

Episode 2: Dirty Laundry

Elise Kova

From set *Streets of New Capenna*

MEZZIO STATION

New Capenna was a blur. Elspeth held onto a pole in the train car as it jostled down the tracks, but doing so was unnecessary when she was packed so tightly alongside other commuters that it was impossible to move. With a lurch and a groan, the train came to a halt at the main station for the Mezzio—the beating heart of the city—and exhaled smoke and people.



Art by: Muhammad Firdaus

From this station, golden elevators in the shapes of giant beetle shells lifted the wealthy to Park Heights. Workers rose from Caldaia via steam-filled stairwells. She fit in easier with the latter than the glittering fashions of the former.

Elspeth assessed her clothing. Her trousers were plain and sturdy, and she'd rolled up her sleeves and kept her vest open to fight against the heat of the train. Even though the dome surrounding New Capenna kept the city consistently temperate, it was sweltering among all those bodies. Her labors also kept her temperature high throughout the day. As eager as she would be to indulge the fancier fashions of New Capenna, survival was her first focus.

And survival meant practical clothes she could work in.

She kept her head down and took odd jobs throughout the city as she could find them. On the surface, she was no different than any of the others. *And yet* Elspeth rubbed her midsection lightly. There was still a hollow feeling that had been carved into her by Godsend's blade when Heliod impaled her. She had been hoping to heal that ache in New Capenna, but she still didn't feel quite right in this new place.

She was so lost in her thoughts that she didn't see the sprinting leonin until it was too late.

The man barreled right into her, and they both ricocheted to the ground. Elspeth blinked, dazed. The commuters flowed around them.

"Angels bless! Quit lollygagging and watch where you're going!" he grumbled, smoothing out his mottled brown fur and collecting the bolts of fabric he'd previously had tucked under his arm before they could be trampled beyond repair.

"Sorry about that." Judging by his clothes, he seemed to be unaffiliated with one of the families that seemed to rule New Capenna, and for that, she was grateful. Whatever government was in place wasn't very effective since she couldn't even name it, but she could name the Obscura, the Cabaretti, the Maestros, the Brokers, and the Riveteers from memory.

"*Sheesh*, anyone ever told you to keep your eyes forward?" The leonin stood and left her behind.

The words rang in her ears, holding her down. Grounding her. The commuters of New Capenna continued to flow around her, some shooting her frustrated or confused looks, others ignoring her entirely.

But Elspeth was hardly aware of the people. In her mind, she was not only in a different place, but time

DOMINARIA, EARLIER

"You're alive!" Ajani raced to her. His protective embrace crushed her.

Elspeth wrapped her arms around him, holding her friend in equal measure. The fur around his neck tickled her nose and cheek, bringing a smile to her lips. Happiness. Relief. *Safety*. It had been so long since she'd last felt such pleasant emotions that it was a wonder she could still feel them at all.

"I didn't believe you walked in the realm of the living until I saw you for myself." Ajani pulled away, settling his hands on her shoulders. His eyes were shining with emotion.

"I wouldn't have either, if I were you." Elspeth gave him a tired smile. "I'm so glad I found you." Dominaria wasn't one of their usual haunts. They had met here once before, long ago. She was relieved it hadn't been so long ago that she couldn't still track down her old friend in this mostly unfamiliar land.

"What brings you here? I would've expected to find you on Naya."

"After defeating Bolas, I came here to meet with Karn and the Gatewatch to discuss the Phyrexian threat. But there will be time for business later." Ajani shook his head, as if dismissing the notion. "*How* are you here?"

"It's a long story" Elspeth told him of her time in the Underworld following her death at Heliod's hand and how she had tricked the God of the Sun into another confrontation. In so doing, she gave Erebus, God of the Dead, an opportunity to imprison Heliod. "Erebus was so grateful to me for helping him settle the score with his old rival that he let me leave."

Ajani was silent for a long while after she finished. He stared intensely at nothing in contemplation. She had seen the look on her old friend many times and knew better than to jostle him from his thoughts when he was like this. However, usually, this expression didn't involve *her*. For as exciting as it was to see him again a small part of her was afraid.

They had been apart for so long and so much had happened to them both. She had returned from the dead. He had begun working closely with the Gatewatch and Karn investigating a looming threat. What if he saw her in a different light now? Would he judge her for the things she'd done?

He shifted on the bench they sat on and slowly, purposefully, collected her hands in his. Staring her right in the eyes, he asked, "How are you?"

“What?” Elspeth sat a little straighter.

“Elspeth, how are *you* ? You might be one of the strongest people I know. But I cannot imagine the toll on your body and spirit of what you’ve been forced to endure. The upheaval when all you’ve wanted for so long is stability. And Daxos I know how much he meant to you.”

It was her turn to look away. Otherwise, he’d see right through all her guards and into the profound hurt she still harbored. Elspeth wanted to be strong. She wanted to put all this behind her. But Ajani knew her too well for that. He knew how deeply she had wanted Theros to be her home, her rock, some stability in a Multiverse of constant upheaval. How much she had sacrificed for her lost love only to have him return as a man she no longer recognized.

“The hardest part,” she began slowly, “is having nowhere to go. Calix hunts me, and while I think I can shake him where would I go when I do? There is no future with Daxos, not as he is now. No plane will ever be safe.” And without safety there could be no home. That was a lesson she’d learned from an early age. That lesson was what had prompted her to seek out Theros—a land protected by gods. But if the gods didn’t mean safety then what ever could?

Elspeth laughed, a bitter note creeping into the sound as she thought of how hopeless it all seemed in that moment. “I fought so hard to escape Erebos’s clutches, and for what? Some days, I don’t know the answer.”

Ajani sighed. “Elspeth, home is not a place; it is a feeling. It is the people who share your dreams and those whom you trust.”

“That’s easy for you to say.”

“You think so?” He seemed mildly offended.

“You’re at home wherever you go. I’ve always had to hunt and fight for mine.”

“I am at home wherever I go because I am foremost at home in my own fur. You must first—”

“I don’t expect you to understand,” she interrupted and withdrew her hands from him. She couldn’t bear the conversation for a minute longer. It was futile to even hope for him to comprehend the pain of being a lost child.

“You’re right,” Ajani admitted. “I might not understand the depths of your pain as acutely as you might hope. But you are still my dear friend, and I don’t have to know every nuance of your suffering to see the wound and want to help you mend it.”

“There’s nothing you could possibly do.”

“I can encourage you to *keep your eyes forward* . Look to the future. Don’t let the demons of your past consume you.”

“I have no demons.” Saying so would’ve been far more convincing to them both if she didn’t sound so bitter and defensive.

“Home will come from within, when you’ve reclaimed your purpose—look inside and trust yourself. If you don’t, you’ll never become who you are truly meant to be. You will never find peace, and there is no home if you cannot find contentment with yourself.”

“I didn’t come to you for a lecture.” She pushed away from the bench, wrapping her arms around herself and stalking away. *Look within. Find peace, then find home. It’s not a place.* The words stuck with her, uncomfortable. She couldn’t escape them with a few steps; she might not be able to escape them ever. She needed to get away, clear her head, and hope to gain new perspective from the distance.

“Elspeth.”

She could hear him stand as well without looking back. “I’ll think about what you said, but I can’t talk about this now. It was good to see you again.”

Ajani continued anyway. “While you were—” he clearly struggled with the word “dead” and said instead “—*gone* I continued your search for home “ He inhaled deeply, as if bracing himself. “I found it.”

MEZZIO CLEANERS, PRESENT DAY

She paused outside her current workplace. The smell of soap hung in the air as bright and crisp as the finely pressed clothes in the windows. Her reflection was distorted in the glass, barely recognizable.

Had Ajani been right about all he’d told her? Was she comfortable in her skin? Elspeth shook her head and tried to push away the thoughts as she entered the launderer. She had to survive the day-to-day. Everything else would come in its own time if ever.

“You’re late,” the shopkeeper said the moment he laid eyes on her. “This is a good job and you’re not going to keep it if you aren’t on time.” Elspeth glanced at the clock on the wall, confirming what she already knew—she was here exactly when promised. “Don’t look at the clock. The clock won’t help you. The only time that matters is the one I say, and I say you’re late. On time is *late*.”

“Apologies,” Elspeth murmured. She hadn’t even bothered to learn her current boss’s name. Her employer changed regularly in this city. No one wanted her for long when it was clear she wasn’t going to play their backhanded and cutthroat games. It seemed pointless to get too attached. “It won’t happen again.”

“It’d better not. I can use muscle like you.” He made a jerking motion with his thumb toward the back door. “Now, I have six bags for you to bring to the cargo trains. Get to it, and you’ll earn today’s wages.”

Elspeth didn’t waste any more time or words with the man and did as she was instructed. The back room of the cleaners was separated into six segments—one for each of the five crime families and one for the general populous. Because angels forbid that even their laundry touched.

She hoisted one over her shoulder and made her way back out, lugging it all the way to the central station of the Mezzio before hiking back. The entire time, Elspeth listened to the citizenry around her. No one paid her any mind, even when she lingered a little too long, or slowed her pace when there was a particularly fascinating conversation. She used every new job as an opportunity to learn all she could about New Capenna. Maybe, eventually, she would hear just what she needed to be certain this was her home.

The door to the shop was ajar on her last trip back, enough so that she could barely hear the conversation happening inside.

“—make sure you pay what you owe,” an unfamiliar man snarled.

“I promise, I’ll get you the money.” The shopkeeper’s usually stern, confident voice quivered. “Just give me another week.”

“Another week?” A woman laughed. “You’ve had a month. We’ve been more than generous.”

“Another day—two days—please, I’m begging you.”

Elspeth had never heard the shopkeeper sound so afraid. So meek. A sinking feeling pulled her shoulders down, settling in her gut with the faint aftertaste of disgust in the back of her throat. These people were preying on the hard-working residents of the city.

Should I intervene? No, it wasn’t her business. For all she knew, the shopkeeper had done something to merit this fate. She should just ignore it and—

“Two days? I’m sure there’s some money laying around.” Smashing and breaking sounds were followed by gruff laughter.

A man’s whimper, cut short by a dull thud and more cackling.

Elspeth was a blur as she pushed through the door, beholding the carnage the strangers had wrought. Mannequins were headless and broken on the floor. The formerly pristine clothes they had worn lay in heaps. The till was smashed around the bloodied and broken body of the shopkeeper, three men and a woman looming over him.

The four assailants’ pale eyes turned to her.

“What do we have here?” said a man with dark hair. He had been the first voice she’d heard. The leader, Elspeth assumed.

“She’s she’s just a customer.” the shopkeeper fought for every word. He was the last person she expected to try and protect her.

Elspeth leveled her eyes with the leader of the group. “Leave.”

“Pretty forward for someone who’s ‘just’ a customer.” His mouth curled into a sinister smirk. “What do you care about the old man?”

It was a good question, one Elspeth had no doubt she’d be asking herself later while tending to whatever wounds she was about to endure. But for now, she was focused solely on getting these people away from the injured shopkeeper. This had already gone too far; they were going to kill him if they carried on.

“Anyone who finds sadistic pleasure in beating up an unarmed man makes themselves my business.”

“She thinks we’re sadistic.” The woman chuckled and cracked her knuckles. “Maybe we should show her what sadistic really looks like.”

“Bold words to say about Maestro enforcers,” a man with the sides of his head shaved said.

The Maestros. Elspeth knew little about the family other than that whenever they were mentioned by the citizenry, it was in the context of art or death, and their laundry always reeked with the metallic tang of blood.



Art by: Jodie Muir

“I’m feeling generous today.” The leader eased away from the shopkeeper. “I’ll forgive you for that poor choice in words and let it not be the last mistake you make on this earth if you empty the contents of your pockets.”

“Funny, I’m feeling generous, too. I’m ready to let you all walk out of here with your kneecaps intact if you leave now,” Elspeth retorted. People like this only understood violence. So, if threats were what it took to lure them away, then she’d be the bait.

“Why you—” growled a man wearing red gloves.

“That’s it.” The woman lunged, but her leader grabbed her shoulder and held her back.

He glared, leaning toward his subordinate, their noses almost touching. “*I’m* in command here, and we do not attack people unless I say so.”

“But—”

“And I say that we’re painting the streets red with her.” He released the woman, and Elspeth didn’t wait for the attack to come. They had risen to her goading. She’d sufficiently distracted them from the shopkeeper, and now it was time to save her own skin. Four opponents wouldn’t usually be a problem for her, but given that they were armed to the teeth, a tactical retreat was for the best.

Elspeth dashed into the street, the four Maestros hot on her heels. She ducked and weaved through the crowded streets of the Mezzio. Most shot her dirty looks but continued about their business, fighting and bloodshed an all-too-common occurrence for the citizenry of New Capenna.

“You think you can outrun us?” The woman had caught up to her, pushing a couple to the ground in her pursuit. “We’ve trained for this, and you’re just some laundry helper.”

She drew a sword from her hip, slashing it in a wide arc toward Elspeth and nearly nicking three bystanders. Elspeth dodged, dropping to let the blade fly over her head. The woman’s arm was across her body, momentum still carrying the blade. Elspeth stepped forward and closed the gap, bringing her fist to the Maestro’s gut.

But Elspeth was the one who released a grunt of pain and surprise.

Her knuckles met metal. Plate protected the woman's abdomen, hidden underneath the finely tailored coats she wore. The Maestro grinned widely, putting her fangs on display. *On top of everything else, vampires. Perfect.*

"Regretting your life choices yet?" she sneered.

Elspeth's response came in the form of disengaging and running once more. She massaged her hand, scanning the crowd for an escape. There was a small explosion and a flash of light. Magic streaked through the air like the tail of an angry comet. It hit the stone beneath Elspeth's feet with a small explosion, leaving a smoldering pockmark behind.

Glancing over her shoulder, she saw one of the men lowering his finger and cursing. They were willing to fire at her with magic in the middle of a crowded street. These people didn't care about others in the slightest. Which meant if they carried on here, there was the chance of an innocent bystander getting hurt.

The red-gloved man lifted his finger, pointing at her. Elspeth ducked, slid, and scrambled into an alleyway as another bolt of magic shot overhead. She pushed past some workers who levied curses at her back. They were quickly silenced by the four hot on her tail.

Elspeth took another hard turn, and another. But no matter how many times she doubled back or how many walls she vaulted over, they wouldn't quit their pursuit. Elspeth looked over her shoulder as she rounded another corner and skidded to a stop.

Wind howled in the void before her.

The road she'd been running down ended abruptly, a half-finished bridge extending out into empty air. More construction was on the other side of the gap between the buildings. Even if it wasn't too far for her to jump, the construction equipment opposite gave her no place she could confidently land. Angry, red smoke plumed up from the abyss beneath her, the lower levels of the city submerging into what looked like a sea of fire and blood.

"Well, well. Cornered I see." The leader came into view. His lackeys were at his side, breathless and looking all the angrier for the chase she'd given them. "Where are you going to run now?"

Nowhere. She had nowhere else to turn. The only exit was behind them, or down. She eyed the smoke and smog of the Caldaia once more, seeing nothing that could break her fall.

"I had been feeling generous," the leader said. "I was just going to rough you up a bit, knock out a few teeth, make sure you couldn't say any more smart words. If only you'd stayed put."

He was lying, surely. Yet, guilt flooded her all the same. She had put all those people in danger as she'd run through the streets. How many people got hurt because she hadn't just accepted a beating? Or worse?

The leader raised his hand, two fingers pointed at her. Sparks collected around his wrist as the air itself writhed with invisible heat. "Get ready to meet your death."

She let out a huff of amusement. "Unfortunately for you, I already have."

He fired.

Elspeth dodged, rolling. She had to get back toward the safety of the building and road cutting into it. The sword-wielding vampire stabbed. This time she grabbed the woman's sword arm, using her momentum against her to spin her into the wall. Metal rang out against concrete as the Maestro's head snapped back.

“How dare you!” Red Gloves lunged for her, taking her to the ground. Elspeth brought up a leg and pivoted to get him off. But she barely had a chance to stand before the other man was upon her. And the air around the leader was already sparking with magic again.

She was outnumbered and constricted. Elspeth traded blows with them, dodging and ducking. Eventually, they would wear her down and she’d make a mistake from exhaustion. She had to disengage before then.

Or find a weapon.

A stack of long steel poles caught her eye. They were identical to the metal jutting from the edge of the unfinished bridge. She jumped, another shot whizzing past her head as her hands closed around one of the rods.

Elspeth hoisted her makeshift weapon. It was a far cry from the divine spear she’d grown accustomed to. But it was the advantage she’d been looking for.

“What? Are you going to attack us with—” the man didn’t finish the statement before steel met the side of his head and he crumpled.

The other two were frozen for a beat and simply stared. Their mistake. Elspeth swept the rod across the ground. The woman jumped; Red Gloves had his ankles hooked. She pulled and then spun, bringing the blunt end of the steel against his temple.

Just the leader now.

“Let’s not be too hasty.” He held up his hands, but this time it quivered slightly. “We can talk like civiliz—”

He fired at her sudden movement but telegraphed his aim. Elspeth dodged, closed the gap, and rendered him unconscious with a *thud*. The rush of the fight began to fade, and Elspeth relaxed her stance, checking on each of them. She did not envy the ache they’d feel when consciousness returned but at least they were all breathing. She didn’t really want to kill anyone, and the last thing she needed was the Maestros out for vengeance against her.

They might have trained to be the strongarms of a family. But Elspeth had fought with gods. They weren’t going to get the better of her that easily.

Just when she went to return the rod to where she found it, a slow clapping alerted her to the presence of another.

Elspeth pivoted, brandishing the pole with a thrust. It came a hair’s breadth away from a man’s chin. He had fair skin and dark hair slicked back close to his head and curling around his high steel collar. Carefully manicured stubble lined his jaw and his mouth, accentuating a wicked grin. His armor was too similar to the people she’d just felled to be chance.

“Your buddies are just taking a nap.” She looked him right in his pale eyes. “I don’t want any more trouble.”

“Looks like trouble found you today.” And it haunted her wherever she went. “They’re not my ‘friends.’ A responsibility at best. Clearly, they weren’t ready to be enforcers. I apologize for their lack of grace.” She wasn’t sure if he just apologized for them not killing her faster. His eyes shone with what looked like amusement at her skepticism. “Say, if you’re that deadly with a metal stick, what could you do with the real thing?”

“Your ‘*responsibilities*’ are lucky all I had was this stick.” She kept it at his throat. One jab at his windpipe, and he would collapse. Though Elspeth had no more interest in killing him than she had in the others.

“I can see that much.” The man lifted his fingers, pushing lightly on the end of her rod. “Why don’t we put this away and talk?”

Elspeth held fast. “I have no interest in talking with you. I want to go about my business in peace.”

“What if I have business for you?”

“I’m not interested.”

“Oh? Already aligned?” He looked her from head to toe, chin tapping the weapon that he clearly felt unthreatened by.

“I have no allegiance to anyone and no interest in doing so; I’m just trying to make do. So will you let me leave?”

He sighed, a bit dramatically. “Fine, though it’s a shame to see your talents wasted.”

She kept her eyes locked with his as she eased away. But the man didn’t make a move. Elspeth walked backward toward the pile of steel rods. Still no movement. She slowly returned the steel to its place, very aware that she was giving up her only weapon with a potential enemy still before her.

He put his hands in his pockets nonthreateningly. Elspeth side-eyed him as she passed. He let her go.

She was back in the shade of the building when he spoke again.

“You know, if you were interested in ‘making do’ a bit easier there’s good money in the work.” Elspeth glared but he continued anyway. “Fine, not motivated by money. Halo, then?”

She stilled.

“Ah, always Halo, isn’t it?”

Elspeth had heard the word Halo mentioned, but she had yet to find any solid information on what it was. “What about it?”

“You could get a regular tippie, if that is your desire. We might not be the Cabaretti, but that doesn’t mean our storehouses are dry.”

“Why do you think *I* would want it?” Elspeth asked carefully, trying to phrase the question to give away as little as possible. If his eyes narrowing slightly or his gaze becoming more curious than conniving or hungry was any indication, she failed.

“You’re not from around here.”

“Of course I am.” Elspeth shrugged and continued walking.

His footsteps were hasty behind her. “No, *no* anyone from New Capenna knows exactly why they’d want Halo. There’s always a reason to covet it.” He looked at her with new eyes. “You wear the fashions of New Capenna, but you’re clearly not one of us.”

Not one of us. How many times would she be identified as the odd one out? As the one who didn’t belong? It never became easier. Every time, the sentiment cut deeper than the last.

“It’s all right!” He must have seen her expression as he kept up with her fast pace. “We all start somewhere. Why don’t you start with the Maestros? We don’t have an opportunity for new recruits from the outside ruins often—surprised anyone still lives out there, frankly—and if you’re curious about the history of New Capenna, then you’ll be thrilled to know that all young family members start in

the museum up in Park Heights.” The man came to a stop, holding out his hand. “Wait, where are my manners? Forgive me. I’m Anhelo.”



Art by: Aurore Folny

Elspeth regarded his hand warily. She imagined shaking it would feel like she was making a deal—one she didn’t yet know the terms of. Instead, she ignored it, continuing to walk. But said, “Elspeth.”

“Elspeth, *huh*, you’re a few generations out of date for a name like that.” He chuckled and continued to follow her as the street opened to a square between buildings. A fountain bubbled at its center. Elspeth slowed to a stop, staring up at the figures that crowned the carvings of the fountain.

“Oh, curious about that?” Anhelo chuckled. “They’re all over the city, aren’t they?”

“They?” She prodded lightly, seeing just how willing he was to give up information to her. To her surprise and delight, he continued.

“The angels.” He nodded to the two figures, locked in battle. A winged woman held a sword triumphant over a fallen foe. But she wasn’t the one that had caught Elspeth’s eye. It was the hunched and spined creature reaching up for the stony woman with its clawed, bony fingers and open maw. A creature of sharp angles and nightmares. “There are sculptures of angels all over the city, as if we’re supposed to revere them for an ancient battle or some such. But only thing they ever did that matters anymore was vanish and leave us the scraps to fight over.”

An ancient battle. Angels. Elspeth stared at the creature the angel was locked in battle with. Anhelo might not know what it was, but she certainly did.

A Phyrexian .

DOMINARIA, EARLIER

“While you were—” Ajani clearly struggled with the word “dead” and said instead “—*gone* I continued your search for home. I found it.”

“What?” Elspeth spun in place, her sole focus on him once more. Her heart hammered. *Home*. The place she had left when she was a child and had never been able to find again.

"It's called New Capenna."

"New Capenna," she repeated as if trying on the words to see if they fit around the shadowy and unclear picture she had in her mind of home. "Why didn't you tell me sooner?"

"I was more focused on seeing how you were."

"This makes me excellent. New Capenna? Truly?"

"Yes, and according to Karn there might be more to its history than just your own," Ajani said with a heavy note. "There are plans to attack New Phyrexia, but we don't want to make any movement before we're ready—before we know we can win."

"What does New Capenna have to do with the Phyrexians?" Worry threatened to strangle her joy. Phyrexians sowed destruction wherever they went. Was there even a home for her to return to?

"There are rumors of a past incursion there, and since New Capenna is still standing, that means they defeated the previous threat."

"And you want me to find out how," Elspeth surmised.

"Exactly." Ajani grabbed her shoulder as she moved to leave. "Before you go promise me you'll think about what I said. I know this mission will be partly personal, and I hope you find what you're looking for—what you *need*—in New Capenna. But please, remember that nowhere will be truly home until you've made peace with your past. You've killed a god, you've overcome death, you've accomplished so much, Elspeth. If you can fight all that, then you can also fight for yourself and find the security you're looking for within you."

"I'll do my best." It was true, and the most she could offer him right now.

"I know you will, and be careful," Ajani pulled her close for a final embrace. "Don't ever make me see or hear of your death again."

"I'd like to avoid that, too, friend," Elspeth said with a soft chuckle. Levity was filling her for what felt like the first time in years. She didn't look back as she planeswalked away, headed for what she hoped was home.

MEZZIO SQUARE, PRESENT DAY

"In any case. What do you say?" Anhele pressed again. "Good money. Room and board. And all you have to do are a few jobs here and there."

A few jobs. She knew exactly what those would entail. Elspeth had no desire to get her hands bloodied in the turf wars of New Capenna. But if what he was saying was true, then this was the best opportunity she'd found so far to learn more about this strange place and uncover its truths. To find out if Ajani was right and this really was her home.

"And the Maestros' museum has more information on sculptures like this?"

"More information?" He laughed. "Even better. The family owns *hundreds* of sculptures like this thanks to our curator."

"All right," Elspeth reluctantly agreed. She didn't want to work with a family, but it was a necessary means to an end. At the very least, they might have the information on the Phyrexians that Ajani and the Gatewatch needed.

"You won't regret it." Anhele wrapped his arm around her shoulder, guiding her. "The Maestros pride ourselves on knowing New Capenna better than any. If it's information you want, that can be given in spades."

His expression was smug. He thought he had found the carrot she would blindly follow. And he was right, in part. But Elspeth was going into this with both eyes open. She wasn't going to be used by forces in power.

EPILOGUE – A BACK ROOM

The Adversary sat in a mirrored room, its entrance hidden behind a barroom bookcase. To enter the establishment, one needed to know a secret knock and a magical touch. To enter this room, one had to be willing to gamble with their lives.



Art by: Vincent Proce

His loyal lieutenants and officers surrounded him. Means to an end, the whole lot of them. He would use them as long as they had breath and proved themselves useful. A sickly purple light hung overhead. “—and that is what the Font truly is,” said the highest ranked among them.

The Adversary considered this and let out a bark of laughter. *Really*. The Font was *that* ? Pathetic. So much power, so ripe for the taking, and the Cabaretti were practically asking for it to be stolen.

“You know what this means, don’t you?” he asked, uncorking a bottle of Halo. The others watched him with hungry eyes as he poured glasses. “It means we’re going to make the Crescendo one helluva party.” Ob Nixilis passed glasses around to each, then lifted his in a toast. “Here’s to taking over the plane.”

