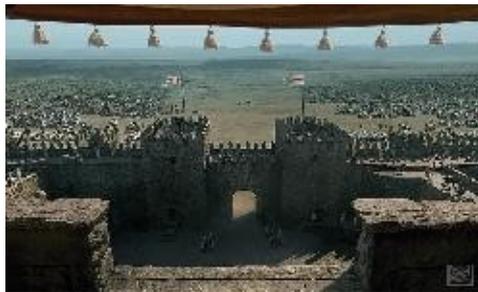


Kingdom of Magic

By : Rediel

Blah Blah Blah Kingdom Blah. Blah Blah Blah Magic Blah.



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Chapter 1: Matthias

Chapter 1: Matthias

Matthias patted Danielle's tearful blue eyes and wiped the tears of sorrow away, he did not cry, he couldn't cry. He had to remain strong for his wife and for the people of Albuaras. It had been announced in the will that he was to be King. Andrew had no wife or children and he would not leave his throne to his younger brother Julius. Julius was wicked and cruel, he was not set to be a King or have any sort of power, and used black magic. A magic that has been banned from use due to it's nature. It was used to curse and maim, never could anything good come of it's use, no matter what purpose it was used for, it would always have a negative side effect.

Matthias took a slow breath; "Stop crying my love. He doesn't have to live in this cruel world any longer."

"I loved that man." she said.

Matthias wrapped his arm around his beloved and said, "We all did my love. We all did." his stubble scratched against her neck as it always did, "Rupert! Come here my boy!"

"What Daddy?" he replied.

Matthias wavered his arm; "Group hug." Matthias scooped up Rupert and held him close. He needed the comfort just as much as his wife only he hid it better. The Kingdom of Albuaras was in tears, there wasn't a citizen in that city who did not love King Andrew, he was an excellent leader and a fair King. Injustice did not go unpunished and parties for the whole kingdom were held in the capital every few months. He was a loved man. Matthias watched as his closest friend burnt to ashes. It was the Phoenix's family tradition past down for centuries. *"Dead in the ashes, I will rise, reborn of fire. A Phoenix!"* It was a phrase Matthias knew well and one he would have to recite in order to become the next King of Albuaras.

"Your coronation will begin shortly, Lord Matthias." said Cecil.

"Thank you Cecil. You have always treated me like a son from the day I set foot in the capital."

"Thank you Cecil." sniffed Danielle.

"Oh. It's quite alright. May the god's bless us with many more years together and happier days than today." replied Cecil.

"Yes. May the gods bless us."

Cecil looked at Rupert; "Look to the skies little one. The fireworks will start soon." and just like that the fireworks splashed across the sky. People did the best they could to celebrate and enjoy the display of vibrant reds and oranges and yellows. The colours of fire and of the phoenix.

"Would Lord Matthias please step forward." Matthias stepped onto the ceremonial platform for his coronation, "Matthias Mark Stone, Lord of Antar and dear friend of King Andrew, Do you take the Phoenix oath and promise to the Kingdom of Albuaras?" asked Cecil.

Matthew knelt and put his hand to his heart; "I do."

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"Good. Now Repeat after me. I Matthias Mark Stone solemnly swear that I will do everything in my power and beyond to protect the fine Kingdom of Albuaras and all that is within it. From the largest of mountains to the smallest grain of dirt. I will fight with all my strength no matter what the odds. I will fight with the people and for the people, and many years from now, when I lie on my death bed my last breath will be. For the Phoenix!" Matthias repeated the oath, it was no challenge for him, he could still remember Andrew's coronation and the oath was still stuck in his mind, "Now you must recite the Kingdom's motto."

Matthias took a deep and calming breath; "Dead in the ashes, I will rise, reborn of fire. A Phoenix!" Cecil sprinkled the ashes over Matthias' head, he took some on his fingers and rubbed a grey, white streak on Matthias' forehead, he poured oil on Matthias' head and placed a thin crown of gold encrusted with diamonds on Matthias' head. The crown wasn't as bad as he perceived, it was much lighter, it pushed his blonde hair down so that his fuzzy fringe fell over his left eye.

"You are now reborn as a Phoenix and as our new King!" proclaimed Cecil. The crowds roared and clapped but some still bore tears from the death of their previous King.

Matthias pushed himself back to his feet, he wanted to dust himself off but he dared not, if the people saw him they would kill him. It wasn't just any old ash he had over him. It was the ashes of his closest friend and a great King; "As many of you know, Andrew was my closest and dearest friend, I will never be as great a king as he but I promise you that I will do my best to honour his legacy!" The crowds went wild with tears and uproars of hope. Not all the tears were sorrowful. Many were tears of joy that the Kingdom would not fall into the hands of a cruel King. From his appearance and manner it was not hard to tell that Matthias was cool and collected and from the way he treated his family, he was kind-hearted and loving. He was going to make a fine King and was going in at the right age for it, thirty, mature enough to make wise decisions but bold enough to take risks. All good qualities in a King or any leader for that matter.

"To King Matthias!" roared a man in the crowd and the crowd followed his example, "To the King!" Matthias lifted his little Prince and kissed his beautiful Queen.

"You're a King now my love." she said.

"Not yet my love. I have the title of King but that doesn't make me a King. Being a King is something you learn with time not something you are given." sighed Matthias. He was worried about his new found responsibilities and didn't know very much about allies and enemies. He knew a little about who he could trust and who would stab him in the back from eavesdropping on Andrew. However he did not know who the other five Kings in the realm were and what intentions they had.

"Andrew always used to say that." she smiled.

"Mummy. I'm tired." said Rupert.

"Take him to bed. You've done enough for today."

"I will do it your Majesty." interrupted Cecil, "After all I am your assistant. It is my duty to take care of you and your family."

"As you will Cecil."

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"If I may be so bold to ask, do you know about the week of a blessed child?"

"No. Is it important?"

Chapter 3: Matthias

"Well the say if you conceive a child within one week of receiving the Phoenix's blessing that child will be bestowed with incredible power." explained Cecil.

"I'll be busy tonight." laughed Matthias.

Danielle playfully thumped him in the arm; "Maybe tomorrow if you get on your knees and beg." She gave Matthias a firm smack on the bottom and mingled with her friends.

"She's a fine woman. You are blessed to have one so good Matthias."

"What was your wife like Cecil? I never met her."

"I'd better get this little one to bed. His eyes are starting to droop." coughed Cecil.

"Indeed. You should get crazy old Bill to make you a remedy to clear that cough of yours."

"There is no cure for age I'm afraid." Cecil laughed rustically, "Come now Rupert. I shall tell you a nice story if you're a good boy." Rupert skipped cheerily after Cecil. Garen Storm waved for Matthias to join him at the barside, Garen was commander of the Army and border defences, Matthias had the honour of fighting alongside him in the final days of the Black Plague.

Matthias pulled up a barstool beside him and said to the bartender; "Get me a pint of cider please."

"Right away your Magesty. I am sure you are aware that you do not pay for your drinks."

"Naturally." smiled Matthias. The bartender poured the cider from a large barrel container and handed it to Matthias who kindly thanked him.

Matthias laughed; "Garen! Why is it everytime I see you it's in days of sorrow?"

"Because." he said, "I'm a warden of catastrophe and am only able to do my duty properly in times such as these."

"Cut the bullshit!" laughed Matthias, "I don't need a cheesy explanation. I need a cunning tactician."

"It's funny to think that at one time I was nothing more than a blade for hire."

"And I a farmer's son." replied Matthias, "Anything is possible if you work hard."

"Work hard? I fucked a General's daughter and she convinced her father to let me fight for him."

"I thought fucking was hard work."

Garen choked on his drink and sprayed the Bartender with a mix of stout and slobber, "Depends how much you paid for the service."

Matthias slapped Garen on the shoulder like old friends do, "You haven't changed at all Garen."

"You've gotten fat."

Chapter 4: Matthias

"I'll have to tell the wife to stop with the roast dinners."

Garen gave the slightest hint of a smile, "Or get up off your ass and join me at the borders once in a while."

Matthias sipped at his cider; "How are the borders holding out?"

Garen peered around the seaside bar. Andrew had always said he wanted to be burnt beside the sea when he died and so built a ceremonial cremation platform built at the most beautiful part of the sea. "This is not the bartime conversation. There are spies everywhere. We will save this discussion for the war council."

"Spies? You really have gone daft!" Matthias laughed but he knew too well that Garen spoke the truth. Supporters of the Black Plague still loomed and there was never any proof that they had all been killed. The Black Plague were hard times that were best left in the past.

"Everyone knows they exist but it's being able to pick them out that's the talent. Spies are harmless unless you feed them facts."

"Then we shall feed them with lies?"

"Aye. Never even give full truths even in the Council. Those men are as honest as I am religious."

"I never took you to be a man of religion." grinned Matthias.

"The only god I trust is a strong blade between my enemy's chest."

"You're such a hard man." mocked Matthias giving Garen the odd nudge. Garen ignored the comments for he didn't need to be told he was hard. He knew it.

Garen called for the bartender; "Another!" he spluttered, "You're a King now then?"

"It hasn't really hit home but I guess by title I am a King."

"You're not fit to be a King. You'll bring back all that magical bullshit and this realm will fall into chaos."

Matthias slammed his steel mug against the table; "Magic is not bullshit! It's a power that aids life!"

"And takes another. I've lived in this realm a good fifteen years longer than you and let me tell you, that magic is dangerous, it's no good."

"Magic is dangerous but if we restart the University of Magical Education. We can educate people in how to use magic to benefit their daily lives."

"And then you'll set up a council to reinforce these laws." mumbled Garen.

"Absolutely!" exclaimed Matthias.

"You're a fool. These peasants are better off believing the lie. And I haven't seen much magic around lately." It was true. Magic wasn't seen in the mainlands after everything magical was exiled to the Engagium Isles and

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away from the main lands. A magical barrier was placed around the Island to hold all the beings on the Island. Julius was among the exiled so there was no real worry of him taking the throne. However uneasiness still fell over the realm. After all it was only a matter of time before the barrier was destroyed.

Chapter 5: Matthias

Danielle approached Matthias and said; "Matthias. I'm going to bed now. Don't be too long ok?"

"Anything for you my love." He gave her a kiss on the head and watched her as she walked off.

"You were watching her ass weren't you?" smirked Garen as he gazed upon her ass aswell.

"With an ass as perfect as hers it's hard not to stare."

"Don't stare to long or you'll be sucked in."

Matthias laughed; "I've been sucked in many times before."

"Walk with me Matthias. I have something to show you." Garen lead Matthias far away from the party and then stopped. He waved for Matthias to come closer. Matthias stood right behind Garen. Then suddenly. Garen grabbed Matthias by the thick mop of hair on the back of his head and pulled a blade tight against his neck.

"What is the meaning of this?" exclaimed Matthias.

Garen sniggered; "You're a stupid, naive, fool that's the meaning of this. I pulled a dagger on you and with the right mind to, could have slit your throat." Garen tossed Matthias to the dirt and sheathed his dagger. Matthias' robes became dirty with sand. They were the ceremonial robes worn by anyone receiving the Phoenix's blessing. Flashy reds, dashing oranges and striking yellows, all the colours of the mighty Phoenix.

"I'm capable of looking after myself but thanks for trying to take my life." laughed Matthias sarcastically.

Garen scratched his ear; "I'm warning you to be on your damn guard. You shouldn't trust anyone and I'm sure you're aware of the mind control magic?"

"Of course! I didn't study at the old University for five years for nothing!"

"I ride for the borders on the morrow," Garen placed a hand on Matthias' shoulder, "Stay safe brother and try to lose a bit of weight for godness sake!"

Matthias looked down at his ever growing waistline and tugged at his slightly flabby cheeks. "I'm not that fat! I'm average for a man my age."

"If it helps you sleep at knight kid." Garen whistled for his horse. A black Mustang came galloping across the sandy beach. It was a stout horse and was well suited for the harsh riding that Garen was used too.

Matthias puzzled; "I thought you rode out tomorrow."

Garen mounted his horse; "Aye." he said, "Tonight I ride to the inn I'm staying at. I found a nice maiden there to keep my bed warm."

"When will you settle and marry?"

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"The hell to that! Variety is the spice of life my boy!" Garen spurred his horse and rode off into the horizon black hair and cape flapping behind him.

"That man." thought Matthias.

Chapter 6: Matthias

Matthias went straight back to his chambers inside the Royal Palace and stripped out of his robes. Matthias crawled under the covers beside his darling wife who by this stage was half asleep. Matthias wasn't the most stealthy or overly light-footed and he wakened Danielle.

"What kept you so much longer?" she said.

Matthias snuggled closer; "I'm sorry. I was talking to an old friend I had back in the days of the Black Plague."

"I remember those days. When Andrew asked you to finish off the war I was so worried."

"You worry too much. I was the most powerful Magician back in my University days and am probably still high up there in rankings of power."

"You're also very vain and I think you'll find I was the most powerful."

"If it pleases you to think so dear." sighed Matthias. His father taught him well that an argument with a woman was a battle that could not be won.

"You were ever so bold back then."

"It was confidence my dear."

Danielle mounted Matthias and sat on top of him; "A trait you certainly don't lack even now."

Matthias rolled over on top of Danielle; "Without it and a helpful push from Andrew, I never would have been able to ask you out and if that happened, you would have been snatched up by that rich cunt Ricard."

"He was found dead a few days after graduation at the University. I wonder what actually happened to him."

"He was found dead and that's it." snapped Matthias sharply, "I will have no more talk of him again."

Danielle pushed Matthias off of her. "No need to bite my face off."

Matthias lay down beside her and pulled her close. He gently pecked at the back of her neck; "I'm sorry. It has been a stressful day. I just need a good sleep is all."

"Good night."

"Good night." Matthias was hiding something from Danielle and it bugged her. She felt uneasy that Matthias had kept secrets from her. It wasn't healthy for a relationship and made her wonder what other dark secrets Matthias might have. The Dark Plague where dark times that called for desperate actions. Back then there was no pride and no sense of shame, it was live or die. The realm had only now begun recovering from the Dark Plague that ended two years ago and spanned for over a decade. The beasts that rose from the crevices of the torn world were slaughtered and those that could not be killed were captured and placed on the Engagium Isles away from harm. It was wishful thinking and sheer ignorance. The Kings thought that if the creatures where out of sight they would be out of mind but how wrong were they. They should have killed the creatures of evil while the opportunity was there.

Chapter 7: Matthias

The next morning Matthias was wakened by knocking on his bedroom door. Danielle had already left as she had planned to visit her cousins in Castuanus. She had took Rupert with her to give Matthias a little break from family matters and allow him to focus on being the King.

"Your Magesty." said Cecil.

"What is it Cecil?" yawned Matthias. He threw on his purple dressing gown and opened the door to Cecil.

"We are holding a council meeting and your presence is requested."

"I wont be able to do much. I know very little about the realm and who's killing who."

"It matters not. You need to learn and now is a good time, because the realm is fairly peaceful."

"Fairly? What's happening?"

"Get dressed and meet me at the council hall. All will be revealed at the meeting." Cecil bowed to the King and walked down the grand hallway.

"I'd better get dressed." thought Matthias. Matthias had a stimulating soak in his grand bath that was connected to his enormous bedroom. After his bath, Matthias patted himself dry and changed into a white doublet and covered it with a tanned leather jerkin with a yellow Phoenix printed on the right breast. He pulled up his brown breeches and laced them up. He sunk his feet into his soft leather boots and threw a striking yellow cloak over his shoulder and connected it with a brooch at the front just below his neck. The cloak matched the yellow Phoenix on his left breast and it too bore a Phoenix in it's center. He wasn't one for swords but he attached his sheath to his belt and drew his sword fingering the edge and looking along the blade. It was a gift from Andrew when he was made a Lord and when he wore it he felt like Andrew was standing right beside him in whatever task he faced. Matthias placed on a new item that he had not yet grown used too on his head. The crown. It pushed down his fringe and made his hair cover his eyes a little but he managed to brush the hair out of his eyes. He walked down the long and twisting corridors until he approached the double doors of the council room. He took a deep breath and pulled the door open and entered the council chamber.

"Ah the King has arrived." said Cecil.

"And he looks dressed for war!" laughed Yakob. Matthias had never liked nor trusted him. He always seemed to have an all seeing eye and all hearing ears. He always would snigger and giggle and had a negative vibe about him.

"I'm sorry. I didn't realise this was a fashion contest and since I am now King I shall wear whatever I desire." said Matthias sternly.

"That being said Your Majesty. You have to hold up the Phoenix name and honour." persuaded Cecil.

"Enough small talk. Let's start this meeting for fuck sake!" coughed Garen. He lay slouched in the wooden chair with his muddy boots planted right on the table and a dark hood pulled over his face.

"Garen?" said Matthias, "I thought you rode to the border."

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Garen removed his feet from the table and pulled his hood back; "I decided it wouldn't be wise to leave you in a room full of manipulative bastards by yourself. That's why I decided to take the role of your personal bodyguard and request control of the Royal Phoenixian Guard."

Chapter 8: Matthias

"You certainly will not!" interrupted Cecil. "The Phoenixian Guard is an age old order that already has a fine commander and a more respectable man for the job than yourself."

"Careful with that tongue of yours. It almost hurt my pride. Too bad I lost that in the Black Plague."

"Silence!" ordered Matthias, "Garen. If you take up that role then who shall control the borders and the men posted at them?"

"Fuck the borders! It's not protection from the outside you'll need. You'll need protected from the inside from spies and assassins. The borders have walls and men manning them, your throat does not, you need a man you know as much as a brother."

"This is madness! I won't have it! Not this mongrel in control of the Phoenixian Guard!" coughed Cecil.

"Nor I!" supported Yakob.

"Perhaps we should give the man a chance." reasoned Janic as he fingered his black moustache and goatee beard. He was an idealist and an honest, trusting and trustworthy man.

"I will take him as commander." said Matthias, "But you must pick another to command the borders."

"My sons are already doing that as we speak so it's not a problem."

"Oh yeah. You have something like seven don't you?"

"Aye." snorted Garen, "I trust them boys with my life. They won't fail you and if they do I'll cut my own throat."

"This is proposterous!" said Cecil, "Your Majesty! What would Andrew think of this if he were here?"

"He would be the King so it would be his problem not mine. He would tell me to go with what I feel. He always did." replied Matthias.

"I think a glass of wine all around would be for the best. To calm us all down." smiled Janic as he poured out the wine and served it around the table.

Matthias sipped his freshly poured wine; "Alright everyone. I know little about the realm so I would ask of you to teach me who our allies are."

"Well Your Majesty." smirked Yakob; "As of yet we have no enemies anywhere. However there is an uprising in the North-East in the Kingdom of Japorcar."

"Why is that?"

Garen gulped his wine down most of it dripping down his chin and onto his jerkin; "Place has no King and everyone wants the throne."

"I see. What of the West?"

Chapter 9: Matthias

Janic patted his stranglely orange beard with a hankerchief he had in his left pocket; "That Kingdom was split in half by two brothers after Mark their father passed away."

Matthias paused for a moment; "He had two sons. James and John. I know them well from my University days, they were close friends of my brother Simon."

"That's correct Your Majesty." smiled Yakob almost too widely. Matthias felt if he had smiled any wider his face would turn inside out.

"King Philip rules Castuanias if I remember correctly."

"Aye," coughed Garen; "He likes to make criminals he catches fight in an arena for glory and for his own twisted amusement. I fought in that place myself, but I was let out 'cause I was killing his little criminals a little too quickly."

"See Your Majesty. This man even admits to being a criminal and a murderer." winged Cecil.

"He's good at it and that's what I need. He's smart and has good instincts and more to the point is that I trust him. I will have no more debate on this topic or I will have you locked up." sighed Matthias.

"As you wish my King." said Cecil.

"Robert Strong owns Damesium. He is neither an ally nor a foe." explained Janic as he pointed to Damesium on the map."

Matthias stretched; "Why is that?"

"He is swayed by gold and easily bribed." explained Garen.

"I will bear that in mind." Matthias cleared his throat and changed the topic to his own Kingdom; "What is the situation in our own Kingdom?"

"Nothing much really." sighed Garen, "The borders aren't too bad either apart from the border to Japorcar."

"That's good." smiled Matthias. Luckily Andrew had left the Kingdom in a decent state before he had died. It would have been far worse if Albuaras was at war. Matthias wasn't any great commander and didn't cope well with stress and pressure. He was a deep thinker and didn't have the gut instincts of a commander or warrior of any description. He could come up with the greatest of battle plans if he had time but in war there is no time for such things.

"Well fuck this," Garen swung his legs off the table and stood up, "There's fuck all to do in this Kingdom. We need to start a war for fun."

"No." replied Matthias' "Things are peaceful and let things remain that way."

"The King is right." said Janic.

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"The King is right." added Cecil and Yakob in support of Janic. Matthias was pleased with the peace and harmony in the Kingdom and the Realm. Little did he know that this was but the calm before a horrific storm that would destroy all that Andrew worked so hard to build. This perfect utopia would be obliterated and war was set to break out. There was unknown and unspoken tension between the Kingdoms, and all that was required was a simple spark, to set off the flames of war. Julius lived as aslong as he was alive, he would do everything in his power to reclaim the throne of Albuaras.

Chapter 10: Guss

Chapter 2: Guss

Guss wheeled his horse around the dead corpse of a man crushed beneath a slaughtered horse and whirled his mighty two-handed, double edged sword above his head. His sword was nearly as long as he and was a nice thick steel claymore style blade with. The sword was very basic consisting of the blade mounted in a bronzed hilt wrapped in grey cloth and a thick chunk of metal for a guard. The sword appeared cumbersome and weighty but Guss had no problem in maneuvering it. He struck a man's shield but the blow was so fierce that it launched the man off his horse. He swiftly moved his hand up the long hilt of the sword, which was about four man sized hands long, and parried a mace blow that would have struck the side of his helmet. He parried another two blows and rode on through the enemy lines. He lanced a man with his enormous sword and threw him aside like a rag doll. He wheeled his horse again. It wasn't like he was fighting at all but scouring the battlefield for a worthy foe. Truth being told he was looking for someone. Someone who had always been stronger than he. Someone who tested all his techniques to the extreme. He dismounted and leapt off his horse onto a retreating enemy.

He cowered below Guss; "Please don't kill me! I'll do anything!" he squealed.

Guss removed his bucket helmet. The helmet had been a bucket his father used to collect water from a reservoir many miles from their desert home. Guss had took it for a helmet when he joined a group of Raiders who strived to rule over Japorcar since it had been Kingless for decades. The bucket had been resmelted and rebuilt to have a visor and had more plates of steel for better face protection. Guss looked down on his prey with his mismatched eyes. One a wolf pelt grey and the other a deep sea blue.

"Where is he?" he screamed.

"Where is who?" whimpered the man.

"The one the call the Demon of the Sands!" Guss smacked the man across the jaw with the back of his hand.

"I don't know!" Guss hit him again, "I swear! I know nothing!" Guss raised his hand again but he was stopped by Gryph. He was the leader of the Sweeping Hawks Mercenaries. There were many Mercenary bands in the Japorcar Kingdom. It was a Kingless land with many claims to the throne and many wars over the throne. Japorcar was a wartorn wasteland and a shell of the once beautiful deserts and intricate jungles.

"Stop!" He said, "These are not The Sand Demon's men if you had bothered to examine their attire you would have realised."

"Gryph..." he replied.

"Let him go." He said, "Let him run off and tell tales of our victory and his defeat."

Guss hit the man one more time, stood up, and dusted himself off, "Whatever." He wasn't one to follow orders directly. He only followed orders if it suited him or he really felt the need to. Somedays were better than others and it depended on how pissed off he was at the time. He was rather ticked today, seven long months, he had been searching for The Sand Demon who tended to keep himself well hidden. He had only encountered the Demon of a man once and was overwhelmed by his power. Ever since then he has been searching to find this monstrosity to be as great a warrior as he can be. Guss would not settle for some common sellsword, he had to fight the strongest he could to be the strongest he could become and sword in

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had he was going to do it or die trying.

"When are you going to let this go, Guss?" sighed Gryph, "You have been chasing shadows all your life. Come into the light and fight the real enemies here."

"You wouldn't understand!" said Guss, "I have to do this to regain my sense of pride."

Chapter 11: Guss

"We are in the heat of battle. This is no time for your foolish pride!"

"Shut up!" snapped Guss. Gryph was much smarter and had greater social skills, no matter what Guss would say, Gryph would counter it with strange words and complicated lectures.

"Remember. I did not spare your life for you to chase your childish fears." Guss' upper lip stiffened. He had never thought about it before, but he really was afraid of The Sand Demon. He felt that if he could defeat him in battle he would be able to move on with his life and felt that this was his only way out. His only way to escape his fear.

"I know." replied Guss, "I'm bound to you after I lost our duel all those years ago when we were still young."

"Yes." smiled Gryph, "You were a lost little boy that my men were attacking at the time. You slayed two of them I believe."

Guss laughed; "Yeah. I still find it hard to believe that those men followed a sixteen year old like you."

"I could easily have ran them through. Fear is a powerful weapon my friend."

"I know." frowned Guss, he looked out over the dunes of the desert still wondering where The Sand Demon was, "But respect is worth more."

"So do you respect me or fear me?"

"I respect your power and skill in battle but I can't say I'm particularly fond of you." Guss laughed.

Gryph gave him a firm slap on the shoulder; "That's good enough for me." he said, "Let's move on from here."

"Where are we going to?" said Guss. He checked his sword over and mounted his horse.

"There is an abandoned town not too far to the East," pointed Gryph, "We will go there and check for supplies."

"And what if there isn't anything there?"

"We will stay there for the night regardless. It will night fall before we reach the town," explained Gryph, "Saddle up! We ride East!" The band of raiders rode Eastbound and night fell rapidly as they rode.

"So have any of you thought about what you are going to do after this war?" asked a soldier.

"I think I might marry and settle down." said one soldier.

"What about you Captain Guss?" It got Guss thinking about his future. He had been so tunnel visioned on finding The Sand Demon that he completely disregarded a life after the deed was done.

"This is no place to think about the future." he said, "We must only think of the next fight or next meal. Anything else will get you killed on the battlefield."

Chapter 12: Guss

"What about you Gryph?" they said.

Gryph laughed, "Isn't it obvious?"

"I don't get it?" said the soldiers.

"I want to be the King of Japorcar and then eventually take over the entire realm like the High King that lived almost one thousand years ago."

"The people wont follow you." said Guss.

"And why not?" asked Gryph rather sharply.

"Because the lands are seperated into six Kingdoms now." he said, "If you try to rule all six the people will rebel since they all want their own independant kingdom and King."

"I will change that view!" said Gryph but he was cut short from his speech.

"Sir! I can see the town!" reported a soldier from the front of the party.

"Acknowledged," said Gryph, "We will rest here for the night and check the situation in the city on the horizon."

"Why are we going there?" asked Guss.

"We have been following your Demons for too long and I've lost too many men over it," sighed Gryph, "You and I shall go alone and see if we can add any sellswords to aid us."

"Fine. I'm going to sleep so don't bother me unless it's important." Guss tied his horse up at the empty stable and found a bed inside on of the not too badly damaged houses. He feel asleep but The Sand Demon haunted his dreams. He couldn't stop thinking about his battle with the Demon of a man. He was no ordinary man, he could control sand and used it in the most deadly attacks that Guss had ever seen. The sad thing was that Guss was surrounded by sand in Japorcar so the Sand Demon's power was increased and he wouldn't have to strain himself in order to use the sands but it was the least of his concerns. However no matter how hard he tried he couldn't seem to clear his mind of vengeance. He got up, grabbed his sword, and went to a quiet place where he could be alone. Silence was a luxury and time for thinking was for the privelliged. He knew why Gryph had redirected the party away from The Sand Demon. They were too weak to face the Demon in battle and would surely be killed, Guss knew this but, he still wanted to hunt the Demon down. He lapped up the water and tried to wash his thoughts of revenge away with each slurp. The Demon had destroyed his home town and killed everyone including his family. Ever since that day Guss vowed to find the Demon and to make him pay for what he had done. He had fought with the Demon a few years ago, but he was too weak to even scratch him, and was left defeated and broken. It wasn't long after, that he found Gryph, that he joined the Hawks. Gryph promised that they would help him but he would have to do as Gryph said after Gryph defeated Guss in a duel. Guss looked up at the little twinkles of brilliant white light which contrasted from the dark purple and blue of the sky. His gaze turned to the bright full moon and he could see the craters of the moon like black specks of dirt. He then turned back to the well. That is when he heard crying. He felt something latch onto his leg with a vice like grip, he tried to break free and reached for his sword when he looked down at it. The little damsel in distress that was clinging to him for dear life.

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"Hey, get off kid!" said Guss, "Get off!" The girl didn't even react at all she just continued to cry and hold onto his leg.

He pryed open her arms with a struggle and pushed her to the ground, "I said get off!" The girl looked up at him with teary eyes and leapt onto him again. Guss threw her over his huge chunks of lean muscle and carried her to the sandstone hut's door on which he rapped. The door creaked open from it's age and a drowsy Gryph answered the door.

Chapter 13: Guss

"What is the matter?" groaned Gryph. He rubbed the sleep from his eyes which were barely open.

"This little girl wont shut up." said Guss. He glared down at his leg and into the child's tearful eyes. The girl looked back at him adoringly, almost like how a daughter looks to her father for support.

"Have you tried talking to the child?" said Gryph. He knew full well of Guss' ignorance and lack of social skills.

Guss scratched his head; "I told her to get off my leg?"

Gryph sighed and crouched down to make eye contact with the girl; "It's ok little one. What is your name?" She looked at him stupidly in silence. She had stopped crying but she still didn't want to talk, "What is the matter child? We mean you no harm. Wont you tell me your name?" The girl pointed to her ears. Could she be deaf? Guss wasn't as quick to notice but Gryph realised immediately and was surprised he had not noticed it sooner.

"What's the matter now?" sighed Guss.

"I think she is deaf." explained Gryph.

"That would explain a lot I guess." said Guss. He knelt down to the girls level and looked into her frightened little eyes. He flicked her head with his finger and she laughed when she fell back in the dirt.

"Seems like you have a way with children, Guss."

"Not really." he replied, "My father used to do it to me when I was a kid."

"I think you should take this child under your wing Guss." Guss sighed, stood up, and walked to the well that was just outside the building that Gryph was sleeping in. He pulled up the bucket and checked it's contents. The bucket was bone dry but the metal was slightly rusted, so it was evident that there had been water at one point. Gryph dropped the bucket back down the hole and rested his head in his hands. Him look after a child? He could barely look after himself let alone a child! It wasn't a choice though, Gryph never gave a choice, it was a direct order not just a request.

"If I must," moaned Guss, "She's too young to fight and it appears that she can't talk. She is just going to be a burden to carry around."

"You have broad shoulders," laughed Gryph, "You should teach her how to talk."

Gryph laughed sarcastically, "She's deaf. How the hell can I teach her to talk if she can't hear me?"

"Figure it out," smiled Gryph, "I am going back to bed and I advise you to do the same." Gryph closed over his door and Guss turned back to the girl. He waved her to follow him back to the building he was sleeping in. An old shack of a home with little roofing and no door.

"It's not much but it's home for now." he laughed and then realised that the girl was deaf. What was he going to do about it? He didn't consider him the father type and that was to ordinary children, this girl was deaf, how would he be able to teach her and raise her if she is deaf? He spread out a bed and pointed for her to settle for

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the night; then he sat in what must have been the livingroom floor, he thought long and hard about his next move, this wasn't what he wanted, he wanted to find and kill the Sadn Demon, not babysit a child that is not even his own!

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