

Date: 19th of the 4th Month, 3242 A.U.

Realm: Uontari

Location: The Flax Mountains of Western Glastol

The large lush and very much mostly green mountainside of one body of the Flax Mountains. More of a giant hillside with a traversable even playing field rather than the traditional-as-you-think-it rocky slopes of a jagged mountain. A few deciduous trees in bright vibrant greens mixing well with the nice warmth that was not too overwhelming. Blue skies with a few puffs of white adrift only above, nearly picture perfect with that yellow sun that hurt to look at.

Water dripped below from green to green, with a far off backdrop of thunderous clouds. Puffy, angry, storming. The winding dirt path laid out and the rock piles scattered around, not at all jagged but simply sat there. A mostly dirt path though with its fair bit of rock and pebble blended in.

Despite the evidence of storm prior, this path lay mostly drained and not a slop hole. Along that nearby path, the clackle-click-clack-clacking of hooves on dirt. Sure it was mostly subdued but it did still carry forth the expected sound, like squishing fabric or munching almost. Subdued as it was, for regardless of the drained path, it still held some moisture.

Much less prevalent over the sound of horse and carriage were the boots half-marching in disoriented sync with the horse. Soon the source came into view as the woodchucks screamed possible slurs in their native chirps-

A horse drawn wagon-sized carriage, a couple horses hooked up and moving along the sides with riders, and various men walking alongside the carriage. The driver sat atop the seat, a man with a rifle to her right. The men all moving, sabers at their sides and rifles in their hands or strapped to their backs. Those on horseback with weapons held though lowered and in one hand as the other handled the given horse.

All of them just ordinary men in cloth ranger gear, except for the main rider on horseback nearest the carriage. For him he wore black leather and looked almost cowboy like. Inside the carriage though, some rather wealthy looking gents sat in seats with a large table between them and dice cups down. Three of them, all proper how-do-

you-do... and one of them lifted their dice cup just enough so that they alone could see the dice within.

“Mmrmm...” he grumbled.

“Any day now Matias,” one of the other gentlemen spoke.

“Gah... I call six fours,” the first man, Matias, spoke while lowering his cup.

“Six fours he says..... alright- lets see,” the second man grumbled lifting his cup just the same, “Imma call you... a liar!”

“Alright lets lift those cups,” the third man spoke, all of them taking his direction and lifting the cups up.

Fifteen dice total, five with face-up fours.

“GAH!!” Matias groaned, “I knew I should’ve stuck with cards.”

“Heh heh no hard feelings now Matias. Sometimes you win ‘em and other times you lose ‘em.”

NEEEEEEEEEIIIGHHHH

The carriage jostled with the sound of the horses outside, the three nobles inside stumbling in their seats. One cup of dice spilled, sliding off and clacking on the floor.

“What devilry?!”

The outside perspective was the window itself opening with Matias sticking his head out with an irate red face.

“DRIVER! Why have we-...”

That red, turned to white and blue with some shade of purple mixed in. Passed the driver sat on the seat with the rifleman. Passed the rangers who were armed. Passed the horseback riders who were to the front.

Further up on that trail a good few lengths away a lone figure posed, something grotesque. A tall figure of a few meters in height, six pincer claws, a very large scorpion tail. Plated from front to back with jaws that looked like they could crush and reduce metal to scrap. Outer jaws, inner teeth, snake-like eyes.

A single creature, soon joined by two more that walked forward on six legs each that were very crab-like. One of the two, a slightly bigger insectoid creature by an extra meter or two though this one was missing a whole claw on one right arm and part of one on the upper left. They crept forward snarling with jaws snapping.

“We’ve got Scorupi Mamba!!” the man in the black jacket yelled out, “Two regs and an alpha!”

The riflemen all readied up, raising their single-shot rifles. Those with swords and sabers drew them. Those on horseback readied, maintaining hold of horse and rifle.

“What are they doing this far up the mountain?!” one rifleman shouted.

“What you wanna ask them??” replied another.

“Hold them back so the carriage can pull back!”

“Too late- we’ve been flanked!”

Two more of the Scorupi Mamba crept from behind the rocks at a distance not far from the carriage. Their jaws snapping, their claws clacking. Drool dripped from their mouths as they approached. Their legs clacked and they drew forth slow, just as those three ahead did. The alpha held to the front, the two regulars beside it.

All of the riflemen spread themselves. Some to the rear, most to the front, a few off to the sides- horses ready. Positioned, ready. The silence so thick that it could be cut with a knife, just like thick fog.

Sweat beaded down the face of one of them, the youngest of the riflemen of whom was the meager age of twenty-two. Beside him a much older man, near his fifties, not old old but not as fresh either. He glanced to the youngster just once over then back to the threat before the group. His hold of his rifle tightening.

“Nch-” the youngster grunted with a posture and face twisted in tension.

“Ready yourself Theo,” the man beside him murmured.

“For our deaths?!” Theo hissed back.

The alpha’s front right crept forward. Rifles held out.

“FIRE!”

Multiple **pows**, multiple clangs. Like the crackle of brick under pressure. Then the hisses of the beasts like gators. Only one of the creatures fumbled back a pace but beyond that not a single gave ground.

The gatorial hisses of a few of them whilst the alpha stomped forward with snapping claws.

“Th-that did nothing!” Theo howled.

“Nrrgh-” grunted the older man.

A loud slap upon the wood echoed behind. Matias’s whole frame broke out of the window with hand slammed upon the side. His sights drifted up and upon the man in black.

“Well don’t just sit there *Captain*!! We’re paying you the big bucks to safeguard us against anything out here. Get to it!” Matias yelled out.

“Heck am I supposed to do against these damned things?” the man in black grumbled with his own hands twitching.

Rifle tossed aside, his horse moved outward. Twin revolvers moved from their holsters and aimed out as his black burned way to reveal an ash-gray blue duster coat, a wine red vest and ascot, glasses with up-folded clipons which allowed his amber gaze to show. A black hat with a band, longish black hair down his neck & shoulders that was well enough moisturized.

“I was hired for dealing with flesh and blood, not these things,” the man replied.

“You were hired to escort us- now protect us Captain Halkot!!” Matias howled.

“Yeah yeah- don’t rush me kid,” he replied now holding the revolvers out front, “Reload! And aim for the eyes, mouths, and joints!”

The clicking and clacking of guns, all of them on horseback maneuvering their rifles. The snarl of the creatures came, the trio to the front charging in. Halkot’s eyes shot up at that very moment and his revolvers clacked. Loud crackles and the flashes, shots ringing out, thumbs over the hammers and cocking them back.

Flickers of spark bounced off of the creatures, the left eye of the alpha exploding into a splash of red gush. One big howl and they all shot in. Halkot leaned ahead and flew, his body leaving the horse for the air. The shots continued until the guns ran empty.

The drool of the alpha and its howl, claws swinging forward. Halkot came down with a foot slapping down atop one claw. Kicking off, revolvers struck forward as the empty casings hit the ground. Another flurry of firing right into the face of the alpha. Once more the beast howled out though not with any noticeable damage this time around as its tail whirled round.

SMACK

Down Halkot flew. Knees and hands to the ground. Head whirled back and looking up. The stinger came down and with a grunt he rolled.

STAB

A narrow miss. A gray liquid seeped out and puddled over the earth as Halkot shot up a few meters away. It stomped one pace ahead.

Crackle pop pop pop

More pot shots that bounced off of the alpha’s shell and of the surrounding stationary Scorupi Mamba. One claw swung forward, the crackle of it colliding with

Halkot. Backwards he flew and straight into the seat of the carriage driver. The thunk echoed out.

“D-dammit,” Halkot growled as his head shot up, “Not good.”

The howl of the alpha as it came storming forward. Behind the convoy approached the other two of which closed the gap quick. Halkot’s revolvers flung forward ready to go again-

SCREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE-

A high pitched shriek. A couple of sparks and lights flashing by the suddenly star struck confused gaze of the captain. A series of puffs of fire which burst in the face of the alpha and crashed across the ground around the others to the front. The snarl of the beast as it quickly slumped back still snapping at the air.

All around the others ceased. The alpha remained intact as its face cleared the cloud of fire. The riflemen kept their weapons raised though their attention was indefinitely scattered. A loud clunk echoed right behind Halkot, something landing on the wood top of the carriage.

His attention and revolvers flew round to meet a cloaked figure. A long black cloak with a hood covering the face, an ax in this individual’s hand. A definitely smirk, a smug one at that, tooth grit and wide.

“Evenin’,” the figure spoke, a gruff male’s voice.

Two more dropped down to the side of the carriage, both at the same height, one armed with a spear and the other a crossbow. A fourth now approached from the brush nearby, shorter than the others and with her only feature being her green lips and feminine lower face and swords at her side. Halkot looked back ahead as a fifth and final cloaked figure emerged in front of the Scorupi. A rapier in their left hand and a tome in their right flipped open.

The fifth turned their gaze, a set of green eyes visible with a slight glow from the magic cast via their own mana. He blinked.

“You?” Halkot murmured.

The lips of the fifth drew into a slight smile as the figure turned to face the alpha, snarling in front of them.

“You humans think with force too much,” the first with the ax spoke, “They’re only wild beasts. Give ‘em a reason to flee.”

“Humans?” the carriage driver questioned with a brow raised, “Then you’re-”

The ax man raised his weapon, jumping up and off of the carriage, “Just a couple of hunters out to have some fun.”

“Psssh- speak for yourself,” the green lipped girl murmured approaching from the side.

“Ayyyyyyyy come on now. We’re all friends here,” one of the two of same height spoke.

The snarl of the Scorupi Alpha broke their conversation. The stomp as the massive titanic force approached the fifth who remained some distance out from the convoy still with book and rapier in hand. Their head shifted back, their eyes looking up at the beast as it wailed out. Its head forward and mouth wide, the cry leaving it like a tidal force in the fifth’s direction.

Their cloak flapped in the force-filled echo of its wrath. The jaws snapping as it did not buckle or move an inch closer.



[Art by AureolinFlax]

“It would be a problem if a couple of local Lords went missing this way up,” the ax man murmured, “Can’t be havin’ that. So that leaves us with no choice but to interfere.”

“Hey if you’re going to interfere you might want to back me up!” the fifth figure called in a dull soft voice despite the yell.

Right in her face, maybe a minimal amount of meters of gap, the alpha hung its face. Halkot shot up, his boots echoing as he hit the ground. Revolvers poised and the other hooded figures closing in.

“Dunno what you people are going to do against these things, so allow me to partake for a moment,” Halkot spoke.

“Heh- be my guest,” the ax man agreed as he stepped forward, “Just don’t expect this to be easy now merc.”

“Hell. Since when is anything in life easy?” Halkot retorted.

The five beasts, all closing in. The fighters, all ready.