

Code Activated

Blood pooled around the messy mess that was once a Wulf'n Vampiress. Body parts in a pile, slight twitching and spasms. Around the works were the mystified. A stunned trio of Vampire Knights, all shook with confusion and awe. Above a bunch of cultists in denial, all stumbling against themselves on the occasion yet mostly solid like statues. Even the hook wielding leader, a leader with hooks in hand ready to rip some throats out, was holding place without so much as a flicker of muscle- only the drops of sweat momentarily present.

Her eyes shimmered up, locking upon the stunned solid Maja. The Vampireess's teeth gritted, her eyes firing up all at once with an instant change of stance. Around the way the cultists, mortals that they still were, had begun to back themselves up.

“Little brat,” Maja growled.

“Auuuuuuuuuuugh, auuuuuuuuuuuuaaaaaahhhhhh!! M-my organs, I-I can feel my organs spilling!” Sereena wailed out, her head squirming alongside the quiver of her severed pieces.

“Sereena, hold it together!” Maja barked.

“Fucking easy for you to say you fucking bitch, I’m in agony over here! I’m lying in a pile of myself!”

“Tch-”

“H-hey Maja, look out!”

Through the air Elise soared, her sword flipped round and held out, ready to swing forward with that glistening white glow. Her form echoed in front of Maja for just a split moment, coat flapping with the winds, one leg arched from the single leap.

“Hrgh!”

CLANG!!

Sparks flew as the sword slashed against the hooks, the grind of metal like nails to a chalk board. Their views intertwined for a moment, arms quivering as the sheer force of both howled against the other.

“M-Maah... ha-” Sereena croaked out, her form falling limp to the ground.

“I feel disgusted even calling you Vampires when you’re as weak as you are. Your reliance on your immortality has dulled your commitment to the real potential your blood holds. And that’s why this fight is already over!”

The roar of an engine, that is what best could describe it. Maja’s sights widened far and wide as the eruption of brilliant snow white wept forth. The crinkle, the crackle, the snap-
SHLINK!!

“Maja!” a subordinate cried from above.

“Guh-” she croaked, spitting a spray of blood.

A single slash from right to left upon her torso, spewing out blood as Elise passed on by. The clatter of broken hooks on top of one another as they hit the barked ground. Maja spun off, her body leaving the platform, her face turning. Elise stepped down, sword flickering back over to her dominant side following the swing, focus shifting.

“Damn, not deep enough-” she muttered.

“Hrk- {This is bad! She’s using her energy to increase both her speed and her cutting power.}”

A single flip through the air and Maja stepped down on the next branch down, her arms spread apart, her attention continuing to be kept on Elise with a huff.

“{No no, calm down calm down. It isn’t that she cut through my hooks, no. That snap, they had to have had a fracture already, perhaps from that last battle?}” Maja thought as her arms lowered, “{She definitely got through Sereena though, that I can’t ignore. Without a weapon, a

single strike from her could prove to be my undoing. Even still... heh, damn. Guess that's it then.}
.... We're retreating!"

"Huah?!"

"Maja!"

A simple blink followed from Elise herself, weapon now lowered.

"This prey is beyond our ability to capture as is, and I don't feel like throwing away all of our undead trying to kill it."

"You honestly believe I would allow you to get away? It's in our best interest to cut you down Maja," Elise spoke, "You're not innocent like Rao's group, you people kill for shits and giggles."

"Perhaps by allowing us to go, you might see your three friends again," Maja continued.

"Here's the other thing that's wrong with your thinking. You three were so confident that we were beneath you- yet you now see that you have it backwards, because we led you to that conclusion. Admittedly it came as a surprise to us just the same. So let me ask you this- do you believe that there is actually some form of disparity in their abilities as opposed to ours? Given that we are of the same group?

The click, the quiver, the dilated call back, the rearing back. A single skid of a lone foot against the bark, twitching.

"We've been played-"

The crash of racing rocks, pounding bricks upon the sands practically. The figure of Dante launching himself backwards through the air and evading the swing of metal. The huge blade slamming through into the grounds with the massive grunt of the hulking wielder of the weapon, the step of the man and his own jump, the sword being wrenched up and out as it was attached to him by his own arm.

One more heave and a ho, swung like a bat straight out and into the trunk of the tree before him. Yet again Dante had taken the dodging initiative, rolling off to the side.

“Shieet man, you’re quick on your feet. I don’t think I can catch you with my sword here; though you seem to be reacting a little slower each time,” Rengard chuckled.

“Ya well you friggen try dodgin’ a bloody freight train swingin’ at your damn head ‘nd see how tired you get, oof,” Dante grumbled, standing up tall once again.

Both stood, squared up across from one another. Neither armed, neither in combative stance. A simple standoff, exhaustion plaguing a single side of the conflict only.

“Dante, we’re done here!” echoed the voice of Elise from afar.

Both heads perked up, and both turned towards the direction of the shout. Aside from the sounds of battle further ahead, it was a calm drifting silence between the two for only a brief period.

“Heh, ‘bout friggen time,” Dante spoke, a grin forming up at once.

“Done here? The heck does that mean?” Rengard mumbled allowed.

“It means that our game of tag is about ta hit its climax,” Dante replied, turning back to the Vampire now, “Means that she thinks we don’t need ta hide our true power anymore, she’s learned what she can.”

“Hell, to think that she was holding back while you were putting in work. Isn’t that something? Heck, you two are something.”

“Heh. I still dunno how you beat Blake’s group but lemme tell ya somethin’ right quick, I’m not much of a plan guy- I prefer the ol’ fashion approach of beatin’ some sense into my enemies- but I respect ‘er feats enough to play along with whatever she comes up wit’. And if’n she’s done playin, then we’re done ‘ere.”

“Heh heh, have to say... I’m really starting to like you guys,” Rengard spoke, ripping his sword from the bark as he spoke, “Course, I don’t see your victory here Dante. How are you going to contend with my immortality? Your blades are ineffective at best.”

“Oh, I have some ideas. Whatsayoo that we make this the end?”

“Final clash? Ha! Fine by me Dante, give it your best!”

Both broke from their positions and began a charge to one another. Rengard with his broadsword trailing behind him and his dash, whilst Dante came forth with a make-shift spear in hand, left hand reaching into his coat pocket. His right arm flung forward and from it flew the spear. The nails of Rengard’s hand changed to claws immediately, a single swat forward.

The spear fell to pieces in that single instance as he continued to run, all the while Dante continued on himself- his right and middle pointer fingers pointing out whilst the rest bent back. His hand shot up, the two fingers pointed up. A slight rumble followed, the ground in front of Rengard breaking and launching up.

SHWWWWWING

The crumbling crackle of rock as the earth broke way from that lone swing of Rengards, his momentum halting as his body twisted round to heave the mighty blade. The rock spilling to the ground, just enough to reveal Dante right before him. A grunt escaped from Ren, his free hand swinging out with the claws. Dante shot in at an arm’s length, whirling to the right, his left hand ripping from his pocket.

The spray of scarlet rained upon the ground, followed swiftly by a thunk and a thud. Dante hit the ground to the right of Rengard and rolled, blood painting the ground as he spun off. A few crashes transpired before he finally came to a halt on the ground, his face blooded- a large gash in his shoulder. Rengard grinned, lowering his arm and his sword.

“Looks as though...” Rengard began, glancing down.

“Heh... yeah-” Dante grunted, huffing as he pressed against the ground in a bid to hoist himself up some.

Smoke drifted around Rengard, his grin locked in place as he cast a look down- a look to the dagger sticking from his chest, smoke bellowing out of the handle.

“Well played Dante. Well play-”

An immediate spark and a ball of fire followed, quick to engulf Rengard- just as quickly replaced by a cloud of smoke mere milliseconds after. The sound of an exceptionally loud gun shot rang out, the echo of thunder rumbling through the trees as the flash went. A shower of red and slush roared down onto the grounds, splashing down for a brief few seconds before there was pause.

Smoke bellowed out from the blast point, that being the bloodied sack of flesh laying a distance away from the initial flash. The chest ripped open and left vacant aside from the dripping pieces left within the cavity.

Maja’s breathing had become a huff here and a puff there. Elise stood in front of her now, sword held out. The Vampiress’s back stood in hold against the very trunk of the tree the two had battled upon. The flicker of her eyes from Elise to her subordinates, retreating high above and down below. Below the undead had begun to sink into the grounds of the forest itself, and the subordinates of the living variety were vanishing from sight.

A low growl radiated outward, “This... is far from over Little Elise. If you think you are going to escape this wretched forest alive, you are certainly dead wrong. We have legions that remain, legions that will overpower you in no time.”

“You’re prattling about as bad as the other one. Perhaps you shall receive a similar fate?”

“Hrmph, I think not-” she grumbled.

Her back pressed itself hard against the bark behind her, the back of her head doing just the same. As if made of grass or feathers, the bark parted, blood dripping out and over Maja’s

shoulders. Elise's eyes flickered to life at once, her feet slamming down. She dove forward, thrusting her sword at Maja's chest.

Maja's form fell back, phasing through the bark. Her face was the last thing seen as she vanished, swallowed just as the sound of the jab against the wood raced out. A low growl escaped Elise as she looked at what was no more than a simple tree, the trace of Maja now gone.

"She got away," she grumbled, stepping back and ripping her sword's tip from the tree, lowering it, "Transportation through the trees... that has to be linked to the Eternal Hollow itself. So that's-"

"Hey, Sereena's body is gone! She got swept away too!" came a shout from below.

Elise turned, looking out over the clearing. As far as the eye could tell, cultists were gone and hidden by the trees whilst the corpses continued to vanish beneath the very soil itself. She turned a quarter step and looked out, gazing up at the canopy that was the Hollow.

"This about wraps it all up then."

Settlement

The creaking and cracking of wood, the clunk and droop of slop, the pooling of mud itself as the very essence of life poured out of it. A single figure rose like a rubble, at first only a mound but soon came shape. Her hair, her face, her shoulders, her arms and fingers. From the ground arose Maja, rising through it as if it were mud- a slow pull.

The chamber she arose in- one of dirt and stone, torches set ablaze.

She stood there in silence, not stirring, not breathing, no movement at all; her sights set to the dirt floor laid out before. It lasted only a short time before her weight shifted, a step taken forward, then another. As if nothing were the matter she moved at the most casual of paces, walking from the room. The next room over housed more torches and more stone walls, a hallway with an actual stone floor. Teeth gritted and fangs bare, her path forward lay unobstructed with a momentum uninterrupted the further she went and instead only picking up briskly.

The forest stood void now as opposed to the moments it had endured prior. No cultists, no undead, no violence. What surrounded however were a handful of corpses scattered round the five entities actually living. The trio of Vampire Knights sat around, or rather some stood and some sat.

Fen Rao leaned his back against a tree, cracked and nearly split to the core by the massive blade strike made to it prior by Rengard. The back of Shree's head rested against her halberd which stuck from the ground, while well across from her laid Yeager on his side. The crackle of branches from across echoed, signaling the approach of Dante with a couple of weapons swinging in hand. The clammer of an ax blade and some daggers tied to strings as he came up on the group...

"Well I've jus' bout got my gear togetha, think'n muh buzz is 'bout worn off," he spoke.

Fen Rao blinked, lowering his crossed arms back to his sides and beginning to straighten up, "What kind of Vampire Hunter- heck what kind of hired guard does his job drunk?"

“A very guud one at ‘at,” Dante laughed.

“... I feel like you’re fucking with us,” Fen replied.

“Could be-”

A shadow bolted down before them, the leafs dancing and twirling with a satisfying crunch as it touched down- the shadow being of course that of Elise, “Nothing.”

“Nothin’ eh? Means they got control of it for fast travel. No way that load about the beacons explains it.”

“Either that mayor lied or they’re using some sort of ability to fast travel. Can’t say that I much care for either explanation,” Elise concluded.

“... in hindsight, it doesn’t make much sense,” Fen Rao spoke, looking up to Elise, “Those villagers, you said that they claimed their little barrier kept the supernatural at bay; but most of those cultists were human. Even the corpses weren’t much till they used Infernal Resurrection.”

“... damn,” she murmured back, turning a step away and looking to the ground, “I was afraid of that, and it makes sensshit!”

“What?”

“We left the convoy unprotected, and we told the Sarzentans to go find that village!”

“Dammit-” Dante croaked, “Lise we need to get back there. Fen, go get the princess and her lackey. We need to make a quick damn hurry back there!”

“Yes of course! Shree, Yeager, come!”

Maja’s footsteps echoed off of the walls as she stormed through. Step step step step step step step in rapid succession. Her face contorted in a mix of rage and rush. Cultists in the way were plowed through and easily shoved aside with her passing presence, others moving from her way.

“Tchhhh-” she growled as she brushed back several more, speed walking by many.

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“WHAT?! What do you MEAN that the Trio were defeated? My Trio? I want answers dammit!” came an extreme barrage.

A lone office, standard with an office chair and a huge wood desk alongside the likes of bookshelves and windows and the works. A single man stood behind that desk, his face erupting like a volcano and his hands slammed down. Across from him between the desk and the door a duo of the cultists in robes with the sweats. Blue faces and waterfalls pouring down to the ground off the tops of their heads as this inferno roared before them.

The inferno though came to be practical with the crackle of an open flame. Behind Soreis roared a glowing orange, engulfing his entire backside and his chair. A thud yelled out, one subordinate hitting the ground and the other taking a pace back. The fire danced and screamed behind Soreis, threatening to engulf him, his scowl intensifying greatly.

“I-it happened sir. Sereena came back in pieces, completely gone.”

“Rengard was taken out too. He, he- he had his insides turned to ash. There was nothing there!”

“GAH, where the blood soaked hell is Maja?!” he screamed at the two.

“We- we don’t know. She hasn’t been back ye-”

As if on cue, the door swung open and revealed the battered angry Vampiress. The door slammed into the wall, Maja’s form clear as day in the doorway. From behind the cult leader the flames began to fade away. A huff followed her arrival as she entered the room.

“You two, out,” Maja growled aloud.

“Y-yes sir!” both shouted, bolting from where they were and rushing out of the room, the door slamming behind them.

This left only Maja and Soreis in the room, the latter crossing his arms with that scowl continuing. Maja looked on with no more than a look of seriousness, backed by a layer of tired. Her eyes quivering ever so, her body tingling.

“Maja... what- THE HELL... happened?” Soreis murmured.

Air escaped her, the tensy of her stiff bod minimizing, “We were played.”

SLAM!!

“Played?! You- MY IMMORTAL ELITE... you’re telling me, you GOT PLAYED?!”

Soreis screamed, his right fist slammed unto the desk.

“They were stronger than we anticipated!”

“Stronger?! You three are fricken immortal, can’t die. How were you forced back with THAT in mind?!”

“The Lightonian Girl and the Hunter were stronger than their compatriots, a lot stronger. In fact, I question if those three we captured are as weak as we think them to be!”

“What?!” he growled now, eyes intense and narrowing.

Maja said nothing, her head lowering, not daring to make direct eye contact as the flames again danced around Soreis- HIS teeth visible and shaken, his hands as fists and shaking, his rage bubbling right over.

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Step step step step step. Their footsteps echoed down the hall, bouncing from stone slab to stone slab. The few in the halls aside from them moved all bound in their robes and hoods. Some moved aside in avoidance of the raging storm fast approaching. Slamming through moved Soreis, his black hair flopping about, whilst beside him crept Maja now re-equipped with weapons of her own at her side.

Behind the ground hovered a unit, mostly of undead and a few of the cloaked individuals. Of course the undead carried no expressions of intrigue as death wrapped them well like a blanket around a newborn- for those few cultists however, the obvious look of nervousness from pulled faces and shaken eyes. The flash of flame emerged as the torches lit on their own the very instant that Soreis moved by in his raging huff.

“-and I want both of them restored in preparation. Sereena and Rengard are powerful assets, I will not let them go to waste!” Soreis roared.

“Of course. It shouldn’t take much to get them back up and running. We’re keeping them alive with *that* technique for now and reconstruction should be quick; though both are unhappy with their current states,” a cultist from behind spoke up.

“BAH! They should have thought about that before letting themselves get torn to bits!”

“... sir, it’s this door here,” Maja spoke.

“Finally, some answers,” he growled, the group halting behind him as he approached the door- placing a hand upon it.

KABAM!!!

Without warning, the door erupted into a fiery smokey blast of fragments and flame, completely engulfing Soreis- the smoke drifting into the very hallway itself. The cultists all fell back, all except for Maja who just stood there, glaring a tad.

Drifting smoke and raging fires, that is what laid before them. Home incinerated, the ground broken and left asunder. Yes, the quiet town of the night was dead, burned, and left cremated. Charred bodies scattered around hanging from holes in buildings that still stood or left on the ground, all mostly skeletal with what remained and fragments of what once was.

This site, this site of slaughter and pyro activity, this site so very very dead was the place where the Elise crew found themselves. Not all were together by the current point, as it was

the group of three together and the two groups of two scattered around the town and broken off. The trio of knights to one part of the town sticking in close proximity, the duo of hunters close to one another on opposite ends of the town, and then the very beings of apparent royal stature close to the edge of the devastated landscape.

Elise crept along step by step, slow paced while her head moved from left to right at about the same pace. All around were the signs of battle. Be it the cracked ground with the occasional pothole every now and again, be it the still standing buildings despite how burned and still on fire they happened to be with all the holes in the world, be it the literal bones charred like that of overcooked BBQ. It all was the same and yet it was all different.

A couple of the bodies were found near remnants of pitch forks, hoes, knives. What remained of clothes either on their person somehow not burned were no more than simple clothes and fabrics, not a single sign of armor of any sort. No guns, no bows, no swords.

The clunk of wood blocks turning over one another echoed, a single kick by Yeager sending them spinning as he strolled on through the streets, "Alright so- I'm confused. The hell happened here?"

"Death. What else?" Shree responded.

"That is not what I meant and you know that that's not what I meant."

"You sure about that bro? Heh heh."

"Alright cut the crap you two," Fen Rao grumbled.

"Sorry sir," both replied in unison.

Fen stood there with his arms crossed, gazing out across the blazing village. The crackle of wood and timbers timbering. Flames erupting harder and stronger all around. Beside approached Dante, not yet looking over to Fen as he kept a small casual distance between themselves.

"Any ideas?" Fen asked.

“No, not one. Looks like a fight; that’s ‘bout all I’ve got. None of the convoy soldiers or Sarzentan folks in sight though.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“Ain’t got none of the weapons, no signs of metal or armor. Few bodies still clothed are the villagers. An’ none of the supplies either groups had are ‘ere.”

“Alright so- what, the convoy guards or the soldiers from Sarzento figured out this was a trap and... did this before taking off?”

“Hard ta say but I doubt ‘et. Somethin’ else happened.”

“And that something is?”

“Dunno.”

“It’s hard to say what happened here,” Elise’s voice called out.

Both men turned their focuses left, observing as Elise approached at her casual slow pace wearing a blank expression.

“We’ll have our answers once we hit the enemy’s base.”

“How will we find it though?” Rao questioned.

“We follow the direction that our team mates went off in, hopefully run into it. This forest might loop but it isn’t the biggest thing. We’ll find them, and then we can settle this once and for all.”

Game Over

Pop pop pop, pop pop pop, pop, pop pop pop pop.

A series of pops, all culminating in bangs. Metal striking metal with little pews. The clammer of footsteps in rushing nature- the eruption of flames by the sizzle of what could seemingly be a flamethrower, followed then by the fierce winds. Crumbling block and the sounds of strikes of swords through the very walls; though not a sword was to be seen.

The rain of casing that hit the ground, shots spent, the winds and flames soaring overhead. Two figures crouched behind an overturned silo, one wielding a gun and the other a bow with no visible arrows. The howling flicker of the wind and that deafening roar much like a jet engine. With flames dying, both shot up and took aim at a lone target.

A green aurora formed around the bow as it was stretched, a beam of light concentrating at the center. What came from the mist was only to be described as an energy bolt, one quickly fired off at the lone target. With it flew more and more bullets from the twin revolvers held by the other.

“EEEEYYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!” came the howl from their destination, powerful winds flying and slapping the many projectiles.

The rain of those objects, the explosion of the arrow and the clammer of the bullets weighing down. Both shooters ducked once more as another round of fire and gust crashed their way. A somber expression held on the one, a small girl, whilst one of seriousness crept over the tall man. For both Blake and Andi, Vampire and Elf, this battle was turning.

The hulking, rage-filled form of Soreis stomped ahead as the flames died back. His salt and pepper hair swayed around, the orange crimson glow of his gaze almost as fire-filled as the very flames he was producing. With his steps forward little shoots of fire burst from his feet, all with each and every step. Blake readied his weapons, locking the chambers back into place with a huff.

“Damn,” he spoke with his next huff, “At this rate-”

The crash, no- the crackle of breaking wood. As if a trunk had been slashed and ripped all combined with the sound of falling rock. Many branches broke apart in the next instance, a rain of beams and logs. Two figures launched themselves around the vast chamber that was once a holding room for prisoners. The roof partially collapsed with three beams taken out, the walls in disarray.

Echoing was the clang of two objects pressed hard together, a crystal dagger and a metal hook. Both figured plowed into one another and jabbed their weapons together with such force that sent both flying back after impact. Roxanne touched down across from Maja, the Drachen on her knee with a couple breaths inhaled and exhaled. Maja on the other hand stood tall and almost stoic- unmoved all things considered.

Her huffing continued only briefly, stunned and stopped as she glanced around to the right. Around the corner came running two figures. A scowl crept over immediately, the sight of both Rengard and Sereena charging in coming to focus. Attentions shifted though quickly, a slight turn back to witness Maja twirling through the air with her hooks held out.

Step

SCHWING

Roxanne shot back with a single hop, the left hook gliding barely passed her throat. Her boots skid back with gravel and dirt being kicked up all the while.

“Bloody hell,” she grumbled, back-flipping as soon as she had spoke.

BUUUUUUUNG, crumble crumble

A massive blade slammed into the ground where she had originally skidded to, now jolting forward a little though stuck within the stone. The Trio de la Muete hovered around that lone weapon, Maja with her hooks and Sereena with her rods. From the ground ripped the weapon back into the hands of Rengard who carried in addition to that a smug grin.

“Bastards,” Roxanne grumbled, “It doesn’t matter how much I damage them, they’ll just get back up healed like they did before.”

The trio bolted forward, their weapons all raised with Roxanne raising only her daggers and a scowl.

“Dammit!”

Across the way and many rooms over remained the other battle dragged on. Flames danced around his arms and legs, the winds blowing sharply outward. A coat of flames completely covered him in seconds, his appearance that of a demon now as he was wholly fire. Several tails protruded and slashed out, striking the wall behind and scorching it.

Behind the current safety of the silo remained the two, Andi’s head lowering back behind and turning, “Blake?”

“We aren’t going to be able to accomplish the mission at this rate. Roxanne needs to be the one to fight Soreis, her crystal armor is the only thing that can bypass that fire armor.”

“And with him pinning us and the trio pinning her-”

“There’s no chance for us to swap. They’re working hard to keep us separated.”

“I know they’re immortal but they are definitely not giving us a break here-”

Across from their silo of shelter remained the wrathful Soreis, flames roaring around him. Though his eyes could no longer be detected, the burning glare was certainly still upon the position of both of them. He stepped forward, the weight of his power echoing out as he did so.

“You peons,” came the low pitched growl of Soreis, “You brats have no idea what in this world true power is.”

“And I suppose you’re going to show us what true power looks like? Rather generic response there mate,” Blake retorted aloud, reloading his weapons in the process.

“No,” Soreis spoke flatly, a response given shock to Blake at once, “I will not delude myself with false beliefs. I have seen true power, and this is not it.”

Blake rose, turning his head around and looking upon Soreis who had just taken another step.

“What I hold is a far cry from that perfect power. However, I still have more than enough power to deal with you people!”

“Nrrrrgh get ready Andi. This might be-”

As he was mid-speech, a figure bolted into frame, skidding to a halt between the duo and Soreis. All three jolted awake, Soreis’s head cocking back.

Black robes flapped and a hood dipped back, the individual turning to the flaming juggernaut at once, “Soreis!” the individual exclaimed.

“What is the meaning of this?!” Soreis hissed.

“Lord Soreis,” the individual spoke, raising their head, beads of sweat dripping down, “L-Lox Town, it was annihilated!”

“What?!” Soreis howled, “Has this Elise Bakuuva truly figured out the extent of our operation?”

“N-no, it wasn’t her, it was *them*!”

“Huaaa? No,” he said with a gulp, “You don’t mean-”

“We have eye witness reports. Three of them.”

“Only three?? Tch- mother of a...” he grumbled, shaking his head momentarily.

As soon as his head stopped shaking he remained there stationary. The crackle of the flames roaring around him softened, soon dying out entirely. Indeed the flame coat that covered Soreis was burned out and gone, leaving only his human body there. Both Blake and Andi shot up, looking at the subordinate and to Soreis.

“We... we are not ready for this confrontation. Execute Plan Ninety-Nine!”

“Sir?”

“Do what I tell you!” Soreis barked, the subordinate in turn jumping back, “It doesn’t matter if they have come for the Sarzentan Princess or for us. If they find us we’re all going to die. Our numbers, our power- it isn’t enough yet. Get going, NOW!!!”

The cloaked figure turned and bolted from his master’s presence, yelling out “YES SIR!” as he went.

Both Blake and Andi stood awe-struck, looking at Soreis. The cult leader stood there looking at the floor momentarily, shaken, and soon looked up to his foes.

“Consider this... your lucky day. A pain in my ass far bigger than that of you people is knocking at our doorstep.”

Both Blake and Andi rose up from behind the downed silo, with it being Blake who spoke out first, “What’s that supposed to mean?”

The crackling sound of stone, followed by spilling rocks. The ground around Soreis broke open, massive vines rising out and wrapping around. Andi’s bow shot up and an arrow took form; though to that end Blake’s arm shot up blocking the shot. Her expression moved from Soreis to Blake, a concerned expression at that.

“Mark my words, young Vampire. This is far from over. Consider this merely as a postponement,” he stated, and as he spoke his body had begun to dissolve and merge with the vines.”

“You’re running away? I thought that-”

“What, that we would stand and fight because we’ve the advantage? With you perhaps but not against what’s coming. Should the fates allow it we will meet again, and next time our battle will not cease until one is left for the maggots!”

Without much more to give, his form was gone, sunk into the vines which remained. Andi’s bow lowered along with Blake’s arm, both of them staring at where Soreis had stood. And as they stared the sounds of battle in the very next chamber had noticeably gone, leaving nothing

but silence. The young elf, still beside her comrade, stumbled back as she released hold of the string of her bow.

“B-Blake.”

“Yeah Andi?”

“What could be enough to scare the likes of them away?”

“I’m not sure, and I don’t particularly want to find out,” he murmured looking onward, “We should regroup with Roxanne and get done here.”

“Why are we running away? Those little rats don’t seem-”

“Silence Sereena!” spat Soreis, “They aren’t the ones we’re running from.”

Out in the middle of the dark woods, figures were rising from the ground and from the trees themselves. Bark ripping open and expelling a mix of blood and bodies. Stationary in the midst of a clearing were Soreis and Sereena, with the likes of Rengard and Maja rising up nearby. Several of the cloaked cultists moved from the trees and the ground, plenty of undead surrounding them.

“Plan ninety-nine,” Maja spoke, “It means that the enemies we have been preparing for have found us.”

“Too early,” Soreis growled.

“So what, we just abandon the forest and all of our undead? Come on Soreis, that’s dumb. With the Eternal Hollow we are unkillable and can move around freely. I say we’re more than-”

“No we’re not, and we’re not. Look- we’re going to lay low for now, go into hiding, wait for *them* to leave. Once we’re sure that they’re gone we’ll resume normal activities. This way we avoid conflict and continue to go under the radar because trust me, compared to those guys we are nothing by comparison.

“Can’t be that bleedin’ tough if you got away from them once before.”

“I’m telling you Sereena, you don’t want to mess with *Specter*. The crazy witch that runs that faction has made total monsters, monster’s so unhinged that they-”

Snap

“-that they... they...” he stuttered looking up, glancing to three figures stationed in the trees above their position, “They... uh they, w-wha- oh my god.”

“Heh heh. Why hello there... Soreis.”

Steps echoed through the halls. Soft and echoing, like walking across catwalk in a giant chamber lined with walls of curtain. Of course this was not the case, as it was simply people walking down the halls of the underground facility of the Cult of Demigrah. Blake, Roxanne, and Andi moved through, echoing as a unit as they rounded a corner and continued on.

Many doors were already open as they strode along, inside bunks and lounges in ruin, some kept up and maintained whilst others were full of dust and webs. The three moved unhindered as they came to a fork in the hall- a left, a right, and a straight. It was from the right where some footsteps echoed out and then steps from the left. Two came from the left and one from the right.

“Did you two find anything Dante?” Blake asked.

“No,” Dante spoke with a shake of his head, “Nothin’ at all.”

“And you, Fen Rao? Did your team find anything?”

“Nothing. The place is dead,” the old knight replied.

“So what, they just abandoned the place on a whim then?” Shree questioned aloud, “After all that they’ve done, why would they just leave?”

“They’re afraid of something... they spoke as if they weren’t sure what it was. If it was after them or if they were after this Sarzentan Princess that you and Elise encountered. Regardless of an answer they fled out of here mid-fight and haven’t returned since.”

“It’s been a few hours now,” Andi added, “They held the advantage over us. Whatever they’re running from is something more than what we can provide.”

“Guys,” came the call of Elise.

From the right hall right behind Dante approached the young warrior, her sheathed sword at her side, her nose in a book held open by her right hand. She walked from yet another room of which the door had been left open.

“What is it?” Blake questioned.

“It... appears to be a journal of some kind,” she spoke, flipping through the pages with her free hand, “It details the properties of this Hollow, even going into the transportation method and their apparent immortality. Details about- harnessing the power of an Eternal Hollow, details about what kind of things they were up to with their undead.”

“So nothing of note fer us,” Dante grumbled, “Thas ducky.”

“Well yes, and no. See here on this page, at the front, it talks about using a structure with runes to control the forest. It lets them move around the Hollow at their leisure, lets them communicate back and forth, and it controls the loop.”

“So if we were to access this pillar, we could undo the effects of the loop?”

“It’s already undone actually,” Elise spoke, looking up, “I asked Yeager to go and have a look at the pillar at the top of the tower and- turns out that they already have it set to open. My guess is that before they left they opened the Hollow up in hopes of letting whatever they’re afraid of wander back out of here.”

“So that solves that mystery. Still- some things are rather vague. What happened to the village, and what happened to our employers?”

“Given that the cargo was gone, I bet that they moved on before those villagers could do anything. And not long after- poof. You know if we hurry we might be able to catch up with both them and those Sarzentans.”

“Well to hell with this place then,” Dante grumbled, “Less get tha fuck outuv ‘ere already.”

“I’m with him,” Shree spoke.

“I suppose it is about time. Shree, go and find Yeager. We should move and return to our people while we still can and inform them of what has transpired.”

“Right!”

Both moved across the hall and passed Dante, soon crossing by Elise heading in the direction she had originated from. Their steps and armor clanged, four of the five watching them leave.

“Rao,” Elise spoke up.

“Mmm?” Fen Rao grumbled, stopping in place.

“I still intend to honor our agreement, if you’ll let me that is.”

“... heh... you’ve a good heart Bakuuva. Lets meet up once we’re done with this forest and, discuss those terms,” he concluded, lowering his head and continuing onward.

Elise’s attention returned to her comrades before her, at which point Blake had again begun to speak up, “Well alright. That’s that. We should move on from here and hurry to catch up with the convoy. We know what path they’d have taken to get out of here so this should be easy enough. Everyone ready?”

“Yes!”

“Right!”

“Then lets go,” he concluded, heading and turning down the left corridor, followed swiftly by his compatriots.

Both Roxanne and Andi followed first, whilst Dante swung round and began to walk backwards, looking to Elise, “Come along now Bakuuva, we’ve got work to do yet.”

With the slightest of smiles, she nodded. Elise shut the book and moved it to her side, following just behind after Dante who had already swung back around to walk normal. Their steps echoed out, soon becoming void entirely, leaving only the crackle of the flames within the halls.

Closing

Hey everyone,

Alexander here, and I would like to say thanks for reading this PRELUDE Arc to the first Ravenlight saga!! For those not aware, about the time I came back from my hiatus I had already decided that the “Prologue Arc” needed to be wrapped up and that I could not consider it as the true beginning to the series.

YES IT IS STILL CANON!!!

The reason for this is due to the circumstances that triggered my hiatus and other problems that popped up back to back which have hindered Ravenlight. This has become especially relevant in the last month.

To clarify- I want to do something **special** with Ravenlight. I want to do Chapter Art, I want to make soundtracks for the series, I want to do a lot of things and turn it into something, whatever that something might be.

This, originally as the prologue arc, was meant to be an entryway into that venture. Unfortunately July happened and a lot of things happened then as well as in August. July I can best describe as the deaths of 2 mentors (one of whom was direct family) that I had for many many years, and that month began with a garage nearly burning down + an old cat needing to be put down. July and August also saw my brother heading off for college and of course, picking up those pieces from July... and unfortunately it wasn't just me.

My art staff of 4 turned into an art staff of 1 by September for various reasons, none of which were anything bitter or hostile. Between that and Soul Fall continuing to struggle, it was getting tight for time. Naturally I knew coming back into this that either that hiatus needed to be prolonged to recover proper, or I needed to put a halt to the arc and do something different. In the interest of not delaying things any further I've chosen the latter.

And on the back of this message I would like to apologize for the rushed ending that was this Prelude Arc; but if it wasn't obvious- I wanted to wrap this up. I honestly can't say I

wanted to keep it going with the drop in quality that happened so early on, so- we're cutting it here to regroup and bounce back.

So what does that mean?

Well, Ravenlight the Series PROPER will be picking up with Saga 1 officially beginning in the near future. I can't say when just yet as a lot of work needs to be done pending this Re-re-relaunch, chapter art and all and maybe the sound tracks, effectively hiring more people to the Ravenlight team... not to mention a few other things in the works to bolster the experience. I can't say when, and yes, Ravenlight will be on yet another hiatus till then.

For updates, pay attention to my socials ig (@Astormsong on Bluesky, Threads, Facebook, etc). Or even join the Discord.

And with that I don't have much more to say atm.

Again, thank you for reading. I apologize that things didn't add up and that it got rushed, for me the quality wasn't here after those couple months of BS and rather than trying to salvage something ik is screwed, I'm opting to move on. As it was this was never planned to be the true Saga 1 start anyway, only a prologue. Hopefully when things resume I will have things better prepared (and hopefully no more irl negative bs to trip things up). Till then if you did like what you've seen, consider checking out Soul Fall or other Ravenlight content.

With that, again, thank you for reading annnnnnnnnnd I'm looking forward to sharing more with you soon.

Have a Happy Halloween, or Happy Holidays, or a Happy whatever it is as you're reading this.

~Cheers