sure that Fire Emblem keeps on ticking. Kid, what you got?

Carlo: ...

Eren: You found something?

Carlo: ... I found a traitor.

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[Past day. Inside of a gigantic tree covered with magical vines, Hilatia is walking with the heads of the Clo mages and is trying to get them on their side. The new Head of the Clo Mages, who took the position after Sophia left her visit, is thin, wears glasses, and has short, silver spiky hair. He has a friendly disposition.]

Head of the Clo Mages: Ah, we wish we can help. But the mages of the Kronos Jungles must remain neutral. It is in our code.

Hilatia: If Vanot takes over, Kronos Jungle will not exist any longer.

[Just then, Sophia and Rivia appear]

Sophia: Queen Hilatia.

Hilatia: Oh, Sister Sophia, you and the monks are done discussing?

Rivia: They're not gonna fight with us.

Hilatia: I see. Pardon us, this is my trusted servant, Sister Sophia. And my daughter, Princess Rivia.

Head of the Clo Mages: I am honored to meet you both. My name is Aruna.

Sophia: [To herself] Aruna? That name... why would a Vanot library be named after the person it seized the land from?

Rivia: Sophia, are you alright?

Sophia: I must speak to Josef. Something is amiss.

[The past and present communicate, and eventually, it's discovered Aruna is secretly Cursed, and has sold out the sanctuary to Vanot in favor of gold and riches. The past discovers his plan and devises a way to counter it.]

Hilatia: [To the army] Do not falter! We must protect Kronos Jungles from those who have become corrupted by Avadi's power!

Rivia: My first battle as a real knight. I gotta prove I got what it takes!

[The player now has control of the map. In the past, Hilatia joins as a Falcon Knight. In the present, no new units join.]

[Past Party: Rivia (Lord), Devin (Mercenary), Esteban (Archer), Jordan (Mage), Lyra (Thief), Sophia (Cleric), Hilatia (Falcon Knight). Player may only choose up to 6 units. Required: Rivia, Devin, Sophia and Hilatia.]

[Present Party: Josef (Marauder), Carlo (Mage Thief), Yuma (Bandit), Marsello (Armor), Eren (Sage Thief)]

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[Present day. Within the walls of the library, Zachary, a Vanot Elite General, guards the palace. Zachary is handsome, is muscular with large biceps, and has messy brown hair. He sits on a makeshift throne laughing, surrounded by food and riches. He disrespects the bookshelves surrounding him by using the books as target practice. Nearby, in a lofty rich bed, Irene is lying down, still wearing her Archer's clothes and carrying her bow.]

Zachary: Hahaha! You think I can hit that one, too?

Irene: Go for it.

Zachary: [He readies his bow, then shoots. He hits the red book he was aiming at, and it burns up.] You see that? These enchanted arrows are freakin' awesome! Only someone as awesome as me could've made that. Right?

Irene: Yup.

[Without moving the rest of her body, and still staring at the ceiling above her, Irene reaches her left arm towards a bowl of grapes next to her on the bed, grabs a grape, and pops it in her mouth. As she's chewing with complete and utter boredom, Zachary suddenly freaks out.]

Zachary: UGH! Intruders? I thought this would be an easy job. No one ever breaks through to the library! Good thing it's gonna be a piece of cake taking care of these bozos...

Irene: You do you.

Zachary: Yeah, and what'll you be doing? You're just lying there like a dead fish. If you're gonna be carrying that ugly bow around, you better make good use of it. Why don't you go out there and pick off a few guys?

Irene: Sounds boring.

Zachary: You think I'M boring? I took you away from that dirty, disgusting lowlife town! I better not hear another word like that out from you. Go make yourself useful.

Irene: [She gets up without saying a word back or looking at him, takes her bow and starts walking outside. Then, she mumbles to herself.] Hopefully it's quieter out there than in here with this loud clown.

Zachary: [shouting at her before he leaves the room] Oh, and make sure you aim for the head of some idiot with wavy and orange hair. I heard he's the one making the most trouble.

Irene: [She leaves the room, and then whispers to herself] Huh, is Josef here, too? That's a surprise. I gotta go see this for myself...

[The player makes their way up both past and present maps, utilizing the past to help the present. The more of the past is saved, the more vines crash into the Library. The interior of the Library of Aruna echoes with the architecture of a terrifyingly large cathedral, filled with runes and books. But just then, the present group reaches a roadblock- a door in which no vine can penetrate through.]

Josef: A giant door? How are we gonna get past this one? It didn't even exist in the past! [He looks up at a balcony above, and sees archers firing down on Blood Rebellion soldiers below. But he seems to recognize one of them.]

Josef: Hey Carlo, is that who I think it is?

Carlo: Yeah. It's her.

Yuma: Oh god, Irene?

Josef: [shouting at the balcony] Hey Irene!

Eren: BOY, if you don't pipe down you're gonna find an arrow through ya head!

Irene: Yo.

Josef: How'd you get up there?

Irene: Followed some Vanot knight to this library. He's an asshole, though.

Josef: You wanna come join our party instead?

Irene: Sounds cool.

Josef: Awesome. By the way, can you open this door up for us?

Irene: Sure. [She walks over to a lever behind the door and pulls on it. The gigantic titanium door opens.]

Eren: What in the world- oh right, the boy and his gang's all insane. I should've known this by now.

Yuma: [To Irene] Did ya have fun?

Irene: Do I ever?

Yuma: Hah. Well, I'm just glad to have you back. I've hated having only guys around here.

[Irene smirks back. She rejoins the group as an Archer.]

[Both groups make their way up to the bosses. Zachary carries both a lance and a bow. Aruna is a mage.]

Zachary: Twerps! You won't like messing with me! I'm a Vanot knight!

[If Zachary fights against Irene]

Zachary: You bitch! After all I did for you?

Irene: If you want me to be honest, the only thing I enjoyed were those grapes.

Zachary: I'LL END YOU. I'LL SNAP THAT STUPID BOW OF YOURS AND PIKE YOUR HEAD RIGHT ON MY BEDPOST.

[Zachary is defeated]

Zachary: Screw... these... peasants... [He dies.]

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[Past day]

Aruna: Before, I was blind. But now, Avadi has opened my eyes. Fall! There is nothing left for you but to fall before his greatness!

[Aruna is defeated]

Aruna: No... my treasures! I... I cannot die without seeing them one last time... [He dies.]

ACT 1, CHAPTER 2: TO PROVE ONE'S WORTH

[Present day. Zachary has been defeated, and the Blood Rebellion soldiers, which have entered the building and are now retreating, watch the final moments of the Library of Aruna as vines crush through it. As the vines fly through, the soldiers gape in awe. Only Kogyo is calm and composed, pausing to marvel at the Vanot wonder.]

Kogyo: It is so damning.... But at the same time, so magnificent.

[But suddenly, all the vines stop.]

Yuma: Why'd they stop? The Library should be gone by now!

[And then, the vines fade away. What was now crumbling is now falling up back in place. The walls of the library are becoming restored.]

Josef: Wait, the library's still here! And the vines are disappearing? What the hell?

[He reaches towards the Fire Emblem, and meets with Sophia]

Josef: You seeing this? What's happening?

Sophia: [Worried] We must have only caused a momentary shift in time. Now Time is working to restore the natural threads of Fate, and its effects are reaching you like ripples in a lake!

Josef: But how? We killed Aruna!

Sophia: It must be caused by those who have come after him, far after our time, but long before yours. Acolytes must have been inspired by his work and picked off where he left. They must be the ones who let Vanot seep into Kronos Jungle and construct the Library of Aruna.

Josef: No... after all we did... we still couldn't save that damn jungle? This is just like that village!

Sophia: I wish we could have. But not all was in vain. We have taken the land away from Vanot hands in your time.

Josef: Yeah. Guess that counts for something.

Sophia: Not all can be saved. We must be grateful for what we can change.

[Josef returns to the present-day world.]

Yuma: I thought we saved the jungle.

Josef: We didn't. [With his hands in his pockets, and slouched over in his usual thug stance, he walks through the grand halls of the empty, bloodied library. His footsteps echo into the vast, haunting nothingness throughout the fallen sanctuary. Gesiri approaches him.]

Gesiri: That girl tell you why this thing's still here?

Josef: Yeah. Cut me a minute and I'll catch you up on it.

[He tells her what happened.]

Gesiri: That's a damn shame. But don't be too hard on yourself, lad. You're probably thinkin' your first win over Vanot is nothin', but it's all those soldiers first win over Vanot, too. They've been fighting for this day to come their whole lives. And now, it's all finally paid off.

Josef: Tch. Well, good for them.

Gesiri: See for yourself.

[They walk into a hallway, past large golden doors, and onto a balcony. Below, on the vast graveyard of vines before the Library, stretching all the way to the outskirts of the land, legions of soldiers cheer and celebrate.]

Blood Rebel #1: They thought this land was theirs forever, but we just showed 'em up!

Blood Rebel #2: My family used to dream of this day for ages. I can't believe I'm the one who finally gets to see it happening.

[Josef is in awe. He starts to smirk.]

Blood Rebel #3: Hey. HEY. Guys, it's that boy. The one with the Fire Emblem! [She points up to the balcony, and gradually, the news travels through the crowd. They stare up to see Josef standing at the balcony. There is only silence, and Josef starts to become worried, angry, and defensive. They appear to be judging him. But just when he is about to walk away, the crowd begins to cheer again.]

Blood Rebel #4: THE HOLDER OF THE FIRE EMBLEM! We couldn't have done it without ya!

Gesiri: [To Josef] See, lad. They're all cheering for you. The Blood Rebellion has been inspired by what you've done.

Josef: Well. I just did what I had to do.

[He walks away, trying to keep his cool like Carlo, or like some hero he's heard about from his dad's stories. But the pride inside him contain truly be contained. All his dreams and bragging, nearly every day in the taverns of Umber Town, have finally been validated. It seems too good to be true, however- it is not something he is used to. So, he doesn't want to think much else about it. He just accepts it as it is.]

Gesiri: Josef. I got something else to tell ya.

Josef: What?

Gesiri: The generals have already held a meeting about the next plan of attack. Vanot will have known one of its Dragon Lands have fallen for the first time. We gotta move quick now if we are to stay one step ahead.

Josef: You got orders for me?

Gesiri: The next place we're landing at is at the Jaune Temples nearby. It's the closest one, so we better take it before Vanot sends reinforcements. You and your smart friend should go look through the books in this library. Jaune's got all sorts of traps, and the books here are said to be rife with secrets about Myonkos. See if you can find anything useful.

Josef: Books? Me and Carlo don't read.

Gesiri: You mean you can't, or you don't?

Josef: It's just a waste of time.

Gesiri: Well, if you can't make yourself useful with the generals, go scrub some armor. [She leaves.]

Josef: Tch. Not a lot of options you're giving, huh, lady?

[The scene shifts to Markus's perspective.]

VANOT EMPIRE- CAPITAL SLUMS

[Markus dons a black robe over himself as a disguise. He waits in line at a market stall for some sort of medicine. There are about 50 people in the crowd, most listless and wailing for their turn in agony. The commoners eye the prince suspiciously as he keeps his head down. One of them speaks up about it.]

Drunk Commoner: [to the disguised Markus] Hey you, you look a bit too nourished to be a commoner, eh?

Markus: ...

Drunk Commoner: Not gonna speak up? Wait a minute...

Burly Commoner: I know you. I've seen you when you and your knights patrol the streets. You're Prince Markus!

[Worried murmurs and gasps run through the crowd]

Vendor: Th- the prince? Why's he here? Oh gods, are we being rounded up? I didn't do anything!

Drunk Commoner: QUIET DOWN, YOU LOT! Listen here, prince- I'm not afraid of you or your knights. Whatever you've got up your sleeve, spill it.

Markus: [He lets down his hood and stands tall] I am the Prince of Vanot. But there is no need to worry. I am not here to lay harm to any of you. Like you all, I am here to receive my portion of the Hollis Fruit.

Burly Commoner: What the hell you need that for? Nobles don't get the plague! You're here to take it away from us, to sell it off to a richer buyer! Must've realized now us commoners don't nab you any profit, huh?

[The crowd begins to back away, with people running away from the lines out of fear.]

Drunk Commoner: See what you're doing? You being here is making these people run off. They'd rather suffer from the plague than risk being around you!

Vendor: [trembling] Pl- please, Prince Markus. Take whatever you need. It's all yours.

Markus: ... if my presence here is causing this, then so be it. I will receive my portion and leave as soon as I can. Gratitude for your service, kind vendor.

Vendor: Y- yes, my prince...

Drunk Commoner: What're ya waiting for? Scram! Go!

Burly Commoner: Quiet, you fool! His knights will have your head if you don't shut up!

Drunk Commoner: Argh, how much worse can Vanot do? I'm sick of them. The best death I can wish for is to die fighting against one of them!

[Markus leaves the scene. He heads into a beaten down house, and inside, lying on a bed, is a short, round, old man who has trouble breathing]

Ernest: [with the voice of a raspy sailor] A waste of good fruit, don't cha think?

Markus: [chuckling] Now you sound like my Father.

Ernest: [He lets out of a chortle despite his troubled breathing, coughing] Hah, get outta here with that crap. Even if the plant was offered to some sick little girl, that dastard would still think it's a waste. But look at me. I'm a dying old man. You know my days are up.

Markus: If I gave you the real medicine, it would be a waste for sure. The Hollis fruit is merely a pain reliever.

Ernest: What do ya take me for, boy? I've sailed all round the toughest seas since I found my sea legs... I don't need something like that. [He coughs violently] Ugh... just toss it over here.

[Markus hands Ernest the fruit, and the old man puts it in a pipe and smokes it]

Ernest: Ahhh... much better. It'd last me for a few days. Just enough before I finally leave this damn world.

Markus: The clerics have foretold your passing?

Ernest: Aye.

[There is a moment of silence. Then, Ernest speaks up again.]

Ernest: Were it not for you, none of us commoners would have access to good medicine. Let alone this fruit. You did good, boy. You were the only noble there in that court room who stood up for us- I'll never forget seeing it with my own two eyes. A young kid, standing against dozens of corrupt old senators, not afraid of a single one of 'em.

Markus: And were it not for you, I would never have been able to succeed with those negotiations. You were the only ship captain who agreed to lead the vessels through uncharted waters to obtain the medicinal ingredients. We proved to the court that it could be done, that an efficient and profitable trade could arise from harvesting the medicine.

Ernest: Heh. I was already in the early stages of the plague. I was willing to try anything. I heard that the king's son was already an apt negotiator and judge. [pauses] The kingdom would fare well under you.

Markus: Unfortunately, that may never happen. The political structure of Vanot is too stubborn to change. I do not have enough sway to cause any significant reforms, and the commoners do not believe I have any real power.

Ernest: Most of us commoners don't know what we're talking about. Forget 'em, and keep doing what you're doing. One day, the people will know just how capable you are. I know it. [He coughs hoarsely] Aye, now it seems my time is up. I can almost smell the dark waters just ahead. It's time for me to be alone, to sail the last voyage.

Markus: [He gets up, and is about to leave] I will always remember what you have done. You believed in me when even my own Father did not. You knew I was strong enough to pull through.

Ernest: No need for final words, boy. All good things have already passed.

Markus: Farewell, Ernest. May you be guided by the stars to where you choose to be.

[Markus exits the house, and the scene changes to the throne room of the Vanot castle. It is dark lavender and black, with mighty obsidian stalagmites piercing through the floors in orderly columns. King Soloman sits on the black throne, with ominous mists of lavender circling around the chair. Knights are lined throughout the sides of the room. Markus walks in through the palace doors.]

Soloman: I heard of your disobedience in the Lapis Deserts.

Markus: You altered military policy and did not inform me!

Soloman: Any sensible general would have done the same! Your insolence has caused harm to our army for far too long. It was time to put you in your place.

Markus: The army is cruel and unfair. All scholars know that our current policies are no different than crimes of war!

Soloman: Unfair? Hah! Do you continue to live in that fantasy, where the Merciless Hunger does not exist? Sacrifice is inevitable. If we were not the rulers, others would take our place, and do what we do. Those who believe otherwise are ripe to be taken advantage of. The ones who benefit from them may claim to be appreciative. But among them are those who look down on the gullible; they sneer at the naive while prospering without any consequence. As of now, you are among the gullible. You are weak.

Markus: Is power that important to you? Your divisive policies have caused our own people to hate us.

Soloman: Why do you care for what they believe? You wish to be seen as their hero?

Markus: ...

Soloman: The hero does not win because of his virtues. He wins because of his courage. That same courage is shared by the conquerors! If the prophets did not foretell that you would eventually learn from your wrongs and grow into a strong and ruthless king, I would have cast you away long ago.

Markus: I will never accept what they have foretold.

Soloman: You may believe what you wish. But once a prophecy is foretold, there is no escaping it. You will learn to appreciate what you have been given. A mighty lineage, directly descended from the Byzantium Dragon Vanot. Many wish to have what you have. Open your eyes and do not let your gifts go to waste. [He pauses, and his tone grows darker] Now, it is time for you to achieve redemption.

Markus: What are you talking about?

Soloman: I have received word that the Blood Rebellion, aided by a boy who wields the Fire Emblem, has razed the Library of Aruna, and is headed for the rest of the dragon lands. If that boy truly does have such an artifact, then we must stop him. Lead our army against these traitors. I trust that once you see how futile your peace negotiations are, you will learn that there is only one path for you to take in this life.

Markus: I will prove you wrong. I will fight them by spilling as little blood as can be done.

Soloman: Try as you might. One must fail again and again to learn. By now, you are beginning to realize that sacrifice is unescapable. I sense a lingering thought within you, one that you are hiding from yourself. But when they come at you with an axe to your neck, you will embrace this truth to survive. Even you cannot be so foolish to reject it.

[The scene changes back to Josef's perspective. Josef heads into one of the sections of the library. It is totally silent, but it is a wondrous sight to behold. He spots Carlo with books next to him, but his friend hasn't opened a single one. Instead, he is strategizing a plan in Imps, while occasionally stopping to eavesdrop on a group of nobles nearby, who do not appear to see him.]

Josef: Yo. Got any good info?

Carlo: Nothing. I've been seeing if I can piece something together by listening to a couple of groups talking. All the stuff they're saying is trash.

[Josef looks at the nobles, and notices that they are all well dressed and attractive. Among them is a young Clo nobleman who Josef looks differently at than the others; Carlo takes note. Josef also notices that occasionally, a young noble girl would walk by, and Carlo would avert his eyes away from her, as not to be distracted.]

Josef: Girl got your eye?

Carlo: She did for a sec. [He goes back to playing Imps]

Josef: Ha, I know she's your type, dude. Not every day you'll come across someone like that.

Carlo: [Visibly annoyed] You're the one to speak. Why don't you go for that guy over there?

Josef: Maybe I will. If you make your move first.

Carlo: Heh. Wouldn't waste my time. Nobles want nothing to do with us commoners.

Josef: Hey man, you're a hero now. That's gotta count for something.

[The nobles start to overhear their conversation, and the handsome young nobleman Josef was looking at walks over.]

Clo nobleman: Ah yes, the Umber Town heroes. It is an honor to meet at last.

Josef: Same.

Clo nobleman: The underhanded tactics you used to win were quite... unconventional. Say, though. We are having an important meeting as of now. Do you mind giving us the room?

Josef: You kicking us out? We're in this rebellion, too!

Clo nobleman: Yes, but from a different front. The matters we are discussing are things that commoners would likely mishandle. Especially commoners who have deluded themselves into believing they are descended from Tarkla.

Josef: You smug, stuck-up bastard.

Carlo: This how you treat your allies? No wonder why you guys never won anything before we came along.

Bearded nobleman: Quiet down. If you two have nothing to contribute, then you are pests in this vicinity. Come; let us move to a different room. We cannot negotiate with Rithilus.

[The nobles depart.]

Josef: Man, I'll get back at 'em. We did all that, just to be treated like dirt?

Carlo: They just see us as tools. If we do our job on the battlefield right, they'll cheer for us. But as soon as we step into their social circles, they'll kick us out.

Josef: Then we'll show we're better than them in every way. We'll be so far ahead of them in the next battles, they'll be wishing they were Rithilus. I just gotta find where to look.

Carlo: You try a book yet?

Josef: Tch... I haven't touched one since I left my job at the temple.

Carlo: You know your way around them better than I do. Could be something good in there.

Josef: Yeah. Probably.

[Frustrated, he reluctantly opens one of the books. He and Carlo sit together in the corner of bookshelves, and several hours pass. Now, it is night, and only candlelight illuminates them. Carlo has been playing Imps non-stop, occasionally stopping to draft up a strategy for a real battle, and Josef is irritated but determined to find something in his readings. And then, miraculously, an answer arrives.]

Josef: Yo, Carlo. Ever hear of the "Scarlet Scales"?

Carlo: Doesn't ring a bell.

Josef: It shouldn't. I just read about 'em. Said they were secretly guarded cause they were too powerful, or something. If a Tarkla touches one, they get these kickass skills. So, some monks had to decide which Tarklas were 'worthy' to use 'em. If I got my hands on one...

Carlo: You're saying you can prove you're Tarkla if you get skills from a Scale.

Josef: I'll get 'em, for sure! The thing is, there's no Scarlet Scales left. But this book points out where one used to be. And guess where it is? [He grins]

Carlo: Jaune Temples.

Josef: If we can get the past to get one of these, I can finally show those dastards who's a real Tarkla. Problem is, the Scarlet Scale in Jaune Temple was infected with some sort of poison. Back then, they didn't know how to get rid of it. This book is saying that just a few decades ago, they figured out how to deal with it. We can tell Sophia and the others how to save that Scarlet Scale!

Carlo: Alright, sounds like a plan.

[Just then, Kogyo walks into the conversation.]

Kogyo: Good evening, Josef. Carlo.

Josef: What do you want? Here to kick us out, too?

Kogyo: No. Allies of the Blood Rebellion deserve to be treated with honor.

Josef: So, what's so important that you gotta butt in?

Kogyo: I did not overhear your words, but I see that Genevere's Book of Omens sits next to you.

Josef: Yeah, I haven't gone over that one yet. You want it?

Kogyo: It is a fine book. But a forbidden one.

Carlo: Forbidden?

Kogyo: There exists knowledge in this world that is too dangerous for humans to use. Have you wondered of these books' origins?

Carlo: Seems like a good question.

Kogyo: Since the dawn of time, knowledge has lived in the roots and stems of certain trees of Myonkos, thriving prominently in the Kronos Jungles. Its secrets were steadfastly guarded by monks. When Vanot razed this land, they took that knowledge and conjured these books to keep for themselves. Ever since then, they have gathered knowledge from nature all throughout Myonkos, seizing it from its origins and imprisoning it within walls such as these.

Josef: Sucks to hear that. Guess you can't wait to get back at Vanot for messing with your people.

Kogyo: It is a shame what happened with Kronos Jungles. If it lived on, the Library of Aruna would not. But though my people's land has died, its essence still lives on. And though I detest its abominable new form, there is something alluring to it. Something familiar.

Josef: Cool. So, you want this book or- [But Kogyo walks away without replying.]

Carlo: That was weird. Anyways, what you gonna do with it now?

Josef: Just stuff it back. I got what I need; I don't need some forbidden text.

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[The past. Sophia lies on a giant dew leaf, housed within a large nook in a large, tropical tree. Her room is darkened; only the faint lights of water dripping through the vines illuminate it. The army is resting within Kronos Jungles, as the monks have provided them with hospitality after they were saved from Aruna's schemes. Rivia walks in.]

Rivia: Sophia, why are ya here alone? Everyone's out celebrating. We stopped Aruna from destroying the jungle!

Sophia: [She lifts herself up and sits on the bed, but her head is tilted away from Rivia] My apologies, Princess Rivia. I should not have conducted myself in that manner.

Rivia: No way, Sophia, I wasn't saying it was your fault! I didn't know there was something bothering you.

Sophia: I...

[Rivia comes closer, and sees tears in her friend's eyes]

Rivia: Sophia... you're crying...

Sophia: [sniffing] The trees. They will all be gone. And I can do nothing to stop them from disappearing.

Rivia: What are you saying?

Sophia: I spoke to Josef. The Library of Aruna still exists in his time. Those in the future must have continued the work Aruna left behind.

Rivia: Oh no...

Sophia: I tried to be as brave as I could when I spoke to him. I did not want him to see any weaknesses in me. He looks to me as his guiding light. [sniffing]

Rivia: Don't cry, Sophia. You're putting too much of this on yourself. [She tries to smile and strokes her fingers over Sophia's cheek, wiping away her tears.]

Sophia: Please, we should not be doing this. A princess must not wipe away her servant's tears.

Rivia: I don't care what the kingdom says, I'm not gonna let my friend go through this alone!

Sophia: Princess Rivia...

Rivia: Why are you always so hard on yourself, anyways? I can carry whatever's on you, too!

Sophia: Ever since I was a child, I have been raised by the Sisterly Order to serve Tarkla nobles. I have no family left; I was the last of my House. Since we lost the rights to our land, the Kingdom believed the only use I had was as a servant to the other Houses. But every noble that I served fell victim to the Curse's madness; some were so far gone, they took their own lives, or those of others. I felt as if I was the one who hurt them, as everywhere I went, suffering followed.

Rivia: I didn't know that. You never told me what you went through before I met you.

Sophia: I did not want to worry you. You were suffering so much from the wounds given to you by the Sacred Fires. I only thought about perfecting my spells to soothe you and make you happy. When I finally lessened your pain, and you smiled back at me, for the first time, I felt like I belonged somewhere.

[Rivia smiles, then reaches out to wipe away the last of Sophia's tears. She caresses her friend's face in her hand.]

Rivia: Do you remember the pendant you gave me? When I wouldn't stop whining for Mother to get me one?

Sophia: You still have it? I thought it was lost.

Rivia: I would never lose it! I've always carried it with me. [She reaches towards one of the chains around her neck; its valley is hidden beneath the top of her dress. She fidgets on it and digs the bottom of the necklace out, revealing that all along, there was a pendant underneath.]

Sophia: You do have it!

Rivia: I'm sorry I didn't wanna show it. I was so happy when you first gave it to me, cause it was my first pendant. But when Father caved in and gave me more, I thought it wasn't as beautiful as the others. Even though I didn't show it, I still kept it around because it reminded me of you.

Sophia: I am so happy to hear that. That pendant is the last heirloom of my family's House.

Rivia: What?!?

Sophia: When I first met you, I thought you would not care if I told you or not.

Rivia: No way, I do care! Sophia, now that I know it's so important to you, I won't be ashamed of wearing it ever again. I'll show it off around my neck wherever I go!

Sophia: You are too kind.

Rivia: If you ever feel like no one needs you, remember that I'll always want you with me. Can you promise to never leave my side?

Sophia: I- I will try.

[The night passes. The day of the battle at Jaune Temple arrives. The Temple is pristine and marble in the past, with many running streams of clear water. However, that is only what it seems like on the outside. It is overcast by shadows inside, and what lies further in cannot be seen. In the present, the exterior of the temple is full of green grass and rivers, but unlike in the past, it is more apparent what is inside of the temple. Wails and screams echo when one approaches the entrance; it is haunted by Cursed Spirits. The spirits cannot directly attack anyone, but they can possess those who have not been blessed. Visitors are mostly safe, but those who have lived there for a while are in danger of being broken down.]

Josef: [to Sophia while he's peering at what the temple looks like in the past] There's still monks living in there?

Sophia: Unfortunately, yes. They have dedicated their lives to guarding the relics within the temple. They do their best to ward off the Curse while living their day to day lives, but the darkness is taking a toll on their well being.

Josef: Man, I can't imagine living in a haunted temple. That's terrifying.

Sophia: Queen Hilatia insists that we must try to do what we can. Even if we cannot save the temple itself, we may be able to save a few of the monks from the Spirits' possessions and gain valuable allies.

Josef: Gotcha. [pauses] Hey, I didn't ask you this before, but you seemed kinda bothered by what happened to Kronos Jungles. You alright?

Sophia: I was a bit hurt. But now I am better. Thank you for your concern.

Josef: So how's Rivia been doing? I haven't been able to talk to her for a while. She doing a bunch of heroic stuff?

Sophia: Well yes, I suppose so.

Josef: Cool. I can't wait to meet her again. I've got a lot on my mind that I wanted to ask her about.

[The past]

Rivia: Wow, a Scarlet Scale? I didn't know there was one here.

Sophia: Apparently it has been damaged, and soon, it will break. Its guardians must be keeping it hidden to try to repair it. Josef has taught me how to heal its wounds; it was a bit hard to learn the new techniques from the future, but I believe I have the basics.

Rivia: I wonder if after we repair it, the guardians will think I'm worthy to touch the scale. Well, we won't know until we get there.

[The present]

Gesiri: Alright rebels, let's camp out here for the day. Our scouts will search the land ahead of us, and after they report back, we'll launch a surprise attack. [She leaves, and soldiers converse amongst themselves.]

Josef: Yo, Carlo, I've been thinking about something.

Carlo: What?

Josef: Don't ya think our group's missing something? I mean, compared to Rivia's. I just can't figure out what...

Carlo: Huh. Now that I think about it, you're right. They're a lot more organized with formal tactics or whatever. Plus, from what you've said, they don't just stumble about and take blows on their heads.

Josef: Wait, I've got it! It's Sophia. She's a healer. We don't got one of those.

Carlo: Good thinking. Not just with healing though, she can add buffs, debuffs and cast some big supporting spells.

Josef: But how are we ever gonna find someone who can do all that?

Carlo: We're at Jaune Temples. There's a ton of them there.

Josef: Wait, you're saying we gotta recruit the enemy?

Carlo: Maybe. Don't forget about the traveling missionaries, though. They don't got a sworn allegiance to Vanot. They're neutral and go around to anywhere they think needs healing from the Curse. We can probably bribe one of the less loyal ones to our side.

Josef: Cool. Well, let's get going then. [to himself] Traveling missionaries, huh? That old man must be here, too. Hopefully he stays out of my way.

[They sneak around the temple, and eavesdrop on the clerics to see if any of them is just in it for the luxuries. But they don't find anyone. They're outside of the temple, hiding in bushes in a grassy plain.]

Josef: Man, this is annoying. I thought we'd get lucky and-

Carlo: Huh. Look over there.

[Josef squints and sees a faint figure of a lone missionary lying on the ground. Upon closer inspection, he sees a chubby boy with rosy cheeks, wearing hand-me-down white robes that have been washed too many times and are starting to become grey, is lazing around on the grass, having a picnic with his toys]

Josef: Wait a minute, is that Charlie? What's he doing here?

Carlo: He must've bailed on us and become a traveling missionary.

Josef: That two-faced bastard! He took the limited-edition Hector Horse we gave him as front payment and left! He couldn't hold up his end of the bargain! I bet he chugged some of the drinks he was supposed to sell, too. I could totally get drunk off one of those now, too. I'm pissed off.

Carlo: Josef, those drinks weren't even alcoholic in the first place. We just filled them with watered down badger juice and hoped the drunks couldn't tell the difference.

Josef: Oh yeah, now I remember.

[They walk over to Charlie.]

Charlie: [to himself] I'm so glad I got out of Umber Town. Now it's just me and my collectibles, and these flowers. Those two will never find me here!

Josef: Yo, Charlie!

Charlie: Oh crap, it's them again!

Carlo: You thought you could leave town without us knowing?

Charlie: I totally forgot we were supposed to sell that day! I overslept!

Josef: Nah, it's all good, we're onto something better now. Say listen, we got an offer to make ya.

Charlie: No way, screw you guys! I'm not falling for that again! Plus, I've got all the collectibles. You guys can't do anything for me!

Carlo: Didn't you hear? They came out with rare editions last week.

Charlie: Rare... editions?

Carlo: You interested?

Charlie: Prove it. I bet they're nothing special.

[Carlo pulls out a crane figurine and places it on the palm of his hand, and it starts to spin]

Charlie: [mesmerized] Wow, Crumplestone?!? Wait just a minute, are you two trying to trick me again?

Josef: It's a real collectible, but you don't have to join us if you don't want to. It's up to you if you want Crumplestone Crane or not.

Charlie: Ermm, well, I suppose I can leave my post and get back before they know... they don't check up on us when we're on break. Just ONE more collectible can't hurt. But once I get this one, I'm through with this!

Carlo: Cool.

Josef: Glad to have you back, bud.

[Charlie joins the party as a Cleric]

[Soon, the battle begins. Kogyo is a green allied unit and leads other green allied units. The past faces Cursed Spirits possessing Tarkla monks, while the present faces both Cursed Spirits and Vanot monks who have been consumed by the Curse's madness. The cursed enemies are far different from the ones from before; they are not gargoyles or ghouls, but ghostly spirits that have little attacking power, yet can possess foes to command them.]

Marsello: This is giving me the creeps; these monks are crazy! How come they're living with all these curses around them?



Kogyo: Vanot needed to conquer this temple to gain its power, but it could not fully ward away the curse haunting it. Still, its monks went forth to their duty. They offered their lives to guard the temple for Vanot, seeping away its powers to embolden Vanot magic. Unfortunately, it has come at the cost of their sanity. They struggle every waking moment to maintain just enough of it to serve their kingdom.

Josef: Really? [to Charlie] How come someone like you hasn't lost his mind yet?

Charlie: [shivers] I haven't been around long enough. Plus, they know I'm just a newbie, so they don't assign me to do the dangerous stuff. I get lots of breaks.

[Eventually, the first half of the temple falls, and the battle is over.]

Josef: Man, this place is huge! We haven't even gotten through half of it!

Carlo: It looks like we've defeated the exterior. But we're not just done yet; the Scarlet Scale is further inside. The temple interior is a whole other beast.

Charlie: [to himself] Whew, glad that's over. Now, where was I with the parsnips... wait a minute, this crane is missing its friends, Dumpy Herman and Sally Sal. How am I supposed to get them if the Order forbids me from buying them in the markets?!? I wonder if they have them... no, darn those bastards! I can't let them play me again. But I've got a plan this time...

[He walks over to Josef and Carlo]

Charlie: Hey listen, Josef.

Josef: Yo.

Charlie: I was thinking I could lend you my services again.

Josef: What for?

Charlie: What? You know I'm a cleric of the order who can't turn a blind eye to people in need! I'd love to help your cause!

Josef: Oh, I see. Great to have you on board!

Charlie: And uh, you don't have to pay me, I'm well compensated by what the order's given me. Though if you happen to come across any of those Homeshire collectibles... it would be nice to have some.

Josef: Sure thing! Someone as generous as you deserves something like that.

Charlie: [to himself as he's walking away] Wow, they totally bought it!

[Charlie leaves]

Josef: You didn't tell him that the entire new edition came out, and you got it all?

Carlo: He didn't ask.

Josef: What a sucker.

Carlo: I've gotta head back to the army. Gesiri wants me to help plan something.

[Carlo leaves, and Josef is alone inside of the foggy temple. He wanders around, and heads into a large chamber. It is dark, lit up only by candlelight and ritualistic, glowing symbols. Josef stands before an altar. It brings up memories that he wishes to forget. Just then, an old priest with a bushy white beard and light grey robes steps out of the fog and appears near Josef. His name is Father Francies.]

Francies: So, Charlie has chosen to depart from the order. He could not resist his temptations after all. As was his destiny.

Josef: I figured you'd be here. I heard you were gonna lead some missionaries on a couple of trips.

Francies: That is the fate that Batova had foretold for me.

Josef: Did Batova also decide that a Vanot lance would run through Klifa?

Francies: I was deeply saddened when I heard what had happened to her. She had devoted her whole life to serving our temple. But the prophets could not foretell her ultimate fate. Batova's Will cannot prophesize the fates of all people; He may tell those of a few, and may only grace us whatever gifts are within His reach. And for you, he has gifted you a fortunate life.

Josef: To die as a mediocre worker in some mediocre temple?

Francies: It is a very good fate, far better than what most can ever have. You will not be stricken with illness. You will not go hungry any longer. You will live a content life, serving Batova and his missionaries in a very humble manner.

Josef: And what if I don't want any of that?

Francies: You are asking for far too much. To ask for more is to be ungrateful.

Josef: So I'm the bad guy for not being grateful or whatever, but the people who were destined to be heroes aren't bad guys just because they were gifted something far better? They never have to do what I have to do- to just sit down, take what I've been given, and leave what I want behind.

Francies: You may have been born into poverty, but since your fate is more well off than others, you do not have good reasons to complain about your suffering. Be patient, and you will be well fed. You may not be eating full course meals, but if you reject Batova's gifts, you will have nothing.

Josef: I'd rather risk starving if that means I have a shot to be greater than what everyone thought I would be.

Francies: Josef, becoming a hero is not the path that Batova has laid out for you. I plead you to return to UMBER Town; the temple will welcome you once again.

Josef: Why do you get to decide what's good for me? Why can't I decide that myself?

Francies: It is by the will of Batova. His Choices are not to be questioned; rebelling against one's fate will only cause discord and suffering. You must give up the Fire Emblem, else you may invite in chaos far more terrible than you can imagine. It is an instrument for the gods, not for humans.

Josef: Forget it. I was told the Fire Emblem chooses its owner; why don't you consider that as part of fate, too? All my life, you people have been dragging me down. This damn room, this damn altar. It's

where all the prophecies are gotten. It's where I was chained up by your beliefs. But I won't let whatever this fate is decide who gets to be a hero, and who doesn't get to be one. You can do whatever you want to do, Francies- and I'll go my own way.

[Josef begins to walk out of the room]

Francies: [shouting after him] A pleasant, peaceful life! A gift that many can only hope for! What more can you want?

### ACT 1, CHAPTER 3: AT A COST

[The past. Sophia is walking through the temple, helping the monks recover. In the temple gardens, she comes across a very ill, middle-aged burly man with glasses and a brown bushy beard. He is hunched over something with a large blanket over himself, and appears to be inscribing something on parchment with his quill.]

Sophia: Ah, excuse me, sir. Are you hurt? I can offer to take a look at your wounds.

Burly man: It's fine, thank you. My illness cannot be treated.

Sophia: Have the spirits ailed you? I have exorcised them all from the others.

Burly man: ... my case is different. All the monks here have tried everything, and they're among the best in the land. Nothing can be done. I've been living in this temple, biding my time, preparing to die. I'm ready. [He coughs]

Sophia: I am so sorry to hear that. [She notices what he is watching, and her face glows up] Pardon me sir, is that a Crescent herb you are watching?

Burly man: [smiles] Why yes it is. These plants are hard to find, so I took the chance to write a poem about its features. The way it looks, how it shines by itself amongst the darkness it resides in... you know your herbs?

Sophia: Yes sir, I am quite fond of them. Ever since I was a child, I have loved taking care of all sorts of plants and watching them grow.

Burly man: Ha, well it's not every day you find someone as interested in them as you. There are collections upon collections of preserved herbs stored in the books of the library. Would you want me to show you around?

Sophia: Well, I have just finished caring for most of the people here, so yes, that would be nice.

Burly man: Alright, then. By the way, my name is Hermann.

Sophia: Mines is Sophia. I am pleased to meet you.

[They head into the library, and into a secluded area filled with stacks of parchment lining the tall shelves. Sophia is in awe at the spectacle]

Sophia: These books are quite new. Did someone write them?

Hermann: Well, I did.

Sophia: You wrote all of this?

Hermann: I sure did. They're just a bunch of musings about things I've picked up during my travels, and some ideas I've had about how people should live.

Sophia: That is interesting. May I take a look?

Hermann: Knock yourself out.

[He shows her a few writings, and Sophia is engrossed in them.]

Sophia: These ideas... they're wonderful.

Hermann: You really think so?

Sophia: Yes. Something was troubling me before, but now, I have finally laid it to rest.

Hermann: What was bothering if, if you don't mind saying?

Sophia: I was saddened by the destruction of Kronos Jungles. With the Fire Emblem, I saw into the future and saw that its fate did not change. Was it inevitable? To have built such a beautiful place, only to destine it to meet such a horrific end?

Hermann: Those who follow Batova would say its destiny is a sacrifice to allow the rest of the world to escape the Merciless Hunger.

Sophia: But your writings have shown me a different view, and one that I think would be very beautiful, if it were to be finished. Growing up in the Sisterly Order, I have been taught that Myonkos works like a clock- each soul is a gear, and must not leave the position designed just for them. If just one leaves, the whole clock may fall apart. Of course, this is merely an analogy; the actual workings are too complex to be understood by any human.

Hermann: I've been wondering how that whole thing works. It never made sense to me why, if someone doesn't become a tailor, the land would suffer a drought. But I guess we'll never know.

Sophia: And because of this lack of understanding, humans have feared leaving an autonomous Fate. But you have discovered all these possible ways for a different life!

Hermann: They're just a bunch of ideas so far. I don't know what will happen if anyone actually follows these principles once I finish them... [coughs] And sadly, I don't think I ever can.

Sophia: Oh...

Hermann: Well, it was nice talking with you. But I assume you have other duties to attend to.

Sophia: Ah... that is true. May I tell you one last thing before I go?

Hermann: I'd be happy to listen.

Sophia: I used to believe that we must walk the path Batova has paved for us. But for months, I have had dreams about many possible futures. When they started, I thought they were messages left behind by Batova. Yet, He has decided upon only a single Fate. Now, I am beginning to wonder which path is the one He has chosen.

Hermann: I wish I had a definitive answer to that. Maybe someone, someday, will. I'm glad I could ease your worries even just a bit, though. Have a good day, Sister.

Sophia: I bid the same to you.

[After a few more cutscenes, the player sees Rivia calling for Sophia]

Rivia: Sophia!

Sophia: Yes, my princess, what is it?

Rivia: This whole temple. It's so gross.

Sophia: I apologize on their behalf, but with all the Cursed spirits about, the monks did not have the will to clean it.

[The present. Josef is alone in the Temples, formulating a strategy in Imps. Suddenly, his surroundings begin to deform.]

Josef: Huh? What the hell?

[After the shapes around him evaporate and reform into a mix of both past a present, Josef sees Rivia and Sophia.]

Rivia: ... well, I don't care! Back in Tarkla, even when all the servants were sick, they still managed to clean up the palace!

Sophia: I think becoming possessed is a bit different than being sick...

Josef: Uhh... you're the same Rivia, from before, right?

Rivia: [turning to Josef and being surprised] What? Oh gods! Umm...

Sophia: You two can hear one another again? [to herself] How did this suddenly happen?

Rivia: Um, yes, yes I am! I have just been preparing to give orders.... As any such leader must do, I must be strong and stand tall to make sure my servants feel my strength, too.

Josef: Sounded to me like you were just whining.

Rivia: ...

Josef: ...

Rivia: All right, I've had it! Yeah, I don't know how to act like some great heroine or whatever, alright? I WAS just acting!

Sophia: [to herself] Oh no... what am I supposed to do?

Josef: What? Aw man, I can't believe it! Everything you said was just bull?

Rivia: Wow, that's crass of you to say that. Aren't you supposed to be some hero in your time, too?

Josef: Yeah, well, I grew up in the slums and didn't have the chance to learn all that. I thought nobles were supposed to know their way around heroics.

Rivia: Oh, sure. The only things I've been taught are how to wear the right clothes to a formal.

Sophia: Um, you two, we must not fight now! Look!

[Surrounding them are more Cursed Spirits]

Rivia: [worried] I thought this supposed to be a safe area after it was cleared, so how did more appear?

Sophia: They must have come from the interiors once they heard our presence. They arrived sooner than we thought!

Josef: That means the rest of the army must be fighting them, too. We gotta start pressing into the interior, now!

Rivia: Same here. We gotta regroup with them and strike against those defensive towers before they can hit us.

Josef: ... And that'd channel a change to give us the advantage back in our time. Hey, I was just thinking of that! It's a sneaky and risky move, but I've been itching to see it happen.

Rivia: [smirking] You think you can give us enough info to lead us there?

Josef: Better than any noble can.

Sophia: Be ready, a Cursed Spirit is coming straight towards us!

[The battle begins. They regroup with the rest of the troops.]

Rivia: Whew. We actually did it.

Josef: I never thought a noble would have such an aggressive strategy style. From what I've seen from Vanot soldiers, they've been taught to play more defensively.

Rivia: Yeah, well, during my training, I often got bored, so I took shortcuts.

Josef: That was nothing like what I was expecting. I was thinking about how to shape up my strategies to better fit a noble heroine's, once I got to talk to you again.

Rivia: Good thing I dropped the act, then. Those defensive styles suck.

Josef: They sure do.

[Both armies make their way down to temple, and, without telling the rest of the Blood Rebellion, Josef commands Sophia and Rivia to clear a path into the chamber with the damaged Scarlet Scale]

[During the battle, Hermann feels a voice calling to him]

Hermann: Ugh... this voice in my head... my delusions are coming back. I- I have to go...

[The voices drags him into the depths even further below, to a place that Hilatia forbids the army to venture into. Sophia sees him go, but she is too far away to reach him.]

Sophia: Wait, I know who that is. Hermann! [There is no response]

Rivia: Oh my gosh, he can't go there!

Sophia: Oh no, something has happened to him. [She shuts her eyes] His time must be nearly up.

Rivia: I'm sorry. I wish there was something we could do.

Sophia: It is alright. This is what he has been prepared to do.

[Eventually, the interior of the temple is captured, and Rivia, Sophia, Josef and Carlo reach the Scarlet Scale in secret. The guardians around it have fallen to the Cursed Spirits, who became more threatened once the exterior was taken over and attacked the guardians out of heightened fear.]

Sophia: The guardians... they are all gone. [She whispers a prayer to the fallen]

Rivia: Does that mean...?

Sophia: I do not know. Once the old guardians fall, new ones must take their place.

Rivia: Oh. Oh wait, but Sophia, aren't you qualified to be a guardian?

Sophia: I- I, uh, I am.

Rivia: So, since you're the first to arrive at the scene, you can take over their duties, right?

Sophia: According to the Order's laws, yes. But-

Rivia: Please, Sophia. Can you let us touch it?

Sophia: ... if the princess wishes it, then I shall.

Rivia: Thank you! Thank you so much!

[They approach the Scale]

Rivia: What am I even feeling? It's like when I get closer to it... I feel something digging into me...

Josef: Sophia, we gotta do this quick!

Sophia: I will. [She conjures up the healing spell, and the wounds on the Scarlet Scale begin to close up.]

Rivia: Ugh, it hurts so much. But- wow! That's what it actually looks like? It's so well crafted. The ruby is so beautiful!

Carlo: Yo Josef, you see that?

Josef: Yeah, something's appearing in our time. That's the scale?

Carlo: You ready?

Josef: Yeah! I'm not backing down now.

Carlo: Hmm...

Josef: [trying to hide his nervousness] Damn. Well, I gotta make it work. I have to.

Sophia: Ah!

Rivia: Sophia, are you alright?

Sophia: [weakly] Yes... I am finished.

Rivia: Oh by the gods, this is it? I... [she slowly steps towards it]

Carlo: There it is.

Josef: Alright. [He begins to step towards the Scale]

[At the same time, the two touch the Scale. A swirl of dark red and mahogany envelops them, and they are lost in a trance. Carlo stares intensely, his eyes wide, his face serious. But suddenly, Sophia begins to regain energy, and notices something is off.]

Sophia: Rivia! Oh, gods no!

[She reaches onto Rivia's hand, and slides her fingers underneath, interlocking them with the princess's. Rivia, in her trance, looks at her friend with glowing red eyes]

Rivia: Sophia? What in the-

Sophia: I'm sorry, Rivia. [She squeezes her hand tighter, and Rivia feels weaker and weaker. Suddenly, she lets go and gasps. Rivia has broken out of the trance, and weakly collapses to the floor. Her eyes revert back to normal, and she gasps when she sees her friend seizing up in pain and screaming when the red swirls become black, unleashing a sinister cackling throughout the chamber]

Rivia: Sophia! [She runs towards her friend, but it's too late. The ritual ends, and Sophia falls. Rivia catches her. In the present, Josef gasps and pants when the ritual stops. His hand is searing and burning bright orange, and he feels something different about.]

Rivia: Sophia? She- she's not waking up!

Josef: What? What happened?

Rivia: She just- she took my place just when the ritual was about to end! [gasps] There's something horrible running down her face, these black veins! Oh no, Sophia!

Josef: Damn it! [He looks at Rivia, and sees a new seal running down her forearm] Carlo, what the hell is that?

Carlo: ... based off what we read, I'm guessing it's a skill seal.

Josef: A skill seal? Then that means the ritual-

Carlo: Josef.

Josef: What?



Carlo: Take a look at your own forearm.

[Though he's panicking over Sophia, Josef glances down at his arm. Like Rivia's, a bright orange and mahogany seal runs down it. It is the mark of a Tarkla.]