

The Ten Rings

By Lewis Stockton

Credits

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Imperial Citizenry Credit

Nexanda

Based on a Tabletop RPG Game Mastered by Lewis Stockton (Vlandirleld Amberster) and Played by Deanna Paice (Elegosa) and Tyler Theisen (Xandril)

Written as part of November's "National Novel Writing Month" NaNoWriMo 2018 and "Won" with 50,000 Words in 30 days!

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Part 1

~ Friendship ~

Chapter I

~ The Last Will And Testament ~

Saintsday the 35th of Heathswrath 1805

The Ilmarian Imperium had ruled for a thousand years and planned to for another thousand years to come. Ruled by Andreas Vandersryke the Fifth, known as 'The Usurper' for a number of years, it was not until recently that it had changed from 'The Usurper' to 'The Just.' The Ilmarian Imperium stood as the highest power in the 'Three Kingdom's' region of the world of Fera. Vadrass lay to the East and trade was booming between the Imperium and its Eastern Allies.

Umissia had come out of a Revolution after the death of its Sultan, now transformed from a Sultanate to a Republic. Trade between Ilmaria and Umissia had strengthened the bonds between each other with Alliances and Unions of families. Fine Umissian silks and spices flowed across the "Zentral Sein" in Ilmarian and "Alabar Almarkaziu" in Umissian, a dividing sea splitting Umissia and Ilmaria down the middle and into Ilmaria while Ilmarian weapons and black powder passed back.

The war between Ilmaria and Alussia had ended on the 1st of Dawn 1791 with a peace treaty signed on the very centre of 'The Front', the largest and most bloody area of the fighting. The peace treaty gave Alussia the land they had fought and died for, seceding a few miles to make a border across a river that spanned nearly the entire width of the Front. In return Alussia would pay Ilmaria War Reparations for the declaration of war and trade between the two would flourish. The only things to be added to the treaty was a stipulation of weapons and technology trading.

However, this story is not about Andreas 'The Usurper' Vandersryke the Fifth, this story is not about his Dragonkin companion Nexanda Tora, nor about the trade deals of Empires. This story is about a handful of people, coming from different races and creeds to stop an evil that would see the world ruined and desolate. Would they receive thanks for their acts? Perhaps, if it was known what occurred.

Saintsday the 35th of Heathswrath in the year 1805 of the Ilmarian Calender was the day that the word had arrived to the ears of Vlandirleld Amberster and Elegosa. The pair had been sat in a tavern planning where they would go next when the letter had been brought to them, their graduation had occurred less than a week prior and Allannia had wished them farewell and safe journeys.

Allannia Sharo, known throughout the known world as 'The Master' was an old Aşağı teacher living in an isolated area of Ilmaria's southern lands known as 'The Reach'. The Master had trained and taught a long line of adventurers and hero's through her hundreds of years on Fera, yet she looked no older than a well maintained middle aged human.

Standing over the casket as it was lowered into the ground, Vlandirleld and Elegosa stood silent as Allannia was buried in the cemetery grounds of Bywulla's Church in the Reach's Regional Capital, Clearwater.

“You read the letter didn’t you?” Vlandirleld, known as Vland to those who he deemed friendly enough, asked quietly.

“I did, it is not right. If it is true then we have to find out who did this to her.” Elegosa sighed as she took a deep breath, opening her eyes and turning to look at her companion.

“If she was murdered, then we will have to be discrete. Many in the city know us and if it was someone in the city, then they may possibly know about the will.” Vland raised his hand and the rolled up scroll he clenched.

“We have the house now, we can plan there.” Elegosa suggested and turned to leave the cemetery, pulling her cloak around her against the cold of the mountain valley’s wind. Following beside her, Vlandirleld’s cane tapped along as he matched pace with her, his white Entitled gloves never leaving his hands since he read the will; passed to them in Allannia’s Lawyer’s establishment.

The ‘house’ was more a mansion than a house. Three floors in total with a basement below the foundations. Training rooms, magical artifact storage and libraries filled the estate; this was a place of learning and training.

It was once, not anymore. Vlandirleld and Elegosa had decided on sharing the estate and with the taxes on it paid up by Allannia for another five years they could save the money she had left for them.

They had found the vault entrance before the funeral, a large stone block outside in the garden. There were nine slots in which something thin and hexagonal was to be placed, Vland had worked out that it was a magical lock and needed nine keys.

The will had stated their locations, they would have to go find them quickly before whomever killed their master found them.

Vlandirleld stood in his room, it was beside the library and the master study. The Master had given him the master study in her will and he was excited to go through all her books.

Checking himself in the small mirror, Vland pushed back the strand of black hair that fell from his short slicked back hair. Tucking his dark blue suit straight with his white Entitled gloved hands, he turned and left the room.

Arriving at Elegosa room, Vland knocked on the door with his cane’s raven head and spoke through the door.

“Are you ready?”

Inside Elegosa was strapping on her quiver and hooking her bow over her shoulders. She checked herself in the mirror, the leather trousers matching the vambraces on her wrists and her white cotton shirt nothing special. Taking only a moment to shake her long blood red hair free of the bowstring and leather straps of her quiver, she turned to the door and looked her companion in his deep purple iris eyes.

“Ready.”

Setting out from the estate, the pair rode their horses north past the city of Clearwater and along the coast of the lake. Passing fisherman and travellers on the road, the pair were used to travelling in the mountain valleys around the city of Clearwater and knew the roads very well.

Clearwater was surrounded by the mountains of ‘The Spine’, the longest chain of mountains that led from the Ilmarian south coast to the very north, connecting Ilmaria to Alruss. The entire area was self contained with only two roads out of the valley. North along the river that flowed to the lake at Clearwater and South out into the Southland cities of Talavinsk, Devenzaal and Valimar.

Reaching Brohoht at the northern edge of the valley, the pair stood at one of the small paths that led into the forest of Brohoht.

“You sure that the keys are here?” Elegosa asked as she stepped off her horse, unhooking some of her equipment off the saddle bags and putting them into her pouches. The pair had found a wood cutters hut that would take care of their horses while they were in the forest for a couple of Crowns.

“I am, the will stated that a grave in Brohoht would contain what we seek. It was a little cryptic but looking through the masters desk I found references to a student and assistant Allannia had, she is buried out in Brohoht. The keys will be guarded in her grave.” Vlandirleld explained, getting off his own horse and adjusting his suit after the ride.

“Guarded? You mean we will have to fight something?” She asked, turning to face Vland as she hooked her bow over her shoulder.

“Perhaps, although the notes I found and the will was cryptic, it could just mean it was left there. There could be nothing.” Vlandirleld shrugged and pulled at his Entitled gloves.

Elegosa led the pair through the Brohoht, it was dangerous and a known place for monsters and people of ill-repute. Bandits hid and attacked out of these woods while monsters and creatures occasionally ventured out to attack people on the roads.

Elegosa was used to forests, she had been brought up in the deep woods of the Waud and lived on the local Aşağı Reservation for some time. She preferred the forests than the reservations, the Aşağı race had always been a second tier in the hierarchy of the Imperium, it was how the world had been since the Humans rose up against the ancient Üstün.

Aşağı were the name of the current Üstün lineage, in their own language. Humans and other races saw the Üstün as the old and the Aşağı as the new versions of the same race but they were wrong. Aşağı and Üstün were the same race yet very different. For one natural talent with sorcery was a factor, interbreeding and the destruction of their way of life over thousands of years had all but wiped out the Üstün of old. Now the Aşağı were all that was left of the ancient lineages.

An hour into the trip, the pair had avoided a bandit patrol and a wolf pack, only having to kill a smaller wolf pack, Elegosa left the bodies for the previous wolf pack to find, it would keep them busy and off their scent for some time.

Vlandirleld let Elegosa do her thing, she was better at the wilderness than he, Vlandirleld preferred the niceties of a tavern, the warmth of a bed and the warm food of a kitchen. Sat in an inn or tavern, reading a good book and in silence.

Allannia had shown him that just hiding in a corner was not the best way to get what you wanted and he would find who had murdered her. He would make them pay.

The pair walked along the path until there was no more path to take, going into the brush, Vlandirleld followed Elegosa's keen eye. The directions to the grave were not so easy to follow but the pair managed it. They turned left at the broken tree that looked like a crescent moon, turned right at the lightning struck tree and right there under the pile of three rocks stacked on top of each other.

"Is this it?" Elegosa turned to Vlandirleld, whom approached and leaned over the rock pile.

"Looks like, it is the spot. This is what the notes said."

"So, do we dig it up?" Elegosa stared at the small mound with a frown.

"Unless the body is going to reach out and give us it, I would assume we would have to dig." He stared at the mound and raised his hands and with a quick flick of his wrists and fingers the dirt began to flit and shift to the side. Using his Entitled sorcery to dig the hole, Elegosa kept an eye on him while she watched out for danger around them.

The noise of the forest was nice on Elegosa's ears, she missed the sounds of the wild of her home, the cities were dirty and loud, the Human cities varied from small villages and hamlets to large soaring cities.

Elegosa had not seen any of the grand cities of the Ilmarian Imperium, she had travelled to Clearwater via the highway up into the Mountains and the city of Talavinsk on the South side of the Reach's surrounding Mountains. To get to Talavinsk she had taken the road through the shallow mountains and forests surrounding Coalfell. Arriving at Coalfell from the North West, she had lived up in the mountain woods with the rest of her Aşağı brethren.

Most of the Aşağı lived either in the reservations the Human governments had put her in or lived in the isolated settlements in the woods and forests. A few tried to settle into the communities and cities the humans had built on their ancient land. Some Aşağı wished to get their old life back, some Aşağı wished that they were Üstün.

"I got it." Vlandirleld spoke and brought his fingers in several twirls and stretches as a box fell to the floor.

Along with bones, humanoid bones.

Elegosa looked over the bones and wondered if this is the former student Allannia had spoken about. Vlandirleld did not seem to bother with the bones, not even giving them a second look, or even a first.

Squatting over the box, Vlandirleld would not kneel in the dirt and ruin his perfectly trim trousers. He opened the box with his knife, not even daring to stain his magically embossed white silk golden rune in laced gloves with dirt.

“This is what we were looking for.” Vlandirleld spoke and lifting the contents of the box for her to see. It was a set of crystal hexagons. A crystalline texture with a transparent blue colour. Raising the hexagon to the sunlight peering through the forest canopy, Vlad closed one eye and stared through it.

“I sense no Aetherial energy coming from this, it seems to just be a transparent blue crystal.” They were no bigger than the palm of his hand and he held out each one to the sun

“I think that might be the least of our troubles.” Elegosa hissed and drew her arrow, knocked it and drew it back to her cheek in one fluid motion. Rising up out of the bones was a figure, draped in thick robes under leather armour, the figure was translucent and the light piercing the high tree tops gave the figure a dull blue and purple glow in the mist it seemed to emanate. Her eyes were pale and lacked iris' and her hair pulled back in a tight bun.

The figure rose and then landed on the ground its feet taking several steps forward.

“I am Priscilla Pinkerton, I was once the student of The Master and was her friend before my death! Why have you come? Speak for your life depends on the answer!” The spectral figure hissed with a stare that could freeze an Ice Dragon.

“We are here to find the key.” Vlandirleld called out and held out the crystal hexagons.

“The Master has died? You must be her latest batch of prized pupils, if so, you must prove to me who you say you are. I can tell when you are lying, so do not even try.”

The eyes of the former student glared at the pair before locking on Vlandirleld. He quickly raised his fingers and made a defensive sign.

It did not help. The voice inside his head hissed and spoke again.

“Tell me a secret of the Multi-verse I do not know.”

Vlandirleld stalled as he heard the voice in his head, he tried to think of something, he tried to think of something that would be something the former student did not know. He struggled, he knew so much but what could he tell her?.

“Too late.” Priscilla’s voice hissed and the figure raised her hand to Vlandirleld. With a cry, the Entitled fell to the floor, his gloved hands gripping the side of his head as he felt Priscilla’s mind enter his own.

Blood trickled down his nose as Priscilla left his mind and nodded. “You are Allannia’s student, but you need to be taught to answer quickly and not to over think.” Priscilla hissed before she changed target.

The eyes of Priscilla switched to Elegosa, the Aşağı girl letting out a long groan as the voice inside her mind hurt and pulled at her very core.

“You, Aşağı, show me a feat of skill.”

Elegosa had been frozen by the scene with Vlandirleld, it had only been a second but he had been brought to his knee’s by this ghastly spirit.

“A feat of skill?” She asked and quickly tried to do something, what had she said to Vland? Not over think and be quick.

The bow was already in her hand and she had loosened her draw when the spirit had spoken but without hesitation, she drew the bow and released the string.

The arrow sailed over Priscilla’s shoulder and went through a series of criss crossing branches until it stuck in a thin branch, impaling a leaf perfectly across its spine.

“Impressive, even for a young Aşağı you have skill. I applaud you.”

The spirit of Priscilla turned to them both and spoke. “I served the Master for many years and even into my afterlife I served. Make her proud my fellow students, I go to rest at her side.”

With a long sigh that flowed with the wind, Priscilla’s ghost faded into the chilly night air of the forest.

“I think, she loved the Master.” Elegosa spoke softly, lowering her bow.

“She did, I have read the Masters journals and she noted that Priscilla was infatuated with her, but she knew that she could not be with her for as long as she wished. The Master was an Aşağı like you, she would live for hundreds of years while Priscilla was a Human, she would live as long as her weak body would give her.”

Vlandirleld put the crystals into his inside jacket pocket and let out a sigh, removing his gloves and placing them inside the opposite pocket inside his lining of his long coat.

“They were lovers for years, into Priscilla’s old age in fact. The Master buried her here at Priscilla’s wishes, it appeared that Priscilla knew of the secret our Master has hidden and she wanted to be here to hide the keys.” He tapped his pocket.

For a moment he was silent before turning back to the path they came. "Onto the next one, we need to hurry. We do not know who may be on our tail."

"Yea, lets go." Elegosa sighed as she looked at the bones of Priscilla on the ground, left where Vlandirleld had carelessly tossed them and now forgotten about them on his one task mind.

"Wait one minute." Elegosa called back and picked up the bones gently, placing them back in the grave and using her hands, patted the dirt back inside the hole.

"Rest in peace Priscilla Pinkerton, live in peace with The Master, tell her we are doing all we can." Elegosa whispered softly into the grave before placing the leaf she had speared with the arrow under a rock on the small grave marker.

"Alright, lets go." She turned to Vland, whom had stood watching and inspecting the crystals while waiting for her to finish.

"Next up, North West of here is a cave, our next set is apparently in there." Vlandirleld folded the paper map and placed it into his pocket.

"Let us take a rest at the estate first, I think I've had enough for today and you're bleeding."

Putting his bare finger to his nose, Vlandirleld took a hankie out of his pocket and rubbed his blood away.

Chapter II

~ The Shahana's Lair ~

Towerday the 37th of Heathswrath 1805

After a night of rest, the pair headed for their next location. Out of the two choices, they decided to head for the caves to the north.

It took about half a day to reach the caves in the north, passing along the main road to the villages of Frëistill and Drywall. The villages were only small and barely big enough to house less than fifty people. A small tavern in each village gave the people there entertainment but there was no interest for Vlandirleld or Elegosa.

The lowlands of the Reach turned into the mountainous forests of the Spine Mountains' lowlands.

Taking a small trail up to the location stated in the journals, Elegosa took the lead through the dense forests. There was no mountain path or road and they travelled with the horses through the dense foliage.

The cave was behind a waterfall, it roared, bubbled and frothed into the lake. The lake flowed into the main river that flowed from the Spine Mountains and into the Clearwater lake.

"This the place?" Elegosa questioned, looking over her shoulder at Vlandirleld who was flicking through the journal in his gloved hands. He had rarely taken them off.

"I believe so, it is behind the waterfall." He motioned with his finger and began to dismount, closing the book and placing it into the saddle bags of the horse.

"Well we're going to get a little wet, we can set up camp and dry off after we deal with this." Elegosa began to dismount too.

"We will not get wet." Stepping forward and raising his hands, Vlandirleld flicked, clicked and wiggled his fingers before parting his hands from their position at his front and moved to his side. The waterfall opened and split, the water flowing to either side as Vlandirleld used his sorcery to part the water.

"Ladies first." Vlandirleld motioned with his head and Elegosa made her way through the opening. Vland quickly followed and then closed his hands together and the water closed up behind him.

The inside of the cave, it was damp and humid, the waterfall splashing slightly into the cave itself. The scent that they walked into hit them in the face like a wet fish. It was rotten, foul and smelt like something had died in here. Perhaps it had? It had died and been eaten by whatever now lived in here. Sneaking inside, the pair kept close to the wall as they made their way inside the cave. The sounds of whatever lived here could be heard scurrying around in the dim light ahead of them. Five short goblinoid figures scurried around the cave about twenty meters ahead of them. Elegosa notched an arrow into her

bow and prepared another for quick reload while Vland made several small gestures with his fingers as he readied his own attack.

“I’ll take the one’s on the left, you take the one’s on the right.” Elegosa whispered and stood up, firing an arrow in the back of the closest.

Vland stood up out of the cover of the rocks and raised one hand out in front of him with several of his fingers in seemingly random positions.

Sixty feet in front of him, starting at the palm of his hand, extended a cone of fire that burnt most of the Goblinoids clustered around the fire.

The smell of burnt flesh and the sound of high pitched squealing filled the air as they turned to attack their attackers. One of them began to pull back an arrow in its bow when Elegosa placed an arrow between its chin and nose; going through its mouth and out the back of its skull.

Two of them, their backs burnt and smoldering, managed to get off a burst of crossbow fire from stolen bows. The bolts flew through the air towards Vland whom quickly raised his hand up in the air again. The bolts collided with his chest and shattered into shrapnel; the wooden shafts splintering and the metal tips ricocheting across the cavern.

Vland’s body began to shimmer and an ornate full body plate armour shimmered in and out of existence as the Mage Armour he summoned flicked in and out of existence.

Firing another shot, Elegosa was picking off the goblin’s with ease while Vland was seemingly having fun with his Entitlement and Sorcery. A target that could fight back was much better than a training dummy.

The cave was clear, but there was sounds coming out of the next part of the cave, a single ‘door’ was covered with a leather-like cloth and held up by old rope tied into metal spikes in the stone.

Walking slowly, Elegosa stopped Vland from stepping into a pit fall trap. “You need to keep your eyes out there Vland, you’re going to get into trouble when you don’t look out in front of your own feet.”

Vland chuckled softly and side-stepped the hole and pressed his back up against the stone wall.

Lifting up the cloth-flap, Elegosa peered into the next area.

The cave opened up and revealed another chamber, at one end it seemed to be a collection of junk and offerings onto some sort of altar; a shaman-looking Goblin was ordering several other goblins towards their direction.

They seemed to be chanting something.

“There is six more, including some sort of shaman.” She explained to Vland.

“I’ll take him. He’ll try casting some sorcery, I’ll deal with him if you can keep them off me long enough.”

“Deal, but keep an eye out, I can’t take six on my own.” Elegosa replied and pulled back the flap, notching the arrow into the bow and stepping back.

Grinning, Vland flexed his hands and prepared his own spell. “Now!” He called out and jumped through the gap.

Unleashing the magic missiles, he swung both hands out in throwing motions, firing three purple balls of Aetherial energy.

The three balls of energy smashed at the Shaman but he did not move.

“Frak!” He snapped and prepared another spell; he thought that the Magic Missile was enough to take it out but it had apparently cast some sort of shield or something.

Elegosa was not having any trouble. With her arrows she could hit pretty much any target but sorcery could be a problem sometimes.

She had killed two by the time Vlandirleld had cast again; the problem was that the Shaman got a spell off too.

An arch of blue energy connected Vlandirleld and the Shaman’s staff. His muscles tensed and shook as the lightning passed through his body.

“Shit... shit.” He groaned and flicked his hand back out at the Shaman. A wall of Ice raised between the pair and cut off the arching lightning.

The energy dissipating around the wall, Vland leaned up against the cavern wall as he took a deep breath.

“You okay?” Elegosa asked, taking cover behind the wall.

“Yea, I’m fine.” He groaned and brushed himself off. “No holding back now!” He growled and jumped out from the side of the wall of ice and flicked his fingers in several more gestures. In the middle of the room, a small flicker of light turned very quickly into a growing ball of fire, a star or sun growing in the middle of the room. Shifting his hands left and right in some sort of dance; Vlandirleld moved the ball of fire around the room; consuming a goblin archer entirely before the Shaman was taken by the ball.

Vland could feel him fighting inside, a shield or ice spell keeping the fire from consuming him but it was only a couple of seconds before the ball flickered and glowed a vibrant yellow-orange as it consumed the Shaman.

With the last Goblin killed by Elegosa’s arrow to the neck, the fireball was extinguished and Vland dissipated the wall of ice.

“So where will the keys be hidden?” He asked, strolling over to the alter with little reverence for whatever God it was dedicated to.

“I have no idea, if these Goblins were here before, it could be buried or even long gone.” She sighed, looking around for any place not looted by the Goblins.

Vland was leaning over the Alter, something seemed off, why had they been chanting? Had they been trying to summon their patron? Had they been asking for help or had they simply been craving their Gods attention?

The answer was quickly revealed as something stabbed into the side of Vland’s neck. Quickly bringing his gloved left hand to his neck, he found something warm, hairy and large at his neck. Turning his head and casting a blinding light in the palm of his hand, he felt his legs grow weak and dizziness fill his head; a vertigo taking his body.

“Vland!” Elegosa yelled out as she drew back an arrow, firing her bow at the patron to these Goblin.

A Spider, a very large Spider.

Shahana the Vile. Spider Queen of the Reach.

Flicking his fingers out at the Spider Queen, Vland’s hand spat fire out in a large arch. Elegosa had to dive back as the fire arch filled the air in front of her. Shahana hissed as she climbed back up into the ceiling of the cave.

“Vland!” She called out again as she tried to get close. The man was throwing and flicking fire in the air.

Vlandirleld’s vision was blurred and his body burnt from the inside out; venom ravaging his body.

Foam collected in the corner of his mouth as he struggled to get control of his body. He brought one hand to his neck and his gloves glowed with Aetherial energy.

Vland’s vision quickly cleared as his Resistance spell filled his body.

Spitting on the ground, the spittle fizzled and burnt into the soft soil and stone.

“Poison, I need more ‘poison’ resistance’ spells if this shit’s going to be a common thing.” Vland groaned and stood straight; his body ached and his vision was still spotty but he would not let some vile spider get the better of him.

“I’m fine!” He hissed and brought up both hands, he’d use the fireball spell again if he could make sure Elegosa did not get hit by it.

Shahana scurried around the ceiling as she tried to get into a position to attack them both. Her mandibles clicked and clacked as her limbs gripped the stone. Elegosa turned and fired a volley of arrows up at the spider as she moved quickly around the cave.

“Keep your head down.” Vland hissed as he stepped out into the middle of the cave and brought up both hands, pointing them at Shahana, he unleashed a volley of missiles before spinning and clicking his fingers up at the ceiling.

The ball of fire flickered and appeared in the air, shifting and moving with his Entitlement.

Shahana fired several spouts of webbing at Vland but his fireball evaporated them before it came close.

Hissing and crying out, Shahana was engulfed by the fireball. She jumped out of the fireball at Vland. Trying to defend himself, his body would not move as fast as he wanted it too.

He was using up too much energy.

Shahana fell sideways as something hit her, looking over the body of the Spider Queen. Several arrows were stuck inside her; Vland turned to Elegosa who was aiming her bow at it.

“Thank you.” He nodded.

“You need to keep an eye out or you’ll run out of energy before the enemy is killed.” Elegosa chuckled softly and relaxed her bow.

“I will.” Vland nodded again and sighed, looking around. “Now to find the keys.” Kneeling down to take Shahana’s fangs and some of the poison, a Spider Queen like Shahana would have some virulent poisons that he could possibly sell. He had felt the affects of it himself, if he had not been prepared with a spell and quick on his reaction, he’d have been dead in minutes.

“Already done, look.” She pointed up at the ceiling. Vland’s fireball had burnt away a lot of the webbing and some of the dirt from the stone. Three crystal shapes reflected the light from the cave mouth.

“Now to get them down.” Vland sighed.

The night of the 37th was spent researching the six keys. They all seemed identical in their shape and size, the only difference seemed to be in the way light refracted through the blue crystal like structure.

Vlandirleld spent all his night working on the research as the night of the 37th had went. Elegosa watched him work over dinner, she had made sure to force him to eat, with the fact he was poisoned with the venom of a powerful giant spider, he needed to get his strength back.

“Where is next?” Elegosa asked as she finished chewing on a piece of bread dipped into her stew.

“There is a camp West of Frëistill and up in the foot of the Mountains. A Dragonkin called Urakah lives there, she is a nomad but a friend of the Master, I only found out about her through the letters and journals left for us, I would

have notified her about her the funeral if I knew before. Vlandirleld explained as he dabbed at his lips with a napkin.

“I will get the horses ready.” Elegosa stood once she finished her food and headed out to the Estate’s stables. When the Master lived in the house she would have her students take care of the house but with her gone and no more students working at the Estate, it would grow into disrepair.

Vlandirleld had already organised staff to come take care of the house, if they were going to be living here they would need staff; if they would be selling the Estate it would need to be kept in repair.

It would cost quite a few Crowns but the money left over from the Master’s coffers would pay for it for some time.

Mounting up and heading North through to Frëistill, the pair stopped at the village and gathered a few midday snacks before their move West to the high cliffs of the Reach’s Western wall of the Spine Mountains.

“There is no path up the mountain?” Vland questioned himself, looking around the series of cliff edges, high above them was a small smokestack from some sort of fire.

“Then we climb.” Elegosa chimed in as she dismounted from her horse and began to fasten the horse to a nearby branch.

“Do I look like a climbing kind of person?” Vland added as he pointed up at the high cliffs. “Besides, we don’t have climbing equip...” He paused as Elegosa unhooked rope, metal hooks and climbing equipment.

“I am not climbing that?” Vland added.

“Then stay down here, I’m sure the creatures in the woods will be fine with you being here.” Elegosa grinned and walked up to the wall, she tied the rope around her waist and slinging her equipment around her shoulder and waist. Hand over hand, Elegosa began to make her way up the stone cliff.

Vland watched her get some distance before she hammered in some guide lines and pins for the rope. Tying herself to it, she looked down at Vland and winked.

With a flush and a huff, Vland walked over to the cliff and, removing his Entitled gloves first, began to follow her.

They made it half way before trouble struck.

With Elegosa leading the way, Vland was struggling behind her. He was not the most athletic person after all, Elegosa was struggling but she was much more able than the Entitled. That was when she heard a scream, a rather girly scream. Looking down, she saw Vland slapping at something coming out of the rock.

A long snake like creature poked its head out and a pair of long wings flapped out in to position.

“Kill it!” Vland bellowed as he tried to control himself, he’d apparently reached out to climb and grabbed it instead of the stone. Elegosa pulled herself up to the next level and pulled out her bow.

“Keep climbing!” She called down at Vland as an arrow was knocked and loosed past him. The arrow went wide as she tried to hit the target but not hit Vland. The wafting of his hand at the creature did not help either. “Stop agitating it!”

“Oh yea, and let it bite me like the spider!” Vland replied and tried to climb again. The metal support on the rope gave away and the rope went loose. Vland fell back as the rope went lose and fell back onto the next plateau.

Elegosa shot out another volley and killed the creature but it was not the only one.

Three more had slithered out of the holes in the wall. Vland stayed down on his back from the fall and pushed both hands into his pockets, slipping on his gloves with the skill an Entitled quickly developed, he fired his a few Aetherial Missiles up at the others.

One of the missiles fired up towards Elegosa. Flinching back, she watched as the missile went high and smashed into one of the creatures that had came up behind her.

Looking back at Vlandirleld, he winked up at her with a small smile in the corner of his lips.

The problem was that more were coming.

Elegosa tried to cover Vlandirleld as he climbed up and then he did the same as she tried to make it up. Eight of the creatures lay dead on the ground and lower cliff plateau while nine more were around them. Balls of acidic spit melted the stone beside them and there were a few close moments.

Elegosa could not get an higher without leaving Vland too far behind.

“I think this might have been a bad idea climbing up here.” Vland sighed as he slung fireballs and Aetherial missiles at the enemy while Elegosa slung arrows.

The mountain cliffs were as cold as the cold weather of the Reach mixed with the mountain wind but the temperature quickly rose. Vlandirleld was the first to react as he swung his arms up in a circular motion in front of the pair.

The shield roared into life as the cliff filled with fire. Elegosa ducked behind Vlandirleld’s coat as he kept both hands up with the shield active.

Once the fire had died down, he clicked his fingers and the shield dissipated.

“What was that?” Elegosa stood up and began to look up the cliffs.

“I’m assuming it was her.” Vland straightened his cuffs and idly pointed up the cliff.

Above them stood a Dragonkin, a golden yellow scaled Dragonkin female dressed in a simple robe and leather armour surrounded by fur.

“You should be careful.” The Dragonkin grinned her tooth filled maw and threw down a rope ladder.

“Ladies first.” Vland motioned and waited for Elegosa to climb before following her up.

“Come quick, the Viper’s don’t like fire but will quickly return when they regain the swarm.” She spoke, her accent a Southern Ilmarian accent coming through her thick Dragonkin tone and speech.

“Lead the way Miss Urakah.” Elegosa nodded and the Dragonkin looked surprised.

“You know who I am?”

“We do, we have come to find you.” Elegosa smiled softly, trying to let it through gently.

“Allannia Sharo has died.” Vland cut in rather simply.

“Vland!” Elegosa slapped his chest harshly.

“The Master has died?” Urakah let out a soft sigh. Suddenly her features saddened.

“She has been buried in the Bywulla Church in the city.” Elegosa motioned to the city in the far distance to the South East.

“She was murdered.” Vland cut in again, receiving a slap from Elegosa once more.

“Vland! A little more tact next time.” She hissed.

“Murdered?!” Urakah snarled, not at the pair but the idea of her friend murdered.

“We received a letter from her as part of her will. She told us that you have some keys for us, to enter her vault.” Elegosa explained.

“I have the keys, but how can I trust you two? It does not matter for now, lets get to cover, follow me.”

Following Urakah, the pair entered her hut and were given a warm tea. Elegosa sipped it while Vland simply held it in his hands, he had yet to remove his gloves.

It was over an hour before they left. Spending the entire hour speaking about the Master, explaining how she had lived, how she had died. It finally led to a small cloth bundle containing the crystals being handed to Elegosa.

“She lived a long life, she used to come to me and we’d sit and talk for days. I believed something was wrong when she did not come up this month, then I saw you on the mountainside and thought you were her.” Urakah sighed. “I was a friend to her for a long time, I retired here and we grew a close friendship. I will descend the mountains soon to pay my respects.”

The descent was easier with the rope ladder and the pair found their horses.

“We have all the keys now. We should return home.” Vland turned to Elegosa as he got on his horse.

“And to find out what is in that vault.”