

Dragon Tide Chronicles: Dialadect Resurgence (Book 2)

By : DracoWyrn

The next of the DTC novels, after the events of DTC Dawn Rising. Will begin once Dawn Rising has finished editing.



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Chapter 1: (Upcoming) Dragon Tide Chronicles: Dialadect Resurgence (Book 2)

Dragon Tide Chronicles

Book Two: Dialadect Resurgence

Prologue

It has been four months since Ramok disappeared back into the Searing Rift, the great hole torn into the world from his return. Stretching all the way down into the bowels of the planet, it travels into the Demon Shaft, an alternate dimension used by the gods to imprison their worst enemies, but it doesn't stop there. It snakes down all the way into the Realm of the Arcane, the plane of magic itself. Here all the energy of the Universe is visible to the naked eye, and it is the source of all magic. It is here that Ramok remains trapped, locked in battle with his brother Xah'mmad. The question is, how long can Xah'mmad stand his ground?

While the two have fought, Aladoria has not slept in peace and quiet. In fact, it has been the polar opposite. The Dialadect, a race of planar beings consisting of millions of species, has begun to emerge from the Demon Shaft. While Aladoria may be engaging with them for the first time, this is not the first example of the devastation they are capable of. Only once before, have they ever caused chaos on Aladoria, and the side effects of their destruction led to the Dragonling Civil War.

An event that happened only five years ago; the Fall of the Towers of Torik.

A pristine night unlike any other, in the middle of summer. No one would ever imagine that an event could happen such as the fall of the greatest marvel of engineering and magic, the Towers of Torik, especially not on that warm summer's eve. For much of the night, all was calm. But late in the dark hours, tragedy struck. A Dialadect, disguised as General Alexander, snuck into the flying city's engine room. A huge explosion rocked the city, and one of its districts sailed far away, and crash landed on the Sapphire Isle. The rest of the city was not so fortunate. While they began to plummet down from the heavens, Alexander pursued the imposter throughout the falling city, desperate to stop it from getting away. However, he failed, it was already too late.

In a terrifying, ever increasing in speed plummet, the city began to nose dive. The sheer friction of the city moving against the atmosphere resulted in it turning into a giant flaming bomb, which screamed right over Feltatus on its way down. Halfway across the ocean, it finally impacted; the force flung millions into the skies, including Tomatahniel, the young son of Torik, and the current Elder of the Sapphire people. Tom, Alexander, and only a hundred others survived. However, the nightmare had only just begun.

A mere moment after impact came an earth shattering explosion, the like of which that rivals some of the strongest Destruction Bombs. No force could ever match the fierce devastating power of an Arcane Explosion. The explosion sent enormous tidal waves roaring across the ocean, and propelled Arcane Fire into the skies. Only hours after the tidal waves impacted, did the night truly transform from a night of peace and tranquility, to one of absolute disaster.

The Arcane Fire descended on the nations, a fire that no water can put out. It consumed the forests and destroyed countless lives. It was so strong, that even the very waters burned and boiled. For weeks after, terrible arcane storms would rage across the globe, wrecking further havoc.

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However, it was one final event that spelled doom for the Chromatic people. The same imposter found Tom, and then proceeded to nearly kill him, and threw him over a cliff. The result was catastrophic. The Chromatic Dragonlings were put on trial, and accused of treachery. Under peaceful and armed relocation, the Chromatics were exiled, banished to the far away desert continent of Nadisera, the Chaotic Desert.

The Dialadect have many times laid waste to worlds in their time, and now, such devastation will only increase, as the long captivated devout beasts of Chaos now rise again. And this time, they won't just divide Aladoria. If they are not stopped, they will literally bring the end of the world, and choke the planet lifeless.

The Chaos War has begun, and all those who cannot stand will be swept away in the new tide of death.

Chapter 2: A Gathering of Kings

Chapter 1: A Gathering of Kings

King Yashin looks as eager to be in the meeting as some of the other leaders of the nations. The only ones even remotely interested in the proceedings is Alexander, Racla, the Dragonling Elders, and my parents.

"Come on, can we at least agree on something? Who knows how long Ramok will be kept down this time?!" I yell, irritation setting in.

Grimmhorn Hamestin, leader of the East Dwarf Kingdom, chuckles.

"Keep your peace, dear fairy. I understand you wish to take action, but like the great stone mountains, we dwarves are not readily drawn to arms without good cause. It is true that Ramok has cost a great deal of destruction and terror, but the threat to us is now done. What more of a threat does he bring than before, when he was sealed?"

Alexander, off in the corner, smiles. "I actually think that Yashin can vouch on this matter, though I'm not sure how readily he would like to divulge."

Yashin Greyborne, pale faced with steely grey eyes, and draping jet black hair, reluctantly nods.

With a rather strained voice, he speaks. "Indeed. I have reports of a mysterious army of demon-creatures rising from the Great Rift, created by Ramok's rise. It appears as though they are coming in great number, and they have already started attacking my nation's settlements of the Central Isle, the location of the rift."

He coughs, and then continues. "We might not have considered them a threat were it not for the fact that *I* was injured in their first attack, something no mere bestial being would accomplish."

He lifts his armor and his undershirt as well, revealing a long jagged scar running from his waist to his right shoulder.

I gasp in alarm. "How on Aladoria did you sustain such an injury? What manner of creature did that?!"

Alexander comes up to the meeting table, and throws down several files. "Go ahead and read. These are the reports I have taken on the situation. These creatures are known as Corpi, or Dialadect grunts. They are one of the weakest species of Dialadect, and yet they managed to injure Yashin Greyborne, perhaps one of the most skilled swordsmen known to the human race."

I pick up a file and start to read, looking through diagrams of the creature, from its bullhorns to its narrow beady yellow eyes, its wicked sword to its brutal claws. Whatever this monster is, it looks like it was made to slaughter. When I have finished, I swallow silently and place it back on the table, and Alexander retrieves it, sliding it into a pouch on his waist.

He says in a low voice, "I understand that some of you have reluctance in joining forces, due to past problems and disputes, but I promise you all this much: the Dialadect are too dangerous to fool around with. Ramok may be defeated, but his followers are not."

The others are silent, until my mother and father, the queen and king, speak up.

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"It is vital that we work together, these Dialadect may pose a greater threat than we realize. And if they are working under Ramok, that is all the cause we need to stand together." My mom says firmly, with an air of authority that is characteristic of her reign. She knows what needs to be done, even if it is something she doesn't like doing.

Yashin is the first to speak up. "No."

"Pardon, but why not? After all, your own people are being attacked right now by those beasts!" She says, with a touch of confusion.

He says quietly, "I will not work with the likes of the magic wielders. They are a hateful lot. They are cowards and fools. Besides, there is no threat to us. You all perceive what does not exist. These are merely an idle threat, and we shall soon take care of them. We humans don't need the likes of you, who look down on my kind as inferior."

He rises quickly, and quietly leaves the meeting hall, followed closely by his guards.

"That littleâ how dare he insult us!" I snarl to myself.

Grimmhorn and the other dwarf kings begin to talk amongst themselves, and after a few minutes, they seem to reach a consensus.

"I'm afraid that like Yashin, we do not recognize the threat of these Dialadect that you have mentioned in this meeting. Although if Ramok should return, we would gladly assist you. However, he is still trapped in that fiery abyss, and he should stay for a great while, at least that's what we are keen to believe. In any case, we must go, as we have our own issues to attend to."

The dwarf lords themselves excuse themselves, and soon we are down to only the elves and the Dragonlings.

Aladora, the elven princess smiles warmly at me. "I'm sorry about all of this, Danica. But, I'm sure my parents would agree that it would be wise to work closely with you on this issue, the Dialadect may in fact be a direct threat, and should be dealt with quickly. I will return with word on their opinion soon. Oh, and Danica, it's been too long since we've had a proper talk. It will be nice to finally catch up."

She bows politely, and then looks up at me. "I'll see you around, ok?"

I smile. "Sure thing, I can't wait either."

With a bit of a merry step, she walks out from the meeting hall, until only Racla, Alexander, my parents, and the Elders are left.

"Soâ" I trail off, concerned about the lack of support I have gotten.

Alexander smirks. "It would be unwise to ignore these Dialadect, I'm not sure what's gotten into their heads. But in any event, I would be glad to assist you."

I laugh, relieved. "Well, I can say at least a dragonling has my back. Good to have you aboard."

Racla gives me a cold stare. As Commander of the Dragonling Army, she might be a tough nut to crack, seeing as she hates fairies due to the war between our races several years ago.

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"As much as I would hate having to work with you, defeating and keeping Ramok at bay is our number one priority. So, I guess you can count me in, for now. But don't mistake this as an alliance, I STILL hate your guts."

I smile faintly, and nervously laugh. "Of course you do, if that changed I WOULD be surprised."

I look at Tom, the Sapphire Elder. "And what about you?"

He shrugs. "I'm in, seeing as the others of the Chromatic Nation have already cast their vote in your favor, the Gem Dragonlings will aid you as well. However, I don't think that this small of a force will be enough to assemble a strong army."

Alexander nods. "Yes. The Dialadect, from what I understand, are sending more and more troops every day from the Rift. They're getting stronger, and by the time we mobilize, we might not be enough. We'll have to get the other nations on board if we are to get anything done."

He pauses, thinking. "The best solution and advantage could be gaining the assistance of the Dragonflights, though I imagine they won't readily agree to assist us. It'll take a miracle to be ready in time for whatever those monsters are scheming."

It seems my work is cut out for meâ !

Oh yes it isâ !

Oh gods, not this againâ !

Chapter 3: The Dragon Spirit Anoun

Chapter 2: The Dragon Spirit Anoun

My vision fades to black, as I get the sensation of being pulled under a thick liquid. When my vision returns, the world's color is gone. In its place is a land of greyscale, and everyone else isn't moving.

"What's happened?" I wonder aloud.

A deep echoing chuckle is the response I receive, and my reaction is to shudder. The voice which made that laugh sounded far from human, it sounded like that of a dragon. I turn to look at the entity behind me, and I behold a huge dragon.

"Who- WHAT are you? I've never seen a dragon like you before! Even a black dragon is nowhere near as dark in color as you!" I speak the truth, this dragon is devoid of all color, and the only color stands out sharply: his eyes. His armored, shadowy form barely holds itself together, as though he is made of mere smoke.

His reply is like a thousand blazing braziers burning through the air: "I am Anoun, the great Spirit Dragon of Darkness."

My wonderful dark twin who Alexander insists I don't associate myself with slowly appears next to him. I consider his words, and wonder why he is so upset about it anyway.

"You have been brought here by us to discuss something of dire importance. Theseâ Dialadect that Alexander and Yashin have spoken of, they are far more dangerous than anyone could ever begin to imagine. They are a race we hoped would be one day forgotten. After all, their name means, 'The Banished Ones'. Not only do they threaten the world now, but they have caused many troubles for the gods. They destroyed the Towers of Torik; there is no question of this. However, their history with Aladoria goes back much further. This is the second Chaos War in all of history. The first happened in the planet's youth, although even I don't remember much about it. The world took many thousands of years to heal from those scars."

"So they have been causing trouble for a while?"

The dragon spirit slowly nods. "It is important that you trust yourself âDanica, Crown." He pauses before saying my name, which interests me.

"If you don't learn to trust yourself, you won't be able to defeat this evil." He gestures to my Darkness, standing beside him. "Although, be mindful that she is not like your typical darkness. There is much more to her than one would realize."

He looks at me. "Do not doubt yourself, but do not trust your own power to the point of foolishness. Much of this world's troubles have resulted from a mortal's foolish belief that their power made them invincible to consequence and reality. That is why I have brought you here. And one more thing, seek out the Red Dragonflight leader, Cahroun. He will be vital to getting the dragons on your side, as well as uniting them against the forces of Chaos, for they are long divided by hate and jealousy."

I nod. "Cahroun, I'll remember it, thank you, Anoun."

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He chuckles wearily. "I wouldn't thank meâ not yet. Be careful, for Darkness is a power few can learn to control."

His body fades, and everything else begins to blur. The last thing I see of the Spirit World is my twin giving me a playful wink.

"We'll keep in touch."

Greatâ looking forward to itâ

And with that, I awaken from my trip into the land of spirits and return to the living. I look to the far west, where the mighty Dragonfang Mountains await, far from sight. Historically, dragons have maintained a strict border with the mountains, prohibiting any from crossing beyond their foothills. Any attempt to do so has always led to retaliation of the most severe. Even with our advanced technology, we cannot defend from a sudden dragon assault.

If I am to succeed, I must cross over into the Land of the Dragons, a land unseen since ancient times.

Alexander walks up to me with a smirk.

"I see what you're up to. Mind if I tag along?"

I smile. "Sure, I'll need as much help as possible."

Chapter 4: Change in Plans

Chapter 3: Change in Plans

Alexander waits for me the next morning, a small pack on his back. He crouches on top of a large branch, with an impish smile.

"What did you do this time, Alexander?" I ask in a mild tone.

He tilts his head to one side. "Nothing. At least, not yet that is." He grins faintly, and I can already feel it coming.

"Don't you DARE." I growl.

He grins wide enough for me to see the canine teeth of his jaws, and they look wicked sharp. I remind myself not to make a dragonling look angry, because a bite from a crocodile would not hurt as much as those.

"Say, Danica. I was poking around in your head for a little bit, and I found something I thought was hilarious."

My eyes narrow in suspicion. "And what did you just so happen to find while rummaging through my thoughts without permission?"

"It had something to do with a cousin and a tomato, I believe."

I pale. *Oh no he didn't seriously find that one did he?! That can't be good!*

"Hey Danica?"

I ready myself, already fearing the worst.

"Apples!" Several apples fly forward, aiming for my face, which I jump back from, already losing concern.

And that's when something red, wet, and sticky splats into my hair. For magic using fairies such as myself, there's something about tomato juice that makes it damn impossible to get that color out of your hair. Needless to say

"Alexander, I swear by Alamadia's name I am going to kill you right here and now."

I lunge at him, and he gracefully dodges me as I throw punches, kick furiously, and even try to hit him where it hurts to every man. To my greatest fury, he continually dodges my blows with a toothy grin, finding the most annoying delight in taunting me.

I finally throw a rock at his head, and he simply side steps, and starts laughing. For a moment, he keeps standing there, laughing his head off. That is, of course, until the dwarf comes up from behind him and smacks him over the head with the rock I threw. The rock crumbles to dust on impact, and Alexander stops laughing.

I take a closer look at the dwarf, and realize that it is Grimmhorn. He sighs with frustration at Alexander, and then coughs.

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"Well, I finally caught up to you. I'm glad I came here soon enough. You have a lovely home, Danica Crown."

I smile sheepishly. "Well I guess you can say that. My family palace is more impressive though."

Grimmhorn smiles a little bit. "Aye, indeed it is impressive, for a palace for surface dwellers that is." He turns to Alexander, eyeing him with some disapproval. "When there's someone behind you, and someone starts throwing rocks, don't let the person get hit in the head, hollow-skull! Take the blow for them!"

Alexander blinks. "I'm sorry, I wasn't aware you were there, or I wouldn't have let it hit your head, dwarf king."

The dwarf sighs irritably. "Oh sure, we're small and not as noticeable, there we go. For a dragonling, you ought to pay more attention! Ah well, that's not why I'm here. I'm here to talk about what happened with King Yashin of the humans."

I frown a little at the mention of Yashin.

"Why? I don't really care that much about it, I wasn't really offended anyway. Doesn't make it right what he said, butâ"

Grimmhorn finds a decent sized rock to sit down on. "Sit, let's just talk for a bit. I know you're going somewhere, but I think it can wait, don't you?"

Alexander and I look at one another and reluctantly sit down on the grass.

Grimmhorn coughs, and strokes his beard. "As a decent aged dwarf, I've seen kings of man come and go, through assassination to rebellion. Rarely have I seen a human with such a great passion to succeed in his role. He is unconcerned with glory, honor, or wealth. No, what that man wants is something special. He wants to be known for at least mending together a race who hates themselves more than they love.

"He strives hard, you could almost say he's almost sacrificing himself for his cause. Yashin is a complex man to understand, yet I've come to know him as a man not to be despised, you have to learn what makes him tick. As a young boy, he was certainly not what you would think would become king of the humans. He was a mere farm boy, a child content with his place in the world.

"Yet here he is today, bitter and hateful, especially towards the beings of magic. He actively persecutes them in his realm, keeping only a select few allowed with such a talent. That young farm boy would never have learned the sword, were it not for what happened to his beloved father."

I look at the dwarf, almost afraid I know what he is about to say next.

He continues in a low voice, "One day while he was out harvesting the family crops, a great cry came from his farmhouse. He rushed quickly to his father's aid, only to see a massacre, the workers were disemboweled, the animals burned alive, and his fatherâhis father was splattered on the floor, red tainted the whole of the family home. Standing in the bloody wreckage was a man in black. This vile villain was covered in blood, his eyes were bloodshot and insane. The man carried with him the knowledge of words, his magic too strong for any normal man."

The dwarf shudders in the horror of the tale, then calms himself. "Yet Yashin took up a sword from the mantelpiece, and swore bloody vengeance, against the man and his kin, magi. Bemused by the boy's desire for revenge, the mage let him live." Grimmhorn chuckles darkly.

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"Oh what a mistake that was. Yashin soon became a general, and later took the throne of his native country. He then went on a feverish rampage against all magi, until he found the man in black. He did not hesitate, not even for a moment. He unleashed a rage so terrible I would think your friend here would turn in fear from it." Alexander scoffs.

"Afterwards, Yashin continued his hatred against magi, and hasn't let up, except for those he deems responsible enough to serve unquestionably. My point in this tale is Danica, if you want Yashin to see eye to eye with you, don't fight him with words. You will never gain his respect with those. Actions speak far greater to him than dry, shallow breaths will. Challenge him in a test of mortal strength. Only then may he heed your words, and see your intentions true."

I ponder his words, while Alexander stands in silence.

"You know, Grimmhorn, we planned on going past Dragonfang, into the lands of West." Alexander says quietly.

Grimmhorn gives us a look of disbelief.

"I have met many fools who would do such a thing, but I would never assume you would even think of something that dangerous, that risky, Danica Crown! We know nothing of the land beyond the mountains, even we dwarves cannot stand against the fury of Dragons, we know too well their might! That truly is an impossible task. Danicaâ I wish you luck, but I hope you consider trying to approach Yashin in a different manner. Perhaps you will get through to him."

With that, the dwarf king makes his leave, his footsteps gradually growing quieter through the passing moments.

Alexander looks at me. "Well, what's your plan? Risk the dragons or speak to a magi-hating king?"

I think for a moment. *We should try to get the dragons to side with us, they'll be helpful in the fight against these Dialadectâ I but should I try to bridge the gap with Yashin? If I could make him see on my level, perhaps the other races will jump on board as well.*

I look up at Alexander, who is studying me as I stand up.

"I'll go to Yashin. I'll travel to Calador."

He blinks. "You said I, not we."

I smile. "You probably would like to help, I know. However, I feel that Yashin wouldn't respect me if I came with others. I'll see you later. Try not to get in any trouble while I'm gone, ok?"

Alexander smirks. "No promises."

I roll my eyes, and then return to my house and gather last minute supplies. I then leave a note for my family and friends, explaining my departure. I head out the door, and begin my travel towards Calador, the kingdom of Humanity.

Chapter 5: Stepping Backwards

Chapter 4: Stepping Backwards

I pause at a stream halfway through Salavadis, the elven country, en route to Calador's southern border with the country. I bend down and start washing my hair clean of the tomato juice that was stuck in my hair, courtesy of that devil Alexander.

After a long five minutes of washing my hair, it finally comes out of my black hair. I pull a towel from my pack and quickly dry my hair, wanting to resume my travels as soon as possible. A small twig snaps, and I pretend to ignore it, while I slowly scan for the source.

A bush rustles, and a Valgarin charges me, but I already have my twin swords swinging, and I cut in him in two.

"Those creatures don't ever take a break," I grumble.

I clean my swords, and then sheath them and continue on my way. Traveling through dense forest and vast plains, I speed the progress of my journey with brief flights, only in the open plains. Soon the forest grows more sparse, and younger. I come to the edge of the wooded elven lands, and break out into a vast, endless plain. Fields of tall grasses ripple like waves as a gentle breeze blows across the plains of Calador.

Scattered far and near, the towns and cities of humanity are far different from the industrialized Fairywoodlands and the grace of the elves.

They appear as grey blots of stone from a great distance, and doesn't strike the eye as our own would.

I continue through the countryside, flying much more in my desire to reach the capital of Yashin's realm. I soon come in sights of a much greater, larger structure than the small, isolated ones. I come on the largest city and fortress of humanity, Solven'grand.

While no appealing to the eye of an average person, one who has the eye for strategic value would call the place a work of art. Built on a mesa that rises up from the rest of the plains, which is also ringed by a massive river carved canyon, the fortress would be virtually untouchable by rivals to Yashin's throne. Nature itself seems to provide a mighty counter to the city's enemies. Surrounding the canyon is a massive outer wall protecting a long ring of farmland which traverses the length of the fortress. The city's inner walls are several times thicker, and the inner city's design makes it perfect for archers to attack intruders.

Yashin truly built his seat of power to last. I can't help but marvel at the dedication to the protection of the throne. I gradually descend at the outer wall's south gate, where two heavily armed guards watch my approach with open distrust.

"Identify yourself," One calls out, his voice muffled sharply by the thick helmet he wears. Their armor is black with the marking of Yashin on the chest piece, a white eagle.

"My name is Danica Crown; I'm the princess of the Fairywoodlands. I wish to speak with Lord Yashin about an issue. Will you permit me to pass on through?" I ask politely, hoping they wouldn't give me a hard time. The two silently look at one another, as though not sure how to answer.

One of them eventually makes an effort to speak.

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"Ermâ ! ummâ ! Well you seeâ ! Darn it Raulf, we'll have to send a messenger, I don't know if the lord wouldâ !"

His partner Raulf smacks him. "Man up will you? Oi! You there!" He yells at a passing messenger.

"Yes, is there something you need?"

"I need you to go to the king and ask what he wants to do about Danica Crown's request." Raulf barks sharply at him, and the messenger departs immediately towards the Inner City.

He turns to me. "Sorry for the inconvenience, but we are not allowed to let anyone of diplomatic status in without Lord Yashin's knowledge or approval. I hope you understand, Miss Danica- erm, Lady Danica."

I sigh, and then nod. "I understand, I can wait a little while."

After a few minutes of anxious waiting, to my greatest surprise Yashin himself comes down from the Inner City and comes right up to the gate.

"My lord! Why do you come yourself toâ !" Raulf gets interrupted by Yashin's gesture of silence.

"Danica Crown, what a surprise this is. I never imagined you would come all of this way to Calador. What business do you have here?" He looks at me with an unwavering expression I can't read, I can't tell what's on his mind or how he feels about my presence.

"I wanted to talk to you about the Dialadect, about working together. I was wondering if you wouldâ !"

He raises a hand, and his expression folds into a weary one.

"I see. I will hear you out once again, solely because you made an effort to come here to the dredges of Aladoria herself. Come with me, Danica."

He turns and heads back towards the Inner City, and onto a bridge connecting the two sides of the canyon. I follow him, and marvel at the depth of the canyon, its bottom veiled by the sheer distance. On crossing the immense bridge, I begin to wonder how we are going to get up to the Inner City. I look at the rise of the mesa, and realize there is a long winding stairway leading up to the Inner City. Besides that seems to be something under construction.

I point it out to Yashin. "What is that they're building over there?"

He glances over at it, and a brief smile of what looks like pride crosses his face.

"That is an elevator. Or rather, that's what we're aiming for. Humanity has spent so long arguing and fighting with one another, they've never stopped to try and advance their state of living. With our unification, I hope to kick start a revolution in our race. No longer will we be the dogs of the world."

An elevator may not sound like much to a fairy like me, but I can't imagine what progress it must be for someone like Yashin, whose race has had little progress in the past hundred years. We climb up the long staircase, and I look down at the outer city, comprised of farms. The area outside the mesa has better buildings, but if I had to guess, they aren't as good as the Inner City buildings.

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After a long while, we finish climbing up the mesa stairway and pass through the Inner City gates. The streets are narrow and paved, with fine stone brick buildings carefully constructed to optimize space. In the center of the city lies the keep, certainly no grand castle, but knowing Yashin, he wasn't concerned about appearance.

As we approach the gates, they swing wide open for us, and we walk inside. I can't help but compare the differences in our societies, and our ways of life. I realize that humans have lived a rather unfulfilled life, compared to us. We fairies probably don't think of the lives of these people, who work hard just to put food on their tables. Not only that, they rely on one another to support each other. Such a short life they lead, and it is not a happy one. I can't help but feel sorry for them.

Yashin stops in the center of the hall, and turns to address me.

"I thank you for coming all this way. I would repay you with hospitality. I suggest you take some time to relax in the woman's quarters. You've had a long journey, you should do well to rest. We may talk later. I have private matters to deal with my generals." With that, he proceeds further down the main hall, to the far end. There, a double door swings open, leading to a council hall, which he enters and disappears behind the doors.

A servant walks up to me and bows, in ragged cloth.

"Come, this way to the quarters, my lady. I apologize for the unkempt state of the hold, for much of pleasures are sacrificed to secure our lord's protection. If you would kindly follow me."

So these are the kind of people Summer was born to... humans are so much more different in their ways of living than usâ it's incredible to see such differences in cultureâ

The woman guides me to the bath housing located in the far back of the keep, and I quickly thank her for assisting me. She bows and departs, leaving me to enter alone.

To my surprise, the water is fairly warm, and rather fine soap waits on the side of the bath. As I soak in the water, a sickening feeling grows in my gut, and many images flash in my head. Two giant dragons locked in a grizzly, bloody battle to the death, biting and mauling one another, then a creepy Dialadect wearing a strange helm breaks through the first image, glowering with the look of victory in his eyes. Finally, my 'dark self' appears in my vision, taunting me with a smirk, calling me weak.

With great frustration, I smack myself and the images stop.

Of all of the evils mortals set upon themselves, perhaps the worst is their own consciousness.

After a long relaxing bath, I dry myself and put on new clothes from my pack and set out to the main hall, to have another chat with Yashin. And I don't care how stubborn he is, I'll get him to forget his stupid pride, because I have a strong feeling he will need my help.

Chapter 6: The Way of Steel

Chapter 5: The Way of Steel

Yashin sits at his throne without a crown, which strikes me a little odd. The throne itself is not made of any fancy materials; instead it is a plain stone construct with no real design. Yashin's character rings clear in his palace. He is unconcerned with minor things like beauty or glamor. He instead worries about the way wealth is distributed, or how the loyalty of the people is in his favor.

Watching me from his throne, his eyes are studying and observing my manner as I approach him.

"So then Danica Crown, you said you wished discuss my decision to fight alone, to not rely on you and your people's magics. I have no interest in changing my mind, but I will hear your words regardless."

I look at him straight in the eyes. "Actually, I began to figure that already. You are a man of action, not of words. You would rather see it proved than to be said pointlessly, am I correct?"

He gives a half smile. "And what sort of action would you consider taking, Danica?"

I take a deep breath before proceeding. "I challenge you to a fair duel with ramifications. If you win, I won't bother you anymore, and you can do things your way. If I win, at least hear me out, and let me help you."

His eyes light up with strong interest. "You say a fair duel? How would you define the event as fair? Will you forsake your use of magic for this contest of skill, or will you attempt to deceive me?"

I reply firmly, "I would not fight you with something you don't have yourself. I will only rely on my own strength, just as you would yours."

He thinks for a moment, his head bows, while his assembled court discusses my challenge with great fervor and interest. Some wonder of my sanity, while others talk of bets. They all quiet as he lifts his head with a fair smile playing on his face.

"Well enough, Danica. I accept your game of skill. We shall not delay in this matter, and distance ourselves from the city limits. I would care to avoid destroying property carelessly."

With these words, he rises from his throne and his attendants strap on his bronze armor, and he grabs his long and mighty great sword, a massive weapon meant for two-handed combat. Such blades are meant for cleaving, not stabbing. Its cross guard is fitted with a golden gem, and is thick across. Its fancy design makes for a perfect block.

The steel hilt is sturdy and meant for heavy duty abuse. He stashes this weapon onto his belt strap, and then indicates me to proceed outside.

"I shall be behind you, go and fly, for I will catch up with you swiftly."

I leave the palace and take off, searching for a place to have the duel. I find my location in a grove not too far away from the city, close enough that Yashin wouldn't have to take too long to travel to the location. A few minutes after I had touched down, Yashin arrives on a white stallion. After he dismounts, he slaps the horse, and it promptly runs back towards the city.

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"This is a battle of swords, not of magic. Are we clear?" He says coldly.

I nod, waiting for him to make his first move. He draws his sword, the blade obsidian black, and twice his length. My eyes must be playing tricks on me, because it looks as though it's growing thicker. It eventually stops growing, and he grips it with one hand.

"Umâ I hope you know that weapon's extremely heavyâ I you couldn't possibly lift a sword that long and heavy with one handâ I" He proceeds to lift it easily with one hand, as if it was only a one handed weapon. He then swings his blade to his side, and a massive gorge opens up where he swung the blade.

I am almost at a loss for words. "You say you're human yet you just created a huge rift in the ground with one stroke of your sword! You'd have to know some kind of magic, or have some kind of enchantment on that weapon to unleash such power!"

He laughs. "I once thought it was magic, but my head mage informed me that it was no magic that I wield, insteadâ I" He smiles. "Apparently, it's something called Kiedo, the power of the soul."

I give him a look of astonishment. "Keido? I - I wield Keido as well, but mine uses magicâ I so isn't that the same for you? Aren't you using magic as well?"

"No, in fact it's the reverse. I'm using my physical strength. She told me once that there are three Keido types. Physical, Arcane, and Divine. As I have determined, your fabled Haven's Cloud is a Divine sword. That is a very rare one, I understand. But, the rarest is the kind I possess, the Physical Keido. To push one to the Limit, it is almost impossible to break one's physical Limit. But in doing soâ I I acquired the power of a whole army."

He swings again, this time at me, and I immediately dodge to the right, just in time. I rush forward at him, and our swords clash, the force of impact causes the earth around us to crack. I draw my other sword, and swing it at his face, and he ducks, breaking our locked sword's contact.

I begin to test his reflexes, continually jabbing at his face, analyzing how he dodged, and in what pattern.

He's got some good reflexesâ I well I can tell this'll be a tough battle, considering how destructive one sword blow is. And to think, that this is the reason he was able to conquer all the nations of humanity, which before lay scattered and weak. With only a hundred men, he conquered not one nation, but all the nations of man, and brought them togetherâ I he is strong, no doubt.

Butâ I those creaturesâ I the Dialadectâ I they give me a bad feeling. There's more to them than what he and the other nations realizeâ I If I don't get through his head that he needs to work together, his pride could be his downfallâ I

He suddenly sweeps low, and his strike hits square in my chest, and sends me flying into the forest, where I crash into a tree, stunned. For a moment, silence.

Then before I can even react, the forest in front of me explodes apart, and he lunges for me, sword ready to impale me. Just as he is about to stab me, the sound of a war horn blows. He stops his strike, and looks incredulously at the source.

"Impossibleâ I those creaturesâ I what are they doing here?!" Yashin whispers in shock.

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A small host of monsters riding what look like a cross of pig and bull stand at the top of a hill overlooking us, the monsters themselves have large bull horns rising out of their thick skulls, with no visible mouths.

"Those areâ Dialadect?! I thought they were supposed to be in the Central Isle!"

Yashin gives me a worried look. "Danica. We need to get to the city. We don't stand a chance on foot. These creatures are dangerous, especially on those mounts of theirs."

Just how on earth did they get here? And more importantly, we're miles away from the city, how are we going to get out of this?!

Chapter 7: First Encounter: The Dialadect Ambush

Chapter 6: First Encounter: The Dialadect Ambush

As we run into cover from the searching eyes of the Dialadect, Yashin pulls out a whistle.

"I am going to try and call my steed. If he can get here in time, we may be able to out run them. If not, I don't fancy our odds fighting them on foot." He blows his whistle, and then pushes me forward.

"I also should keep it in mind that doing so might give away our position, so keep moving!"

We rush through the tree line, moving quickly even as the Dialadect howl and scream as they search for us. After several long, tense moments, we begin to hear the clatter of hooves in the distance. Yashin allows a faint smile of relief to cross his face, but it is wiped off when the owner neighs.

"â 'That doesn't sound like him. Is that some other horse? But why would another horse respond to his whistle?"

Out from the bushes, a massive horse bursts into view. If I could call it a horse. Its body seems solid, yet is composed of blue lightning. Its mane is a wave of arcing electricity, and its eyes glow neon blue. It rushes towards us and at the last second, scoops us up with its head and deposits us on its back.

"Lord Equine?" Yashin seems to ask the horse in wonder.

Yes, I am the Horse lord Equine, the first horse in fact. I'm here as a favor, I was only supposed to retrieve Danica, but since you were in trouble, I came to your aid as well. Now, I suggest you hold on, because this is not going to be a smooth ride.

He gallops at incredible speed out from the forest, and into the plains. As soon as he does, the Dialadect take up pursuit on their hideous mounts, waving their spears and axes in bloodlust.

Hmmph. A couple million years and they've learned little. My mouth opens wide, and before I can say anything: And yes, I really am that old.

His speed increases in seconds, the landscape blurring all around us, and the city fast approaches us. He turns, and as he passes the city, he bucks, knocking Yashin off his back.

I'm sorry, but that's as far as I take you. You can handle yourself this far, can you not? As for you, Danica, we must travel a great deal further than this. You said that you want the races to work together against this threat? Well, now's probably your only chance.

Where are we going? I ask.

Why Danica, we're going to visit the dwarves in their great halls of stone. At least you are. But I must guarantee that you arrive there safely.

â 'Ok, but who sent you to get me anyway? The person who sent you as a favor?

â 'I'm not sure she'd want me telling you. And by the way, you ask so many questions. Ever had a question jar?

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Ha ha.

He turns on a dime, and gallops off towards the mountains to the far south, the lands of the dwarves. Unfortunately, our friends we picked up have already caught up to us. Arrows and spears fling past our heads, and the sounds of their swords being unsheathed can be heard.

Equine neighs in annoyance. *While I pilot, perhaps you could do something about those irritating scum brandishing their weapons at us.*

I'll get right on that.

I rummage around my travel packs for a ranged weapon, and pull out a heavy duty bow.

This should workâ

I string an arrow onto the bow, and take aim at one of the Dialadect's heads. I let it fly, and the arrow lands solid in between its eyes. It makes a weird howling noise of pain, and it indicates for the mount to slow down. It yanks the arrow out, and then roars; flesh where its mouth would be rips open to reveal a cavity with needle sharp teeth.

I flinch at the sight, and then aim slower, at its chest. Another arrow lets loose, and it impales itself deep into the monster's flesh. With another howl of pain, it loses its balance and tumbles off its mount and is trampled underfoot, dead.

Nice one, would you mind killing more? More quickly? I hate to stress you out, but that's not really productive.

What do you want me to do?!

How about use an enchantment spell on the arrows to make them blow up on impact?!

âGood idea.

You're welcome.

Now shut up. You're distracting me.

I concentrate on focusing energy into the arrow tip, charging it with my power. Then I target another Dialadect, and let loose the arrow, aiming straight at its head. Without fail, it hits dead center, and it explodes, tearing its flesh and body to ribbons, the blast wave knocking half the group off their mounts, and scaring the rest of them off.

Niiiiice. That was a good enchantment, I'll hand it to you on that. It looks like we've scared them off for now. Ah look, we're almost to the dwarf mountains.

I look, and see the very mountain that Ramok had crashed into in our last encounter.

Man, I never noticed how extensive the damage was to the mountain before, but now it's so glaringlyâ massiveâ

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It shouldn't take too long to get to the dwarves now. Danica, I would start thinking aboutâ hold on a secondâ that scentâ

Danica. We may be in trouble. I smell a Mangus.

A Mangus? What's that?

The elite generals of the Dialadect, they're usually the only ones capable of sentience and magic. They're very dangerous. There aren't too many left though. Which meansâ I really hope it isn't who I think it is.

Who?

Behind us, a great veil of black magic begins to swirl, and the rough shape of a humanoid rises out from it. Fully materializing, it is covered in thick black armor with red trim and designs. Its helmet has four large horns at the top, with large eyeholes surrounded by accents, and a false set of teeth at the bottom, making it look like a real demon. Its eyes open, insane amber eyes gleam out from the depths of its helmet.

A low chuckle emits from it as we attempt to ride further away from it.

"Don't even try to get away from me, servants of Order." His voice is dark and commanding, with an edge of insanity, more foul than the words of a dragon out for blood. "You will not escape me, no matter the distance you travel. It has been a long time, has it not, Equine, spirit of Lightning?"

Equine neighs. "Not long enough I'm afraid. You're as vile as ever."

The Dialadect chuckles. "How impolite of you, you won't even address me by name?" He begins sprinting after us, his stride easily capable of matching our speed, aided by his height, about a head taller than a Dragonling.

Leaping in front of his, he lands in a graceful pose. "Allow me to introduce myself, little fairy. I am known as Mangus Dallien, and it is a delight to be free after so many countless years wasting away in the damned goddesses' prison. As delightful as it would be to allow you to reach the dwarves in their stone strongholds, I'm afraid an alliance of the races would only hinder my efforts to burn Aladoria to a fine crisp. So I'm afraid that this is the end of the road." A foul twinkle of amusement glints in his eye, but before he can move against us, Equine stomps his hoof.

A great peal of thunder rings out, and then comes down as a mighty bolt of lightning, and I hold back a small urge to laugh at the sight of Dallein's nerves being fried. Equine pours on the speed, and races for the mountains, almost at their base. We catch sight of some dwarves, and they start making their way down the mountain.

Good, now we'll make it for sureâ

"I DON'T THINK SO!" Dallien roars, directly in front of us. He grabs Equine by the leg, and tosses him back, sending me flying off his back and into a rock.

Flames leap up around us, and a massive black portal opens up. Dallein slips through the portal, not before saying:

"It was fun, Danica Crown. But I'm afraid my Brute needs some play time. And as it turns out, you've turned out to be a very good chew toy. Farewell, we won't meet again." A dark chuckle rings out, and a dark shape

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slowly begins to make its way through the portal.

"Damn! What do we do now, Equine?"

He shifts in appearance, and takes the form of an armored knight with a javelin.

"We pray to Irintis and the gods that they may spare us from the wrath of the foul beast. We shall truly need it."

Two beady yellow eyes gleam from the depths, and a meaty hand slowly stretches out from the portal.

Whatever we're about to fight, it looks HUGE.

Chapter 8: Brutal Barrage

Chapter 7: Brutal Barrage

The monster lumbers out of the portal, and I gasp. The monster, apparently called a Brute, lives up to its name well. It has a massive torso the size of a tank, with large, out of proportion arms which give it the pose of an ape. Its shorter legs end with giant padded feet, with three toes on each. Its head is ridiculously small in proportion to its muscular body. On its arms are massive steel shields, and it wears a strange helmet, which only reveals its face. Two small black eyes gleam at me; its expression seems relatively calm. Armor is also found at its knees, which from what I can gather, infers that its armored portions might be potential weaknesses.

But how to fight this ridiculous beast?! One way to find outâ

I observe it carefully, waiting to see what it will do. I notice it suddenly blink, and I instinctively roll to the side, just as it barrels past me, head lowered in a charge. It barrels onward, slowly coming to a stop just before a tree.

So it can't slow down easily huh? Can I take that as an advantage? Observe your surroundings, concentrate!

Behind me, a massive gorge from Ramok's battle with Xah'mmad stretches for miles, and plummets far below.

That'sâ almost perfect! I guess its luck that we're here, where the showdown took place.

Even as I stand here before this monster, whose eyes show no sign of true intelligence, I can't help but think of the immensity of that battle, how utterly overwhelming it was. The power of Ramok, everything he did was power off the charts, something I couldn't begin to have understood at any other time.

After all this time, it's only now that I really am questioning everything. Why was I made the god's chosen one? Aren't there more suitable people than me? There must be! What about Racla, Alexandi's daughter? Wasn't he their champion before? So why didn't she get the role? Or Alexander? Hell, Alexander's still possibly more powerful than I am!

And that other meâ that darknessâ where'd it come from, and how does it have such power? I don't know anything, I don't have any answers! This feelingâ this confusionâ it's frustratingâ Butâ I know it's irrelevant now. Those questions don't matter. I have something that needs to be done. I'm not gonna stand around like a fool when Ramok may come back at any moment, and the Dialadect are already on the move! Thisâ monsterâ is just another obstacle I need to surpass!

I look up, just as the monster barrels at me, and I wait patiently, until the last possible moment, than duck aside. I watch with anticipation, as it struggles to come to a stop before it can fall.

Equine gives me a nod of approval as the monster topples off the cliff, almost in a humorous manner. I take a sigh of relief, and that's when a loud roar splits my ears.

The monster lunges back up the cliff, looking very, VERY angry. Like some sort of ape, it beats its chest and charges me again. I dodge, confident he'd miss.

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And that's when its giant fist slams into my side, and sends me flying into a boulder, knocking the wind out of me, and I hear a distinct, CRACK! From my spine.

Damn! He broke something! Now what?!

Equine sighs and gives me a frustrated look.

"Danica, you should never underestimate your opponent. Stupid as it may be, it's not totally brainless."

He spins his javelin in the air, and then throws it at the monster's chest. Surprisingly though, it doesn't block the blow to the chest, but almost instinctively blocks UP, to protect its face. I give Equine a look, and he nods. We are both thinking the same thing.

Its weak point is its head. Something about that head makes it weaker, so it instinctively protects itâ but why?

Before the monster can react, Equine runs up and swipes the javelin from the chest of the Brute, and retreats to a safe distance.

I'm not gonna make myself useless this time. Get back in the fight!

I carefully reach over to my back, and after finding the injury, I begin applying healing magic to the damaged bone. The monster sees this, and charges me again.

Damn! It doesn't want me to recover; it's not as stupid as I thought!

"Don't worry Danica; I'll distract him for you! Equine says from a distance."

And how are you going to do that from way over there?

As if answering my question, he reaches back, and a spear of lightning forms in his hand, and he flings it at the legs of the beast, the burst of lightning too quick for the beast, and the force sends it toppling onto the ground, face first.

It stays down for about a minute, more than enough time for me to recover and get back on my feet. I grab a hold of my twin blades, and look on as the beast gets back on its feet. It eyes us with a threatening, hateful glare, and charges the two of us again. After a few seconds, it crosses the distance between us, and raises its fists to strike. We duck under its arms and thrust our blades at its face, but our thrusts both miss.

We jump away, as it comes after us again; unfortunately, we've put ourselves into a corner. A massive boulder jets out from behind us, and beside us is the gorge I tried to make it fall off. We're trapped.

We watch its fist travel towards us almost in slow motion, waiting for the impact to arrive.

"EXCUSE ME, TWO HUNDRED POUNDS OF PURE DWARF FALLING!" A distinctively *dwarven* accent yells from above our heads.

A dwarf clad in iron armor slams down on the monster's head, and cleaves it in two. The body of the beast stumbles without the control of its head, and after a minute, collapses on the ground, all the while, the dwarf does not fall off the entire time.

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He looks up at us, his axe dripping in blood, and he gives us a smile. "Welcome to the land of Dum Fuorum, land of the North Dwarven Kingdom. I, Grimhorn Hamestín welcome ye to our hall, even if it is under the pretense of bloodshed that ye had arrived at our door."

I smile. "Thanks for the assist, your timing was perfect."

"Don't mention it, Danica. Ye are my guests in this land; it is only my duty as ye host to protect ye from harm."

A chuckling emits from the shadows of the treeline, and I turn to see Dallein leaning against a tree.

"I'll be keeping an eye on you for sure, Danica Crown. You exceeded my expectations, and actually survived a Brute in head to head combat." He chuckles.

"So long." He is suddenly sucked into a fiery portal, and his image is lost to our eyes.

Grimhorn strokes his beard nervously at the sight of him.

"Perhapsâ€¦ perhaps we were wrong to ignore the Dialadectâ€¦!" He mumbles. "Danica, we have words we must discuss. Equine, will ye be joining us?"

Equine shakes his head, and transforms into his horse form.

No. I am needed elsewhere. It is time that Danica took charge, for the time of war draws near.

The time draws nearâ€¦ the darkest days have yet to come.

Chapter 9: Halls of Stone

Chapter 8: Halls of Stone

As me and Grimmhorn travel through the long marble hall, I look at the countless murals that decorate the walls. I spy a curious one which catches my interest and stop.

"What's this mural about?" In the mural, a winged being depicted in gold showers light on the mountains, while below four mighty dwarves shake hands.

Grimmhorn pauses for a moment, and then keeps walking.

"That, Danica Crown, is a depiction of the elder days. Ye fairies would not remember those days, except in what ya'd refer to as, 'fairy tales', amusing as that phrase is. In the good old days, the four great Dwarf Nations and the Great Dragonling Kingdom were strong allies. Together, we prospered; there was peace among the four clans. Under the watch of Alexandi, there was much joy in the world. Even the humans, quarrelsome as they may be amongst themselves, they too enjoyed great peace. Even Yashin's great kingdom cannot compare with that day and age of peace." His tone sounds oddly nostalgic.

"If only those days could have lasted. What days they were. Now look at what we have. Our four clans lash out at each other's throats, and the humans quarrel bitterly, attempted rebellions a way of life in Yashin's kingdom." He looks at me with eyes of regret.

"You know very well by know what ended those days. When the war between your nations started, everything collapsed. The good days ended."

I always knew that the war devastated many lives, butâ it affected more than just our warring nationsâ they affected everyone?

"Grimmhornâ I had no idea that war even had an effect outside our borders. I'mâ!"

Grimmhorn raises a hand to stop me.

"Enough, Danica. It's alright. What is important is to know our past, but not to dwell on it. There are many who have yet to learn this lesson, and live by a life dedicated to hatred. It becomes the only thing worth living for, and their way of life."

He looks to me with stern eyes.

"Aladoria has had great suffering; this world has seen much hatred and violence. That is no excuse to lose our selves." He stops and puts a hand on my shoulder, with great difficulty.

"Danica, I believe that ye'r generation, who has faced the world in a way different from everyone else, has a true chance to understand one another. From both sides of the war, ye both share pain, so is it not true that by that alone ye have a bond ye can use to bridge these years of hatred?â Danica, I believe the one who will lead this world to a new age, a new era of peace, will be ye. The road will be long, the road will be tough. But in the end, I think it is possible."

I stare at him with a sense of awe and respect. The dwarf lord has really been there, seen it all for himself. He's seen so much more than me, and really understands this world more than I do.

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I swallow hard. "Th-thank youâ!"

He smiles, his beard twitching from the movement.

"Danica, now's not the time to be losing ye head. I'd get ye head together, because we're almost at the mountain city."

I turn back to the path ahead of us, where two heavily armored dwarf guards stand watch over an iron gate. Without a word, they eye each other and swing the gates open for us, the hinges creaking slowly.

A dim light pours out of the opening, over a crystalline city, countless spires twisting up high into the cavern in the mountain. A small hole in the roof lets in natural light from the sun, which is currently setting right into view.

"Whaâ!? What is the city made of? It looksâ! so beautiful! It's magnificent!" I exclaim in wonder.

Grimmhorn's beard twitches, he's smiling again.

"Ever heard of quartz?" He chuckles.

I blink at him in surprise. "Quartz? I thought it was something more expensive, like diamond orâ!"

"Nope, just quartz, nothing too special."

I look down at the center of the city, and notice something. There is a crystalline design, almost a golden color in an Alexandian Sun symbol, the mark of Alexandi.

I point it out to him, confused by its presence.

Grimmhorn strokes his beard. "Very observant, Danica. Most fairies wouldn't have that kind of eyesight, I'd imagine. But what do I know about fairy eyesight? That was a gift from ol' Alexandi. It allows our magic users to channel magic for any elaborate rituals. It's the secret of my clan's success against dragon attacks."

I blink in surprise. "Dragon attacks?! You guys have been attacked by dragons?!"

Grimmhorn looks at me with an amused expression.

"Ya didn't know that we dwarves and the dragons don't get along? I'm amazed. For the longest time, our races have clashed over territory, and of course, gold and all of our other treasures. It's not true that Dragons attack for the purpose of gold and stuff like that. It's only true if it's an attack on us. Our vaults have centuries of treasure stockpiled, unfortunately that is double edged sword. Dragons are almost magnetically attracted towards treasure, so it seems. The Metallic and Gem dragons aren't the problem, it's the damn Chromatics ya look out for."

He sighs. "What's ya interest in it? It isn't anything special, though there's rumors of a secret temple or something down below it. Our magicians have looked at the thing up and down and to the alley and found nothing special in that regard."

I look at it for another moment.

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"â ¡Nothing really."

Actuallyâ ¡ there isâ ¡ its kinda weird, but I'm getting a feeling as though it'sâ ¡ calling me there. Is there something special about it that Alexandi wanted me to find? Wait a minute, I hardly know him, how would he even know me or care enough to do such a thing?! Man I gotta get my head straight!

We walk to the upper level of the city, a much classier and more designed section of the city at that. He indicates a large building, and enters, I follow him quickly. On the inside is polished dark wood, with extravagant silk rugs and carpets decorating the place. On the left and right are two long hallways, full of doors. He takes me to the right, and opens a door halfway down.

"For now, stay here. The next meeting with the other four lords will be arriving soon, yer quarters are that of a full house, so if ya need to bath or do anything else, feel free to make yaself at home. If ya would excuse me, I have important work to do."

He closes the door softly, and I'm alone again in a foreign city.

Well, a bath might be relaxing after that nasty battle earlier on. After that, I think I'll take a look around after dinner, it should be coming soon, right?

Man, this has been a long day.

I enter the bathroom, which is surprisingly 'modern'. It perfectly matches the steel and tile standard of most fairy bathrooms.

This must be the ambassadorial quarters. They remind me of home. Mother's probably worried, I should check in soon. There's so much toâ ¡ toâ ¡

Whatâ ¡ the hell is that in my mirror?!

A black shadow figure stares at me from the mirror, a wicked smile on its face, its figure awfully familiar.

"Oh no, not *this* again! Alrightâ ¡ calm downâ ¡"

Close your eyes, don't look, it'll go away soonâ ¡ calm downâ ¡ everything will be just fineâ ¡.

After a couple of minutes I dare to open my eyes and nearly jump out of my skin when my dark self not only is still there, but is standing right in front of me.

"You're awfully rude, ya know. What the hell do you mean, what the hell is that?" She pauses as I stab her in the abdomen.

"You do know that won't work on a spirit, right? I hope you realize that. Fine. I'll leave you alone, but don't blame me if you regret this later." She spits, and then vanishes.

I've been seeing her more and more latelyâ ¡ her power is starting to scare me to be honest. How is it that I couldn't have taken Ramok down alone, yet she was able to fireâ ¡ what was it, a Herrio, and blow a huge chunk out of Ramok like it was nothing? â ¡Regardless of that, he healed right away, so that was a moot point, but still! Just what is she, and how does she possess that kinda power?

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Despite taking a bath, and even having a wonderful and entertaining meal hosted by Grimmhorn and his amusing jokes and interesting stories and legends, I can't help shake off the feeling of dread and fear I felt when I saw her, my body continually shakes from the encounter. I stare out at the twilit cityscape of the dwarves, at the center of the city.

There it is, that pressure, that almost a need to investigate that symbol what's with it anyway? It's so weird a! Ok, if I keep thinking about this any longer, I'll go insane!

After putting my armor on, and strapping my two duel swords to my belt, I fly out of my quarters and land in the center where the symbol remains embedded in the stone.

A weird feeling prickles my scalp, as though something is with me, watching my every move. I shudder, the feeling that someone just breathed down my neck striking fear into my heart.

And then it hits me, a moment before the voice falls on my ears.

There's only one spiritual aura that can make me feel this way.

"Hello, Danica Crown. Fancy seeing *you* here." The cold voice of Signas whispers in my ear before everything burns black, and a terrifying sensation of falling reverberated through my senses.

Chapter 10: Zero

Chapter 9: Zero

I groan, my head feeling like it is spinning violently. I wait for the dizziness to die down, and then I look around at my surroundings, the darkness too deep to make anything out.

"Well, Danica, how nice of you to drop by." Signas's voice rings out from the dark. I whip my head wildly to look for him, but wherever he is, he's hidden by the darkness.

"Light," He calls out, and a great rush of flame erupts, a great line of pillars are illuminated by braziers attached to them, one by one they light up until they illuminate a great golden throne, above it on the wall is an Alexandian Sun. And seated on that throne is

"Signas!" I gasp. "What are you doing here, why am I down here?"

He looks down at me, a cold gaze devoid of emotion lands on me. "Oh, you had a little accident and you fell. That accident may have been aided by me. But that's beside the point."

A chair appears in front of me, out of nowhere.

Signas stares at me, and I at him.

"Well, sit. It's rather annoying talking to someone who's distracted by discomfort."

I don't move a muscle. From the dark depths of his eyehole, I can see his dark blue eye almost twitch in annoyance.

"I said, *sit*." When I refuse to do as he says, he snaps his fingers, and a loud ringing noise vibrates throughout the room. When it stops, I find myself sitting in the chair, and quite unable to get back up.

"Good girl, Danica, you might just make a good pet dog."

I snarl in irritation. "Bite me. How the hell did you just do that?"

"Ever heard of magic, Danica? That's a clue for you. As fun as it is to taunt you," He says in a clearly bored voice, "There is a reason for my little visit. Do you know where we are?"

I stare up at him. "If I had to guess, it's the rumored temple the dwarves told me MIGHT exist."

Signas pretends to clap his hands. "Why yes. This is one of the 'Tombs of Alexandi', but to be honest, you won't find much of a body here. This place has different uses than the standard tomb. You may be asking in your head, 'Why do you ask?', I'll tell you."

He stands up, and slowly starts walking down towards me.

"In your fight against Light, you were clearly outmatched. All hope was lost. Then suddenly, Haven's Cloud, your keido appeared. The battle swiftly turned, and you slew the 7th member of the Covenant. In your battle with Alexander, it spoke to you, directed you against his dark rage. It could be said that it merely was helping you.

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In that same general topic, when you fought Ramok, you didn't really fight him, did you?" His dark blue eye narrows, the light of the braziers flicker ominously against his mask.

"What are you getting at? Are you suggesting that I'm weak?" I try my best not to look directly into his eye, a feeling of unease is growing within me.

"Instead of you using your own power to fight him, your darkness rose up and took control, didn't it? It fought in your place, but claimed you were working together." He chuckles lightly for a brief moment, before appearing right in front of me, his eye narrows into a deadly glare.

"That. Is. A. Lie."

"All this time, you've been under the impression that you've commanded power of your own, yet the only power that is truly yours is your war fairy powers over earth, and even those would be useless against us.

The Keido, Haven's Cloud, was originally the Keido of Alexandi. In order to unlock the power of Kedio, one must break their limit, a physical, divine, and arcane barrier set within their soul. You have not done so."

"But how would I-"

"Have acquired the power of Keido, wielded Haven's Cloud? You didn't. Hidden within your soul, Alexandi hoped that it would trigger when you would most need it, or if the power of another Keido threatened your life. So when Light activated his Keido, he unknowingly unleashed that blade."

He disappears, and does not reappear.

"True wielders of the Keido do not need to weave the words of magic in order to summon their Keido, it is an incantation to merely increase the focus of the power. For example."

A sword presses against my throat, and I look down to see a black blade pressing close to my skin.

"Soulbane, Reaper of Souls. And *my* Keido, also one of Alexandi's two swords." An immense spiritual presence dominates the room, and it takes me a moment to realize it is coming from the sword. Its aura feels as though it hungers to devour life without remorse, desiring nothing but its enemy's blood.

Signas removes the blade, and chuckles. I turn to face him, anger setting in.

"That's fine, insult me all you want! But that does not explain why you are here! Why I am here!" I yell.

"Oh that? You've not caught on to it yet? This sword is not for show and tell. But I'm afraid there's no need for me to use such a precise instrument of death on someone as unworthy as you." His sword begins to change to the color of steel, and its power fades away until he holds a normal sword.

"I'm here to determine your true worth. I only let you live after you killed Light because I was curious to see if you would continue to develop. You failed my expectations. And so now I'm offering you one more chance to prove you are truly capable of being the chosen one of the gods."

He stows his sword away.

Huh? Why would he put his sword away?

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"Danica Crown, fight me, and prove to me just how much worth you have. If you truly deserve to be called the champion of the gods, then survive and flee. Draw your sword, do not lower it for even a mere moment.

In the beginning of our lives, we are full of light, and the beauty of life blossoms. Our hearts are filled with hope, and we hold our heads high. Once we have grown, darkness seeps in through every crack, life presses down and we buckle under the strain. All becomes meaningless and never ending, all eventually being eclipsed by despair and death, another life snuffed out. My name is Signas, in the old tongue it means 'Zero'. Zero is another way of saying 'nothingness'. Despair is the path to Zero."

A dark aura surrounds him. "I am the 1st member of the Covenant, the Despair of Alexandi as his last breath was exhaled into this world. And so shall it be that your despair will join and become one with mine in the end."

The lights go out, and the darkness wraps around us, beginning to swirl in a violent vortex, fading away to reveal that we are now floating high above Feltatus, clouds gracefully floating below, and the ocean sparkling like a sea of diamonds.

Ironically, the beauty of the day was about to be marred by the ugly affairs of battle.

"And my weapon of choice to end your life will be your own sword." He opens his hand, and Haven's Cloud appears, and he quickly grabs hold of it.

Im-impossible! That is that is MY sword! How can he wield it?!

Chapter 11: Power Beneath the Mask

Chapter 10: Power Beneath the Mask

I ready myself, drawing my duel swords, hardly expecting a good outcome from this. Signas looks at me, and calmly points his index and middle finger at me.

"Lightning," He says softly, I almost don't catch it, and I dodge at the last second, as a massive arc of electricity bursts from his fingertips, missing me by only an inch.

So his main element is lightning? Usually people can only use one element, but then againâ

I take a risk and dive at him, swords raised to skewer him. He looks up at me, and opens his hand so that his palm is exposed towards me.

"Fire." He commands, and a massive fireball erupts right in my face, singeing my whole body in searing flames. I manage to get out with only minor burns, had I stayed longer, I would have been toast, literally.

Alright, Lightning and Fire, no problem. That's his two main elements. I know there are exceptions to the rule, but there should be no way he knows more elements than that.

Even still, he's no pushover if he uses gestures like this. I'm pretty sure that if you master the art of gestures, you no longer need to vocalize commands in the ancient dragonic language. I need to get towards the earth, where I have an advantage with my Earth Fairy War powers. If I can get him close to the ground, I should be able to counter him with my own magic more effectively.

I begin to fly away from him, towards the outskirts of town, flying as fast as I can. Only a minute later after I'm sure he's decently behind meâ

"What do you think you're doing? Running from a fight?" Signas says almost in a bored tone, before kicking me in the face.

My body goes sailing back towards the city straight for a skyscraper.

Oh shit, this is gonna hurtâ and I can't stop myself in timeâ

CRASH! I break through the whole building in a mere second, and erupt in a shower of dust and glass through the other side, and keep flying until I hit a second one, and continue flying, right into Signas, who is waiting for me at the other end.

"Come now, this is easier than my morning exercises." I spin around, and slice him in half. His top half looks down at his bottom half and then looks at me.

"Danica, look again." I look in alarm as his two halves freeze over and become solid ice.

Ice as well? But thenâ

"KEEP YOUR HEAD IN THE FIGHT, PXIE!" Signas yells as a massive whirlwind blasts me straight into the ground, the ground cracking and uplifting from the force.

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Wind too? What the hell is going on? Don't tell me he canât use all of them?!

"That's right, Crown. I'm glad you're noticing. The average spellcaster only has two main elements, and cannot hope to learn more than those two. Even the elves are bound by this limitation. I however have no such limits. In factâ"

He raises his hand and closes it in a fist at me, and the ground starts rising up like a shell around me, intent on crushing me to a bloody pulp.

"I will say that's impressive, but earth won't work on me!" I growl as the earth shifts to my control, and I form it into a suit of armor. I raise my swords and shift into a defensive stance.

For a moment, Signas is quiet. Thenâ

"Hmm hmm hmmâ" *Is heât laughing?*

"Ha ha ha, very funny. But seriously," He says, punching me in the cheek and shattering my earth armor as if it was glass, "Don't pride yourself over such weak abilities. It makes you look even weaker."

He suddenly melts into shadow.

Stop this, if you can.

I look out towards sea, and gasp. "Is thatâ A TSUNAMI?!" I scream. "How the hell am I gonna stop that thing?!"

A massive wall of water, ten times taller than the tallest skyscraper is roaring towards shore, as it travels it starts leaning over to crash down.

There's no time, I've got to form an earthen shield, and quick!

Pouring my strength into my spell, I take a deep breath and will the earth in the bay to rise. It groans, creaks, and then slides up, becoming a massive wall of stone larger than the tsunami, and it collapses as soon as the wave hits, fortunately diluting the impact into the city.

"Whewâ that about became a nightmare."

"You have no ideaâ" A sword impales me from behind, and Signas stands behind me, his eye showing great frustration.

"And to think I had so much more planned for this. You're not worth using my own Keido against. You're not even worth this pathetic shell of a body your soul dwells in."

I feebly attempt to slice him, but he just jumps back, taking out the sword as he jumps.

Haven's Cloud's blade drips with blood, MY blood, its own owner.

"Signas! Give me back my sword!" I point my blades at him in anger.

"Humph. Try and take it if you can. Call out to it with your will, see if it responds. Go on, try it."

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I feel deep within myself, searching for its presence. *Please, come to me, aid me! Help me!*

Nothing, though I feel the blade's own presence within my soul, it's as if it refuses to acknowledge my call.

"You see," Signas says quietly. "This is what I meant. It's not just a matter of *asking* for help, you need to be able to help yourself. It no longer acknowledges you for *I* am its proper master."

I snarl in frustration, and lunge at him. He sighs, and rushes me as well. Before I can even swing my sword, he ducks under the blow I planned to make and punches me in the gut, sending me into the sky in mere moments, clouds zipping by my head. I pass through one, the water vapor chilling me to the bone and drenching my whole body. As I begin to slow, I notice Signas waiting for me.

In a millisecond, he drop kicks me, sending me crashing back down into the city streets, the impact destroying much of the road and the surrounding buildings.

I cough up blood, unable to move. Signas begins to appear, his image starting out multicolored and hazy before solidifying before me.

SMACK! He delivers a solid punch to my gut, making me spew crimson blood from my mouth, it begins to run down my chin and drip onto the ground.

Iâ couldn't reactâ to any of those attacksâ it was like, I completely lost sight of him in mere moments! How is he moving so fast?

A weird tingling goes throughout my body, and my injuries fade away.

"Get up. As much as it would please me to finish this, I know this isn't the best you can do. Get up, and get serious or I swear by the goddesses I really will kill you this next time."

I waste no time in getting back up, an angry scowl blazing on my face. Swinging my sword with deadly speed, he ducks his head back, only to find my second blade coming in from the opposite direction.

He leans back, the blade barely sniping his blond hair. He puts away Haven's Cloud and draws two duel swords.

With a loud clang, our swords clash, and sparks fly. We start slowly, but as the duel progresses; our quiet dance becomes a violent dance to the death. Despite my best efforts, even when our blades start moving beyond normal speed, I'm barely able to dodge his offensives, and my blades are continually rejected by his pinpoint precision and speed.

Suddenly disappearing from sight, only to slice my right leg and my back, Signas begins moving even *faster*. His very body becomes a blur, his movements becoming more offensive as I am forced back into a defensive stance, just to avoid being stabbed in the heart.

Keep calm Danica, analyze. You're doing fine, keep your head calm and focused, keep in the game and don't let him score a hit. Every hit can determine the course of battle, focus!

Even with my best attention, I can no longer discern his movements except at the last second.

"Good, good, I was worried you were going to disappoint me." Signas praises my swordplay, while not losing any of his lightning quick speed.

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"I must admit, Light has nothing on your capabilities, I'm struggling to keep up now!" I reply, beginning to run out of breath.

We both step away from each other, and circle each other for a brief moment turned into hours of nerve racking tension, before we lunge yet again. Signas lands on his feet behind me, his swords covered in blood.

"Black Shadow Step, Cross Execution Cut." He says dully as more than ten sword strikes to my chest, five to my back, two to each of my legs, and one shallow slice erupt with blood from my body, and I land on ground in a shivering heap.

Signas stands over me, sighing. "I take my words back; you're still not even a challenge. Apparently swinging a sword is the only-" I cut him off with a stab to the chest, fury in my eyes.

"You may mortally wound me, but don't you damn lower your guard, you asshole! You could have done anything, but I will not forgive you for deliberately sending an attack on my home! I will not allow it!" I yell at him slowly getting back on my legs.

He looks down at the sword still wedged in his chest, as blood starts flowing from the wound and staining his cloak red.

"I see. Even with a wound like that, you'd rather keep fighting and risk losing your life in defense of home. Admirable, one could even call it a sort of strength. That's still not good enough."

His body flickers, and turns multicolored, and then fades away. I hear a noise behind me and turn to have one of my arms sliced, almost losing it. I panic and move away, just barely avoiding losing it.

I double over in pain, the searing pain burning me where he severed my arm's nerves.

I force myself to look up, and he's completely unharmed, no trace of any injury on him at all.

"Wh-what is this? A-an illusion?!" I stammer.

He chuckles. "If only it were so simple." He holds his arm out, and opens his hand.

"Spatial Reversal." He says dully, and the nearly severed arm begins reattaching itself, and all the wounds and blood disappear from my body, in fact it feels like it never even lost blood.

He looks around, as people start coming to investigate the source of the fighting.

"This certainly won't do." He claps his hands, and a wave of force is emitted from him, spreading out everywhere.

"Time-Space Reversal."

Chapter 12: Collapse

Chapter 11: Collapse

Everything begins to blur and distort, colors fade to grey and meld into an endless white. Slowly they pull out from the endless white and reemerge into a scene familiar to me, a sight I beheld only twenty minutes ago: Feltatus is once again far below me, masked by passing clouds.

"Just what the hell is this? Did he say, 'Time-Space Reversal?' How is it possible? I've never heard of such a power, in all my studies of magic! I may not be an expert, but I know enough to knowâ!"

I turn to face Signas, who is staring at me passively.

"Time and Space magic is supposed to be something that only the gods use. Mortal magic users could never hope to attain such a power! Yet here YOU are, wielding it as if it's second nature to you! Explain yourself!" I yell at him.

He narrows his eye. "Such demands are not for those so far beneath my level. While Ramok can destroy whole mountains and landscapes, that is a far cry from my own strength. With but a wish, I could issue all of civilization's very oblivion."

I smirk. "Then why not do it if you're so mighty? Why kill random people for no apparent reasons? We know the Covenant is responsible for random disappearances and murders; I would like to know what such a powerful being like you could possibly get out of doing that! What's your aim?!"

Signas tilts his head to one side, as if confused. "All this badgering, as if you honestly expect me to answer in your favor. But I'll answer briefly, all the same. We seek individuality, to become complete, our own selves. As we are, we are but parts of another's soul. Yet why should we simply be forced to return, and lose ourselves for someone else's gain? That is the purpose of the Covenant, to protect and empower, so that we may rise as true Souls, no longer bound by the destiny fate would have for us."

I frown. "Become whole? You want to become your own selves? What does that have to do with anything?"

Signas looks to me, his eyes unreadable as ever. "As far as you're concerned, it has nothing to do with anything, you are indeed right. I need not explain ourselves to you any further than that. But because you're a threat, that's why I have ordered attacks on you before. But now you're pathetic, no longer the threat we believed existed. But still, you have proved to be much stronger than I initially assumed. For that reason, I shall accommodate with holding much less of myself back than before." He chuckles lightly. "I wonder how much of this you will be able to withstand before you pass to the next life."

He stretches out his hands, and all around skyscrapers begin to rise, being torn from their foundations, dust clouds trail behind as they ascend. At first I barely register this, but then I realize as the sounds of people screaming reach my ear, what exactly he's doing.

"You bastardâ!" I snarl, just as Signas throws a skyscraper right at me, forcing me to duck down lower in the sky. Signas spins in the air, sending a whole barrage of them flying at me. I dodge them; the wind streams they create blow me around, making the task difficult. I look back, concerned for the people's safety, and look back to Signas just as a skyscraper slams into me, knocking me into the ocean far below.

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I struggle against the sinking currents caused by the skyscraper's descent into the waters below, fighting even as my muscles start burning from the strain. I gradually work my way back to the surface, gasping for air. After I rest my longs for a minute, I immediately go back down to try and help the people trapped within their metal underwater prisons.

Signas kicks me with his knee right in my stomach, forcing me back out of the water, and into the air.

"YOU BASTARD! Let me through! There are people inside those buildings you're tossing so carelessly!" I scream in anger, drawing my swords and charging him.

Signas starts laughing. "If it bothers you so much, then you should start catching them, after all this is a game of catch!" He yells as he lifts more buildings into the air.

"âJust who do you think you are?! You're toying with people's lives, treating them as if they're worthless toys!" I yell at him, determined not to let him harm more people.

"Is that not what happens when you play with toys while you play your games? Sometimes they break." He says carefree as he thrusts more buildings at me. I throw up walls of earth to stop and slow down the buildings from being thrown any farther, and move to strike Signas. He readies Haven's Cloud, then charges at me in response.

I carefully time my dodge at the last second, and swing my sword at his masked head, aiming to cleave him at the neck. My sword makes impact, slices, but then completely goes through him as if he wasn't even there.

WHAT?! I barely have time to think as a sword cuts me open at the waistline, and Signas sails right past me, blood flowing from his sword, MY blood, MY sword.

I hitâ I hitâ so why? How did that happen? I clearly should have cut his neck, I know I was on target, I didn't miss! So howâ!? No, is his power that great, that he can alter the time that heâ!?

"Allow me to explain it to you clearly, Danica." He says as my wound closes from his magic once more.

"It's very tricky, Time and Space, they both have limited effects when used separately, one cannot change physical state in Time, yet can alter what time an attack actually lands. However, if I only did that, you would have seen my image blurred, my real body slightly behind my present body. By combining my power with Space, I am able to erase my body and existence, and either appear ahead of you or after you so that I strike first. That is the basics of the technique I'm using, though the actual technique is next to impossible to detect and counter, even with this knowledge. Unlike motion, I can travel without any particular alerting movements."

He means that most fighters have a reflex that can give them away before they strike, but this technique doesn't seem to have a flaw like that. He can stand perfectly still while using it, so I can't judge what he's going to doâ damnâ!!

Signas rushes me again, thrusting his sword at me in a multitude of fast stabs, forcing me to go on the defensive and start to dodge and weave in and out through his strikes, and as I do so, I search for an opening. Eventually I detect a pattern and thrust my own sword under his guard and manage to stab him in the chest. Blood pours from his chest, and he stops and looks at me.

"âWell done, you paid attention to that opening. Howeverâ!"

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"AGGGH!" I yell out in pain as a blade runs through me from my back and out through my stomach.

"You fell for another trick. I don't have to use my powers always together, they work very well apart. For instance, this Spatial Clone. A physical and spiritual clone, to the last detail." He says from behind me, and as I watch, the one in front of me begins to fade away in multicolored light. I look behind me, and Signas holds Haven's Cloud, the blade embedded well into my back.

"You're keeping up with knowing my abilities, but your ability to foresee them and counter them is poor. If you cannot adapt in this situation, you will never defeat me, nor even come close to truly wounding me."

That's when I smile. "You know, I may not be all that powerful, but I still have my own tricks up my sleeve". My face cracks, and my whole body turns to stone, and crumbles away.

Signas chuckles. "My my, unexpected. I see you have earth clones. Not as solid as my clones, but they feel real enough to fool someone. I assume you just cast the spell, because I can't even trace where the real you is."

I whisper behind him, "Maybe you should turn around."

"Dan-" I stab him straight in the back, my first sword piercing through a lung, and my second through his heart.

"UUUGH!" He chokes out, coughing up blood.

"D-D-Danicaâ !"!

Hang onâ ! what's wrong with his voice?! It's offâ ! it sounds likeâ !

"W-why would youâ !. Why would you k-k-kill me?" The voice of my boyfriend Drasmere chokes out in front of me.

"N-n-no! W-hat'sâ ! what's happening? Signas was right here, I stabbed himâ ! andâ !"!

"And you fell into another trap. Spatial Replacement Technique." Signas says from behind me, laughter in his voice as Drasmere begins to slid off my sword blades and fall down below headfirst into the city.

"DRASMERE!!!!" I scream, cold wet tears of pain rolling down my face. I turn to Signas with rage, "HOW DARE YOU-"

Signas grabs my throat, and violently crushes it, a gurgle is the only thing else that comes from my throat except for blood.

"Now join him, wretch." He tosses me down with incredible force, and as I fall, my vision begins blacking out, blood raining down into the city. My vision blurs, my sense of hearing begins to be replaced with a high pitched ringing and echoing, leaving only my consciousness.

N-noâ ! n-noâ ! Drasmereâ !. How could Iâ ! kill my ownâ ! my ownâ !

As I continue to fall, I pass into darkness and pain fades from my body, and I swear I hear:

"Danica, you pathetic weakling. Must I save your pathetic ass again?" The voice echoes over and over in my head, as I drift alone in the dark void.

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