
Kinito Ironsword

They told you you were worthless. That a little Earth dirtgrubber would never amount to anything. But you proved them wrong. Oh, if they could see you now.

You were born to the Earth caste. A poor family of peasant farmers. Air nobles owned the land; they got the lion's share of the harvest. You were near the Izar border, so you owed the Fire fort nearby another portion. And some piece of paper from your great grandfather's day obligated you to supply some more to the post station nearby, used by caravans and messengers. What little was left afterward was hardly enough to go around. Still, your parents were hard folk. They knew how to scrape by.

The kids from the fort used to come by when their training for the day was done and watch you, still hard at work in the fields with your sisters and brothers. They'd jeer at you. Sometimes they'd throw rocks, particularly if you were carrying a big bundle they could make you drop. They called you names, said you'd die in the dirt like the animal you were. Your siblings told you to ignore them. You were never good at taking advice. One time it got too much for you. You yelled back that you were tougher than they'd ever be, that they were weak stupid cowards, that you could take any of them. Of course, they weren't in the mood for a fair fight. At least all they had were wooden training swords. And as they left you lying there, bloody and bruised, one of them said, "You're just a pathetic little earthworm. You'd not worth a hundredth of one of us. I'd like to see you in a battle. You'd die in seconds like a squealing pig."

Your parents sat you down that night. They said the same things they always said, that there was honor in being Earth caste, that being at the bottom of it all you could support all Tetrana. That it was best for everyone if you knew your place and didn't try to upset the balance. Needless to say, you weren't in a mood to hear it. You weren't it that sort of mood at all.

You'd always been an clever kid. You paid attention to the news that'd come through the post station. You'd heard about the concern about relations with Izar, the call for troops. It wasn't hard to sneak out at night, steal what you needed, and put together a disguise. In the morning, you showed up as Kinito Ironsword, a young Fire soldier from an obscure branch of the Ironsword family, reporting for duty. If the sergeants noticed your unfamiliarity with the drills or the poor fit of your armor, they chalked it up to growing up in the capital, far away from the glory that was the proper Fire inheritance. They praised your decision to come to the border and be what you should be.

It was hard, of course. Drills weren't as grueling as working in the fields, but they used different muscles and took more precision. And in sparring, you had to go against people with years of experience on you, and they weren't inclined to take it easy on this soft capital newcomer. But you were determined. You knew you could be good enough. You practiced extra in the evenings, when the other soldiers were off drinking or flirting. And you got better.

There was another soldier there, about your age, that caught your attention. They weren't like the other ones, who treated training like a game and worked as little as they could get away with. No, Nalen Incen took practice seriously, like you did. You noticed them training alone in the evening, once, and asked if they'd like to spar. Soon, you were regular partners for extra practice. You could point out things for each other to work on and encourage each other to keep pushing when weariness set in. But more importantly than that, there was someone else here who didn't seem like an enemy. Someone that it felt like you could trust.

It was late some evening when you slipped. You and Nalen were joking and chatting, catching your breath after some intense sparring, when you told a story about something one of your siblings had done out in the fields. "The fields? I thought you grew up in the capital." Nalen asked. You froze for a moment, thinking of a story. But then you hesitated. You really wanted to be able to trust someone, to not hide from everyone. You *thought* you could trust Nalen. And you decided to go for it. And guess what! Nalen was an outsider too! A Water merchant who thought trade was weak and fighting was glorious! After that, you two were tighter than tight. You were fast friends, and did everything together.

But then the simmering tensions with the Izarians went hot. There'd been attacks elsewhere on the border, and your division was sent out to scout their movements. You found an army camped on the other side of the pass. You set up camp in a defensible position and waited for orders to come from the fort. Orders were not fast in coming.

That night, while you were on guard duty, you heard signs of movement. You wanted to go investigate, but the other guards told you it was just an animal and wouldn't come. Nalen, though, was with you. And what did you find? A division of Izarians, dressed in dark clothes, obviously trying to sneak into Tetrana to sabotage the supply lines or assassinate the leaders! You sent Nalen to rouse your troops while you tracked them from the shadows, leaving a trail for them to follow. You kept at it for an hour, constantly terrified of being seen. And then the troops arrived, and you all attacked. The Izarians never knew what hit them. Soon you stood there, with your sword bloody and corpses at your feet, with your captain looking at you with admiration.

The war has settled down, at least for now. Now that they knew what to look for, other forts caught several other detachments of saboteurs, and the Izarians soon backed down. Overnight, you became the hero of the fort, of the whole army. When Ceranest himself came to the fort and made you a general, crediting you with saving Tetrana from destruction, you thought it was a bit overdramatic, but you weren't going to say no. You couldn't help but chuckle inwardly. Worthless little earthworm, eh?

And it's also, you guess, why you got picked as the leader of the Fire delegation for the Convergence. It's a great honor, you could hardly refuse. You made sure Nalen got included as well, so you'd have someone to talk to. You don't really know the third delegate, Ter Fiero, but you're told they have accounted themselves well.

Becoming a hero overnight has brought you other kinds of attention, too. It's not exactly *unwelcome* (you were never considered a "catch", before), but it is a bit bizarre, especially pursuit from people such as this. Your two most persistent suitors are Mim Kinril, Water Guildmaster and known for their shrewd business dealings, and Cilac Anguma, a well-off Air aristocrat from a powerful family, and they've both been hinting that marriage is on their minds. You don't know quite what you think of that, but it's nice to be pursued. Currently, your leaning is towards Mim: a successful merchant seems a more honorable career than an idle aristocrat, and you don't know what the aristocracy would do if you were caught in an illegal marriage into a powerful family. But you're sure both of them will make great efforts to be your choice at the Convergence.

As for the Convergence itself, there are three matters of importance. First, the alliance with Osken. You've seen the harshness of war firsthand. A strong defensive alliance would help protect Tetrana and hopefully avoid the need for further fighting. Second, the use of magic in warfare. Even though your caste proposed the question, you have your reservations. You've seen how hard war is on the common people when fields and towns turn into battlefields. Fire magic is amazingly destructive; adding it to the mix would destroy the land you fight over more thoroughly and invite similarly harsh tactics from your foes in response. No, adding the destruction of elemental flame to your arsenal is a slope you don't want to go down.

And last, of course, there is the Realignment. You know how hard things were growing up, how hard they must still be for your family. How hard the Earth caste works and how little they get for it, while Water merchants rake in gold without actually producing anything of value. Moving Earth above Water would move those who feed and clothe the country a little closer to the place they deserve.

Of course, to make your contribution to the Realignment you're going to need to trade for some different gems, particularly the two Earth gems you need. At first you were worried about someone noticing that you're not actually Fire caste, what with the gems and all, but then you thought about it some more. You've proven yourself, that much is clear. But it doesn't mean as much if no one knows who you really are, that the hero who saved a country is actually Earth caste. After the Realignment is over, if you can find a suitably dramatic opportunity, maybe it's time to reveal the truth, to everyone. It's terrifying, to be honest. You could lose your position, be forced back into your old life, or worse. And who knows what your suitors would do if they found out the truth. But, you're not really in this just for yourself any more. You want to make Tetrana a better place, to keep future Earth children from having to go through what you did. And that's not going to happen if you just play it safe.

Hopefully the gods of Earth are still smiling on you. You're going to need all the help you can get.

Goals

- Use the Realignment to move Earth above Water, to make life a little less harsh for your family and caste.
- Ensure that the alliance with Osken goes through, for greater protection.
- Ensure that the prohibition on fire magic in combat is maintained.
- Find a suitably dramatic opportunity, ideally post-Realignment, to reveal that the “hero who saved Tetrana” is actually Earth caste.
- Figure out what to do about your romantic situation. If you *do* choose to marry, there is no more auspicious time than immediately after the Realignment. . .

Contacts

- **Nalen Incen:** Your friend among the Fire soldiers, the only one who knows your secret. Secretly Water caste.
- **Ter Fiero:** The third member of the Fire delegation, a soldier of distinction.
- **Their Majesty, Ceranest:** The ruler of Tetrana. If you’d been told a year ago that you’d be honored by the likes of them. . .
- **Mim Kinril:** One of your suitors, the Guildmaster of the Water caste.
- **Cilac Anguma:** Your other suitor, a well-bred noble of the Air caste. You do have some feelings for them—but if you were to reveal your true identity, a romance with Cilac could never be.
- **Quan Northwind:** An extraordinarily attractive Air noble who has recently caught your eye. Perhaps it would be hasty to limit your options to just Mim and Cilac. . .

Items

- Fire gem (×5)
- Kinito’s Spirit Butterfly