

Blood of a fallen warrior

By daechang-nim2005

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This is my bro's story. It's 66 pages long. :)

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1 - Untitled

Blood of a Fallen Warrior

Rain pelts the wide leaves of the abundant bush in a hidden river valley surrounded by large mountains. A small waterfall runs alongside the mountain wall and into a lake. Near the lake, a new sign of life is moments from happening. A clutch of five, massive eggs are positioned upright around the bank of the lake. One of the eggs quivers lightly, as there was movement from inside. It slowly cracks open about the top. The crown of the eggshell arises slowly and a set of glistening red eyes observes its surroundings. The creature raises its claws, removing the top of the shell from its place atop of its head, throwing it. It excitedly wobbles back and forth until the egg falls over. It shatters into small remnants as the clear liquid used to sustain the creature oozes across the earth. The creature stands on all fours, its claws digging into the fresh, newfound moss and soil beneath it. Its tail waves slowly and thumps the ground. It lifts its head, opening its massive jaw, revealing its sharp teeth, in a yawn. The creature slowly flaps its frail wings, pumping blood into their virgin muscle. Blinking, numerous times, the newborn creature takes in all of its surroundings and ripe senses. It feels the gentle drops of rain upon its back, detects the other eggs near it, the lush green encircling the area, and smells and hears the flowing water. Thereafter, it takes its first steps toward the mesmerizing lake. Maintaining its footing, it cautiously peers at the reflecting surface of water to see a reptilian yellow and white-splotched head. It surprisingly pulls back and looks again to soon realize it was its own reflection. It carefully sniffs the water and then takes his first refreshing drink of water. After drinking his fill, the baby dragon steps back. It turns around to observe the remaining four eggs. He cautiously ambles toward them and sniffs each one. Suddenly a roar is heard and a loud crack following is heard in the distance. Unlike most newborns, it wasn't as curious as most. It hastily trots into a nearby mass of bushes and crouches low.

"Over here, Tenga! I found the clutch!" A man announces, cutting through the thick bush with a machete. Clad in a pair of dark trousers, shirtless with leather suspenders and a pair of thick, heavy-looking boots, he stands near the eggs. A symbol was burned into the back of his right shoulder. The rain slides down his bald head and drips from his thick goatee. He circles the eggs, monitoring them. They were about waist height compared to his height of 6 feet. A woman soon breaks through the brush, following him. Her appearance was very masculine, her hair cut short, wearing the same trousers and boots along with a small, brown tank top. The same symbol was burned into the back of her neck. She held a mace in her right hand.

"Whoa! Looks like that dragon *did* have something worth protecting," Tenga marvels at them also, holding her bruised shoulder. "No wonder she kept her back to those bushes," She slowly caresses one of the eggs. "Gorlo, why don't you report back? I wanna dispose of them." She requests. Gorlo eyes her, wondering if she was capable of the job or not. Giving in, he responds with a nod and walks back through the brush. He glances back to see her lift her mace and swing, smashing one of the eggs as a

clear liquid and entrails of an unborn dragon spill onto the ground. Gorlo continues on, letting her finish the job. Tenga begins swinging numerously, demolishing each egg. After quickly finishing, she comes across a smashed pile of eggshell by the bank. She frowns, approaching it to investigate. She stares at it for a moment and then shrugs it off.

“Gorlo must've taken care of one before I got here.” She concludes. Tenga then turns and hurriedly leaves, hoping to catch up with her partner. The baby dragon produces a low, guttural growl, setting those two to memory and feeling its second emotion of the day—hatred.

After about an hour, the baby dragon finally crawls out of the bush. Cautiously checking its surroundings, he approaches the smashed bodies of his dead siblings. After grasping that they were never going to move, the baby dragon pushes through the brush cut down by his family's murderers. It comes across the inert body of a large, white dragon. Inching closer to the motionless remains, instinct let him know that it was indeed his mother. The orphaned dragon lies down and curls into a small ball against the cold, dead body. It falls asleep, the rain pouring harder along with his mournful state.

The next morning, a beam of sunlight breaks through the canopy, falling upon the dragon's sleeping body. The sun's warmth awakens him. He yawns in a high squeak and looks around. Everything was as it was the night before. Noises then catch his attention; they were coming from the lake. The baby dragon rises and timidly ambles into the brush. He makes out something with the same body shape as his previous enemies, crouching over his discarded shell. It had long, dark hair and wore nothing but a cloth around its waist. He spots another, similar to it, not far off. The baby dragon pokes his head through the bush to get a closer look. The man turns around suspiciously to see him. The dragon's eyes widen in surprise before fearfully withdrawing back into the shrubbery.

The man creeps over to the bushes to notice them shaking vigorously from the trembling dragon. He squats and reaches into the small, deerskin pouch tied around his waist.

“Shiah, I've found something. Come take a look.” He calls to the nearby woman. He pulls the bushes aside to reveal the dragon. The two beings stare at each other, sizing the other up. The man pulls out a chunk of raw deer meat from the pouch and holds it out in the palm of his hand. The dragon didn't seem to take it, so the man moved closer. Each inch he moved, a low, guttural growl began to grow louder. The dragon's teeth were now bared. It suddenly snaps at the man's hand moments before he snatches it from being bitten off! The man gives a reassuring look and tosses the meat at the feet of the dragon. It ravenously eats it down, watching the man closely.

“It seems this is the dragon that escaped from that slaughter.” The man says to his partner, his eyes locked on the small, unpredictable dragon.

“It's a miracle, Kyo. He should come with us. We can raise him,” Shiah suggests. “We both know how intelligent dragons are. We may be able to teach him our language.” She states, staring at the beautiful dragon.

“Well, it's worth the try,” Kyo gives in, moving a little closer. “I am Kyo. Kyo,” He slowly explains, hoping the dragon would comprehend.

“—Kyo.” The little dragon slowly utters. Kyo nods with glee and tosses it another piece of meat. The

woman kneels next to her husband as the dragon chews the meat.

“Shiah,” Kyo points to her. The dragon watches her and decisively walks toward her, beginning to trust his newfound saviors. Kyo smiles, glad that they were making progress.

“Come with us. We have more food and will protect you.” Kyo gestures the entire sentence. After a moment of persuasion, the two are able to take the dragon along with them. Kyo and Shiah escort the dragon to a village at the top of the valley.

Over a period of four years, that baby dragon was nurtured and christened, Geoterra. The peaceful, native people living in the village saw the dragon as their savior and protector, and in return remained loyal. Kyo and Shiah waited on Geoterra's every word. He had grown to the healthy height of five-feet-tall and seven-feet-long, which Imperial Dragons were supposed to be. His smooth skin was now a cream color. Geoterra's hut was erected at the back of the village. Lying lazily on a fur rug, Geoterra discusses the current status and other matters of the village with Kyo, who played a role as his advisor.

“...lets just stop hunting in that area. The animals there are too dangerous, according to the record of injures there,” Geoterra explains. It would take too much time to train the warriors to use stronger weapons. So it's just a waste of time. We'll exclude that area.” He ascertains. Kyo nods, quickly jotting the new order to note. As Kyo began to explain the next issue, a denizen of the village enters the hut.

“Excuse me for my interrupting,” The man bows deeply. “But there are two outsiders who have requested to specifically see you Geoterra.” He discloses the news.

Looking peculiarly, Geoterra stands as Kyo sits the notes aside to follow. The summoned leader of the village leaves the hut and walks through the village and down the elevated path leading to the entrance. The village people smiled and waved to the dragon. Geoterra smiles and continues. Arriving, he sees two individuals inside the wooden gates of the village. They were dressed in black cloaks. Geoterra approaches them and stands a foot away from the outsiders, towering over their heads. He eyes the two suspiciously.

“Remove your hoods.” He commands in a bellowing voice. The two nervously pull back their hoods. Geoterra's eyes widen as he recognizes their faces. His instincts were on fire as his cognizance was telling him they were the two he set to memory as an infant—the ones who slain his family! Fire rages in his eyes, as well as in his gullet.

“Before you say anything, turn around!” He orders as they look at him oddly and obey. “Kyo, pull the cloth down from around the female's neck.” He requests. Kyo complies and pulls it down. Geoterra sees the symbol written in an unknown language carved in the same area he remembered. Letting loose a thunderous roar, he lets loose a blaze of fire into the air as the two outsiders turn around.

“Leave this place! And *never* return!” Geoterra orders, his face inches away from theirs. The woman

smiles as they turn and began to leave the village. Geoterra's composure snaps and he reaches out, grabbing her left, upper torso and turning her around. She screams in fright, his claws deep in her chest and back. Geoterra breathes a blaze of fire, burning her alive! Her shattering screams are heard over the crackling of fire, but soon die out. Her partner stands in wonderment. Geoterra flings her charred remains through the gate, at the other's feet before turning back toward his hut. Kyo hurries after him to support.

"I wonder what those Slayers were thinking, coming here and seeming friendly." Kyo tries his best to relate with his lord. Geoterra ignores him and silently advances into his hut, his anger visible on his face. Pacing around the hut, the enraged dragon unexpectedly grunts, his knees bending as he clenches his teeth. Kyo fearfully stares at a large lump shifting inside of his master's side. Suddenly, a large, elliptical object exits Geoterra from behind.

"Are you okay?" Kyo inquires, cautiously approaching him.

"Yes, I'm fine. It's just that I've reached the age of procreation." Geoterra exhaustingly reveals. "And that was my cue to lay my clutch. I'm afraid this village is not the safest place for them. Watch over this egg until I return from spawning." Geoterra requests, as he slowly exits the hut.

"You are having your first clutch! This is a joyous day, Geoterra. I'll protect this egg with my life." Kyo happily accepts. Geoterra smiles and nods, glad to have a loyal friend. Unfolding his wings, he strongly flaps them twice, ascending quickly from the ground and flies away.

Geoterra descends the valley and all its lush glory, into the open plains. The plains housed many animals with its fresh, green grass. While flying across the grasslands, the mighty dragon notices a group of people pointing at him, calling his name. He ignores the humans, as he had more important things to worry about. Geoterra builds speed and flies for a seemingly long time, changing climates, and entering the far north. A low, mountain-like glacier is noticeable. The weary dragon descends into its open, wide top. A sheet of thick ice stretches across the inside of the crater of the hollow mountain. Geoterra, nearly exhausted from his flight, thinks that this is the best place for his eggs. The fatigued dragon begins laying his eggs in a circle. The eager clutch of eggs, slide out with ease. After laying six eggs, Geoterra rests for a moment to regain his strength.

"My first brood," He observes the new, lain eggs with pride. "I cannot wait to see their beautiful faces. Soon we will repopulate the land." Geoterra talks to his eggs, possessing a strong maternal sense. Soon recovering strength to his wings, Geoterra stands from his haunches. Beating his wings repeatedly, he ascends from the nest, feeling a whole lot lighter. Geoterra flies with comfort back toward the village.

Approaching the valley, he notices a large smoke column from afar.

"No..." Geoterra gasps in fear, imagining the worst. He flaps strongly, speeding toward his village. As flies above it, he discovers the entire village engulfed in flames! The dragon stares in astonishment, not believing his eyes. Suddenly, his name is heard being shouted from below. Rotating around, he looks down to spot Kyo, pushing the egg away from the burning hut it previously was held in. Geoterra descends and uses his claws to prop his egg up, giving Kyo time to rest and explain.

"It's you Geoterra," Kyo sighs in relief. "Once you left—the Slayers invaded the village. We—tried to fight them off—but they were of many. I managed—to save the egg—from them." Kyo exhaustingly explains his story. Geoterra's anger rises to its point. They had killed his family, now they hurt his people. So many scars the Slayers had put upon his heart. This had to stop! He beats his wings, immediately airborne. He soars back toward the plains. Anxiously flying, he spots a large group of Slayers. The angered dragon could tell they were the ones he overlooked before. Geoterra lets forth a roar of malice and dives toward them in a full-on assault. Opening his jaws, he lets loose a guided stream of fire, burning many of the Slayers alive. Before ascending again, he grasps three of them in his claws, dropping them from a high altitude. Hovering from above, Geoterra showers the remaining Slayers with scorching flames. Diving again, he builds speed, breathing orbs of fire.

Suddenly a flash of white light blinds him and Geoterra finds himself on the ground, lying on his side. Opening his eyes, he sees a teenage boy standing before him wielding a peculiar sword. The sword was translucent like a crystal. Digging his claws deep into the earth, Geoterra leaps for the boy, roaring furiously. He misses the quick warrior by inches and breathes a flare of fire in his direction. The boy extinguishes the flames with his outstretched palm and returns a bolt of lightning. Geoterra takes the bolt head on and is thrown onto his back. The boy leaps upon his chest with the crystal sword.

"You have been slain by Trine!" He announces moments before bringing the blade down to pierce the dragon's heart. Geoterra unleashes a stream of fire, sending Trine flying back, immersed in flames. Geoterra regains his footing and ragingly advances toward his downed foe. The frenzied dragon is abruptly stopped by the choking of a gold cord around his neck! Geoterra roars again, letting loose a cloud of flames. Turning back, he sees a young girl clutching the other end of the cord. Before he could even think of attacking her, he was shocked to the point of paralysis!

"Trine, now!" The young girl cries to her partner. Trine coughs, his clothes and skin heavily burned, struggling to his feet. He sees Kria standing with her hands toward the sky. He nods, knowing she wanted to perform a Hinderer's Circlet.

The young warrior stands, facing his female partner. Geoterra lie incapacitated between the two. Trine takes a deep breath and raises his arms up to the heavens. Together the two cite an incantation as their hands glow with a turquoise light. A resulting circle of turquoise light surrounds Geoterra's entrapped body and a great symbol forms under his body. The dragon breathes a last breath of fire, tingeing the sky red.

"I bind you Geoterra!" Trine shouts as a beam of azure light ruses from under Geoterra, consuming his body completely. His body is then pulled through the earth. The symbol remains on the ground where he was imprisoned.

The Slayers celebrated their act, thinking Geoterra was the last dragon killed. Over the years, the last remaining worshippers of dragons donned themselves the Dragonlords. They turned to dark rituals in an attempt to keep the last egg in their possession alive. The Slayers knowledge and civilizations continued to advance. One glorious night in the eyes of the Dragonlords, the egg hatched. Two new species of dragon emerged, due to repeated rituals. Little did the Slayers know a curse came with it...

500 Years Later

Dear Mortikai,

This is Princess Eva and I am in dire need of your assistance. I have been kidnapped by Dragonlady Ilena, the current mistress of the Dragonlords. I know things began to look strange after a group of mysterious people were being let into the castle. I also could sense the markings of something evil conjuring in the shadows, unseen by my mother's eyes. Two days ago, as I was walking the halls of the castle, I noticed them to be more empty than usual. That's when I spotted Dragonlady Ilena. I tried to escape her, but I was struck by some kind of incapacitating orb of energy. I came to, briefly, to notice myself on the back of a dragon. All I can remember before passing out again is the formation of Dragon's Peak. I have sent you this letter, my cousin, because you and I both know that you are the kingdom's greatest warrior and I feel that you are the only one capable enough of rescuing me. So please Mortikai, make haste, for they are planning to use me in a ritual to resurrect Geoterra, Lásia's Greatest Threat, to walk the land again. I will hold out and struggle for as long as I can. I am waiting...

Sincerely,

Princess Eva

Mortikai stares in awe at the letter as he sips his coffee. He sits the mug down and stares at the letter.

"Eva." He mutters, breaking the silence inside of his self-built cabin. Mortikai lays the letter aside and grabs the mug, walking over to the sink. He pours its dark contents down the drain and sits the glass down.

"Princess Eva is in trouble. She—needs my assistance." Mortikai walks over to his bed and sits down. Looking at the floorboards at his feet, right in front of the bed, Mortikai spots the crack that served as a marker. Sliding his finger into the cranny, he pulls the board up. The nook contained an old scabbard. It had seemed like ages since the last time he held it. Mortikai reaches down and pulls the scabbard out of its resting place and grabs the hilt. He unsheathes his old war sword. Suddenly, a flood of memories rush to him. He then remembers—that day—seven years ago...

In the days of Mortikai's knighthood, The Dragon War was still going on and there were constant attacks by the Dragonlords upon the Symbra Kingdom. They were fighting for more land since they were gradually pushed back toward the Dark Range.

Mortikai and his fellow knights were all in their quarters, in the basement of the castle. Today was their day to relax, since they had a full week's worth of training. Mortikai sat in his considerably larger quarters than his teammates, playing a heated game of chess with his appointed squire.

“Ah, that's a nice move.” Mortikai compliments, losing a rook.

“Thank you, sir,” The young squire humbly smiles. “First I'm beating you at chess; maybe soon I'll be able to go toe-to-toe with you in sword fighting.” He shows his cockiness.

“Let's not get too carried away!” Mortikai laughs, reaching over and disheveling his hair. The two fill the room with laughter.

Suddenly a familiar sound rings throughout the castle. Mortikai's face changes completely stern as he hears the bellowing of the watchtower's warning signal. The two friends meet eyes and shoot up from their seats. The squire runs, grabbing his knight's armor. Mortikai reaches for his sword, removing it from its wooden shelf on the wall. He turns around to see his armor ready for him. With the help of his squire, he was completely dressed in a matter of seconds.

“Will you need your steed?” His squire asks, ready to wait on his every need.

“No thank you, they're too close to the castle for me to use him.” Mortikai answers, positioning his scabbard.

“Well, Good luck, Mortikai!” The boy shakes his knight's hand. Mortikai nods with a smile and opens the door of his quarters. He steps out into the narrow hall to see all the other knights down the hall come out in complete synchronization.

“All right men! It's time to fight and defend our castle! These Dragon suckers just keep on coming! Let's go!” He shouts, boosting his men's morale as they shout in excitement along with him.

“Oh, *do* lead the way great one.” A sarcastic remark is made from behind him. Mortikai swings around to see Akitus, the second-in-command, standing behind him.

“Do not start with me today, Akitus! Not now!” Mortikai warns, bumping past him and running up the stairs with the troops following him.

Akitus was always jealous of Mortikai. He thought that he should have the title of, “Grand Warrior”, and have a larger room. He hated the thought of living under his lifelong rival. Every single battle, he selfishly hoped that Mortikai would be killed in battle, so that he would be bumped up to “Grand Warrior”. That was his dream.

The troops, led by Mortikai, sprint out of the courtyard and spill out into the evacuated streets of Symbra. The knights exit the castle, out into the Forsab Plains, ready to do battle. Mortikai looks up at the watchman to find out the location of the oncoming foray. The soldier points north of the castle. The troops all turn in unison to see a vast brigade of Dragonlords. Some men, taken aback by fear of their enemies' numbers, take a few steps in reverse.

“Do not fear, men!” A loud, booming voice says to them. The king, dressed in his armor as well, walks out onto the soon-to-be battlefield. Walking through the parting crowd, King Ophius takes his place next to Mortikai.

“Uncle Ophius, I am ready.” Mortikai announces bravely. The King nods bravely, signaling them all to wait as the Dragonlords sprint onto their land. The Symbrian knights clash with the Dragonlords in front of the castle. The Dragonlords wielded long glaives, as they fought in their brown, robed attire.

The battle progressed for a little over an hour, blood spilled on both sides but the majority of Symbrian knights winning. After slashing through countless underlings, King Ophius finds the leader of the enemy troops. The two face off momentarily, sizing each other up. The King saw a flaw in the lack of armor and advances first, swinging his sword overhead. His attack is blocked by the steel rod of the glaive and countered by the seasoned leader. The two give and receive blows, trying to defeat the other.

Mortikai buries his sword deep into the gut of a foe. Extracting his sword, he slashes through the neck of another. Definitely proving his title as “Grand Warrior” Mortikai slays another. Battling through the remaining crowd, he comes across the King battling their leader. Mortikai witnesses a cowardly warrior approaching behind the King for a dishonorable kill. Mortikai lets loose a war cry, running toward him.

“Uncle, look out behind you!” He yells, catching the King's attention. King Ophius ducks as the glaive moves overhead, aimed for his back. He strongly knocks the glaive away, the warrior losing footage. Mortikai follows through and digs his sword through his body. The leader of the Dragonlords takes advantage of his towering position over the King.

“Notus Tenok!” He yells an incantation, holding his palm out. A gust of air, bowls King Ophius over onto his back. The leader persists, bringing his glaive down upon him with a look of malice upon his face. Protecting his uncle, Mortikai deflects the glaive, ramming his solid shoulder strongly into his face. His foe falls, and Mortikai brings his blade to his neck.

“Curses, we should have brought the dragons,” He regrets. “Go on; kill me so I can pass the final curse onto Geoterra and the princess.” He mutters. Mortikai hesitates, not hearing clearly.

“What will happen?” He demands. “Talk!” Mortikai brings the downed foe's neck to bleed. The vulnerable leader looks at him sternly and begins to laugh. Without notice, two steel rings fly from the darkness of his robe's sleeve. The deadly projectiles catch King Ophius in the throat, his jugular vein rupturing!

“No!” Mortikai screams, severing the spineless man. Dropping his sword, he turns around, kneeling and holding his uncle as he slowly bleeds to death.

Akitus sees this and decides to beguile the situation.

“Mortikai, you failed to protect the king!” He shouts loudly, catching some of the soldiers' attention. Mortikai flashes him a look of animosity.

“Do not start with me! I would *never* do such a thing!” He utters through clenched teeth.

“Well what happened then?” Akitus inquires, his arms folded as the rest of the troops close in. Mortikai's eyes widen as they begin to side with him

“You let the King die!”

“What happened?!” Their cutting remarks come one after another.

“I—I didn't mean to. Now that I've killed this man, Geoterra and Princess Eva will be granted some curse.”

“That doesn't mean anything! Those are excuses!” Akitus snaps back. Mortikai stands to his feet in anger.

“You let the King die!” Another knight adds.

“He's no longer the “Grand Warrior”, he's a Fallen Warrior!” One man says. The soldiers begin to chant, “Fallen Warrior! Fallen Warrior!” Mortikai looks around at the closing in soldiers. He glares at the smirking Akitus. Mortikai couldn't believe how quickly they sided with Akitus. He couldn't endure the verbal abuse. He tried all he could to save his uncle. Turning around, he sees the soldiers, once his comrades, closing in on him. A last glance at the dead King Ophius sets everything off. He breaks through the crowd and runs across the field, leaping over frequent dead bodies. He runs past Symbra's gated entrance to see his cousin, the young Princess Eva, staring at him sorrowfully. He notices tears run down her face. Mortikai continues on, running across the Forsab Plains until reaching the Émigré Mountains. He climbs them and flees into Vela Wood, isolating himself from the world that turned their back on him in a matter of seconds.

Mortikai drops the blade and buries his face in his hands.

“How can I do it? Can I even call myself a warrior again?” He questions himself. He then reanalyzes the situation. “I—I must. My cousin needs my help. Plus, I may be able to redeem myself with this heroic act,” Mortikai smiles, thinking of how his reputation would return. Yeah, I'll be named “Grand Warrior” again. It's sad that I'll have to prove myself to be let back into the walls of society.” Mortikai stands from his bed, holding his double-handed sword. Walking across the room, toward the door, he slips his feet into his boots and walks outside. The renewed warrior walks around to the back of his cabin, surrounded by an abundance of trees.

“Lets see if this sword still has its edge.” Mortikai takes a breath, positioning his feet for an attack. He executes an overhead, horizontal chop into a nearby tree. Only a small incision is visible in the thick bark of the timber. He ignores the disappointment and swings toward another tree, harder this time. Another small incision is made and Mortikai brings the session to a close.

“This sword is too weak. It can't dig into a tree, let alone cut through the thick hide of a dragon,” He jokes with himself, looking at the dull sword closely. “Looks like I'll have to synthesize the sword into something stronger.” Mortikai decides, spotting the anvil lying near the back of his cabin. He lays the sword across its top. Determined, he walks around to the front of the cabin and inside the hut. Mortikai

locates a spare steel block and a piece of flint. Carrying the items outside, he sits down near the anvil. Mortikai collects handfuls of dry leaves and crowds them around the bottom of the anvil.

Mortikai squats, gathering numerous rocks around the base of the anvil, building them up like a dome around the leaves. Mortikai reaches to his right, grabbing a large rock from nearby. Clashing the piece of flint into the larger rock, he creates sparks hot enough to ignite the dry leaves. Mortikai sits the portion of flint aside, smiling at the crackling fire. Mortikai subsequently holds his palms in front of the young flames and remembers the one spell he only found useful as a knight.

“Fotia kaio.” He cites the incantation, making the fire's temperature rise quickly. Shortly, it changed from a bright orange flame into a blue flame. The sudden heat from the fire heats the anvil, bringing its base to a glowing red. As the entire anvil becomes red, Mortikai stands and pulls his sword from the top of it, replacing it with the steel block.

“Oh, I forgot the gloves and the blacksmith equipment!” Recognizing his mistake, he runs back into the house. Searching through a chest mentally labeled as, “Junk”, he recovers the blacksmith tongs, heavy hammer, thick gloves, and holding cup. The anxious warrior rushes back outside to the anvil to see the steel beginning to melt. Dropping the tongs and hammer, Mortikai hurriedly collects the melted contents into the holding cup. After collecting all of the melted substance, Mortikai slips his hands into the thick gloves and sits his sword atop of the anvil. Grabbing the hammer and tongs, he begins the reformation of his sword.

After an hour or so of unrelenting pounding and reshaping, Mortikai was completed with his sword. It remains on the anvil as he walks back around into the house. The large tub near the sink catches his eye, and Mortikai pumps a few gallons of cold water into it. With it full, he carries it outside and to his blacksmithing area. Using the iron tongs, Mortikai picks up the new sword and deeply submerges it into the cold water. Steam emits with a loud hiss, rolling into visible white clouds and vanishing. He holds it immersed in the water until there no longer was steam. Removing it from the water, it glints brightly as the sun's rays hit the blade. A smile spreads across his face as he admired his work. Bringing the blade to his face for a better look, he nods with satisfaction. He also notices the extra weight of the sword.

“Hopefully now it'll be strong enough to cut through these trees.” He comments aloud, looking up with a smile. Mortikai shakes his left glove off and switches the sword to his bare hand. The hilt was cool enough to be held. Removing the right glove, Mortikai holds the sword properly. He walks to the middle of the open space between the trees. Concentrating, Mortikai swings powerfully toward the oak he attempted to cut before and hacks it completely down! Taking a half step, he strafes to the right, and slashes through another massive tree trunk! Mortikai stops his attack and holds the sword horizontally, examining its new edge.

“I did a good job. And now that I've forged a sword strong enough to take on a dragon, I have to get my mind back focused and enhance my warrior's pheromone to the fullest. I need to heighten my senses to the way they were back when I was a younger warrior.” Mortikai uses the blade of his sword to chop the tall grass down into the shape of a square. Stabbing his sword into the earth, Mortikai kneels and sits Lotus style beside it. He takes a few deep breaths, relaxing his entire body. Mortikai slowly closes his eyes. He begins listening to every single sound around him, the rustling of the branches, the whistling of the wind, chirping of the birds and other sounds of the surrounding wood. Mortikai searches deep within himself to remember his warrior skills.

After three hours of constant meditation, Mortikai finally opens his eyes. His hearing was enhanced to the point of he could pinpoint the sounds of any direction he looked. Detecting another life form was as simple as feeling a vibration through his body. The hardened warrior possessed no care in the world except for saving his cousin and the many grueling battles he may have to participate in to reach her. He stands to his feet now, nearly emotionless now. Mortikai couldn't sense another person around him for miles away. He grabs his sword by the hilt and holds his left hand out, palm down. Raising the sword up, pointing the sword's tip toward his hand, he slowly carves the Symbol of Slayer into his skin, each penetrating stroke bringing blood to his hand. Blood flows steadily from his newly carved label.

"I am now a Slayer." He mutters before walking around to the front of the cabin. Entering, Mortikai sits on his bed and pulls the scabbard from its hidden nook. He stands and kneels, laying the scabbard vertical toward him. He carefully, carves the Symbol of Slayer into the wooden scabbard. Finishing the symbol, Mortikai sits his sword aside and uses his right index finger to outline the symbol with the blood from his bleeding hand. Slyly smiling, he stands and sheathes his sword, walking to the sink. Mortikai runs warm water over his hand, applying pressure to cease the bleeding.

"It's time for me to sleep. I may not sleep for the next three days." He comments, looking outside at the sun's position, calculating the time to be 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Sitting the scabbard on the floor near his low bed, Mortikai lies down. Stretching and yawning, he falls asleep, his destiny ahead of him.

Confined somewhere in the Dark Range, Princess Eva sits on a small bed, one of the "lovely" furnishings of the miniature, prison cell she was held in. The chamber looked seldom cleaned at all. A small puddle of water lies on the floor, from a leak in the ceiling. Eva began to grow accustomed to the regular food and bathroom breaks. She sits, legs crossed, resting her chin on her hands. Eva looks at the new garments they gave her. She was dressed in a pair of flooding pants and a small t-shirt. Covering her feet, were slipper-like shoes. Finding it hard to pass the time, the only thing she really did was listen to the guards' conversations. Laughing at their absurdness, if the conversations were in Lásian, otherwise they were in an undecipherable language.

"I hope Mortikai can find it in himself to be the warrior he once was. I seriously do believe he's the only one capable of finding me. Those other blokes aren't worth anything," She talks to herself, finding it the only thing to do besides sleeping. "I hope he understands that I do not hate him for letting my father die. He actually *thought* during battle, something most warriors don't do." Eva rolls her eyes, disgusted at how everyone took the accident out of proportion. Calming down, she finds herself horribly bored again.

"Well, I guess its time for me to do something I would have never thought I'd engage in by my own free will," Eva stands up, dressed in the pants she was given, stretching. She then crouches to the floor and begins performing pushups, one of the many exercises she was taught in her basic defense class.

The sound of chirping songbirds and shining sunlight awaken Mortikai. He opens his eyes and scans the room, his senses prepared and vigilant. He was now beyond the warrior he was long ago. Mortikai notices this himself, but he would have to be to rescue Princess Eva from Dragonlady Ilena and her

horde of dragons and minions. He swings his legs over the bed onto the floor, sitting up and yawning. Standing, he approaches the sink, inserting the drain with a plug. He tiredly pumps the sink full of hot water. Once it was full, Mortikai submerges his head into the water. Holding it under, he could feel the tingling sensations of warmth running through his body. He slowly brings his head from the water, his long, brown hair slump over his right shoulder. Grabbing his locks, Mortikai wrings it out as water falls back into the filled sink. Removing his garments, he picks up a bar of soap and a washing towel, to bathe his light, caramel skin.

“Better get this out of the way since I probably won't do this for a while either.” He says to himself. After washing himself, Mortikai dries himself and searches through his dresser. He dresses himself in undergarments and searches through the last drawer. He digs out a pair of white tights and a white, elastic shirt to match. Mortikai slips them on as the material hugs each cut of his muscle, deeply outlining them. He grabs his boots from near the bed and puts them on, lacing them tightly. He walks to the back of the small cabin, and grabs an old bag of discarded items from a hook on the ceiling. Opening the heavily discolored bag, he searches through its contents. There was a chain mail tunic, helmet, plate armor, Symbrian shield, chain mail-covered leather gloves, a flask, a boomerang, assorted maps, and a piccolo.

“I could use this chain mail tunic and flask,” Mortikai removes the items from the bag. “These gloves and map will prove useful, also.” He grabs them from the bag. Carrying the items to the bed, he spreads them down. Mortikai picks up the chain mail tunic and slips it over himself. The tightly interwoven silver links of metal makes his outfit handsome. He lastly grabs the gloves, pulling his hand into each one. They still fit perfectly from seven years ago, their feel familiar to him. Mortikai unrolls the old map before him and looks over it.

“According to Eva's letter, Dragonlady Ilena has taken her to the Dark Range. I don't know exactly where Dragon's Peak is though. I guess I'll have to look around.” Mortikai throws the map aside, its image imprinted to his memory. Mortikai looks over to the tarnished flask, picking it up. He turns and walks toward the sink. Pumping cold water from the faucet, he fills it to the top with cold water. Screwing the top back onto the flask, Mortikai attaches the flask to his tunic by the hook located behind it.

“Looks like I'm ready to come and save you, Eva.” Mortikai announces, walking toward his bed. He grabs his scabbard and ties its string tightly to his left hip. Mortikai looks at himself in the long mirror in the back of the room. He smiles, happy to see a warrior again. A knock on the door suddenly interrupts his moment. His pheromone detects another human at the door. Turning, he approaches the door. Mortikai quickly opens the door to see the short mailman that delivered mail to him every blue moon.

“Just coming to give you this,” The small man states his visit. “It's from Symbra.” He opens it, as Mortikai always made him read the mail for him. “It's from the Royal Family. `We just wanted to inform you of the disappearance of Princess Eva Leone of Symbra. She was kidnapped three days ago and the searches for her have becoming useless. She may be dead, since the only foe of the family—”

Mortikai snatches the letter from the man's hands and rips it.

“I already know she's gone. I was informed earlier.” He says coldly, stepping out of the cabin and closing the door behind him.

“Is the Fallen Warrior going somewhere?” The small man dares to ask, mockingly.

“You listen here, little man,” Mortikai grabs him by the shirt, pulling him from his feet. “I am on my way to save Princess Eva. And I am a Slayer now, so I'd watch my tongue if I were you.” Mortikai threatens him sternly.

“The Slayers accepted *you* into their group, Fallen Warrior? Ha! Don't make me laugh, Mortikai.” The man snatches away from him, landing on his feet. The man walks off, laughing. Mortikai sighs and lets him go, not having time to deal with the likes of him. Leaving his home to set out on his journey, he hoped that everyone else hadn't lost all respect for him. It was hurtful to not see fear in the little man's eyes, as he towered over him.

Mortikai walks through the secluded Vela Wood and toward Mt. Émigré, the small mountain that granted him his peace from the rest of Lásia. The unwavering warrior admires the fauna and flora of the surrounding wood. As he trekked alone through the tree-filled woodland, a small pile of leaves ahead of him began to swirl and ascend, forming a dryad. The forest nymph's skin was a tan complexion, and her hair was forged of golden leaves, as well as her attire, which looked like a skirt stopping just before the hips. Mortikai recognizes the dryad as Fyllo, one of the first intelligent, living things he encountered when first coming to Vela Wood.

“Mortikai, you're leaving us?” The beautiful nymph asks in a high pitched voice, advancing closer as three other dryads formed from the branches of the trees. They detach and land on their feet. Their skin of a brown tone and their hair composed of branch-like dreads. They wore skirt-looking outfits produced of tree bark.

“Yes, I am,” Mortikai answers, hugging the three attractive wood nymphs. “I have to save Princess Eva from being used to awaken Geoterra.” He explains, embracing Fyllo.

“Okay,” They all nod. “Please, do be careful. We do wish to see you again someday.” They wish him good fortune.

“I will, so don't worry.” He smiles, hugging them all once more and then continuing on.

Mortikai travels until he reaches Mt. Émigré. He could look up and see the top of it easily. The miniature mountain hadn't formed a jagged top yet, but looked more of a butte. Searching the face of the mountain, Mortikai spots a good ledge to begin his ascent on. Walking through the toothed, rough rocks at the base, he sees a small, projecting rock and jumps, clutching it. He pulls up, grabbing another and stepping onto another rock, inching his way up Mt. Émigré.

In a matter of minutes, Mortikai makes it to the rough, flat top of the effortless mountain. Finding a large rock, he takes a seat, securing all his items. An oread quickly leaps atop of the mountain and walks over to the resting warrior. Mortikai recognizes the mountain nymph, by her pale skin, long slender legs, long, black hair, and rock forged clothes.

“I remember the last time you were up here, Mortikai. You were fleeing Lásia's wrath,” She sits on the ground near him. “So why are you back? I thought you were turning your back on Lásia, as they did you.” She questions curiously, looking into his eyes.

"I forgot nymphs never forget, Stonia," Mortikai lightly laughs, as the nymph nods in agreement. "I have to save Princess Eva from being used to resurrect Geoterra. Dragonlady Ilena is trying to accomplish this feat and awaken her master, I cannot let that happen! Eva sent me a letter herself, requesting my help alone." Mortikai explains to her.

"Ah, I have felt the warnings of the planet lately. The last time Geoterra was conscious, it wasn't really as bad as the Slayers made it seem. He actually just stayed to himself. It wasn't until that day they tried to capture him that he breathed a final breath of fire that flooded the skies red and sent a heat wave throughout all of Lásia. If there is a possibility that he awakens, he is going to be infuriated! I wish you the best if you do have to go up against, "The Dreadful Evil of Lásia", as you Slayers have called him."

"I think I'll manage," Mortikai laughs lightly. "Thanks for the talk, Stonia. Well, I have to be on my way now. Goodbye." The anxious warrior stands, bidding her farewell. She smiles, nodding respectfully. Mortikai stares out upon the great view of Lásia. The sun's rays were touching all of the land for as far as he could see. Sunlight reflected brightly off of the bright, white bricks of the Symbra Kingdom. The vast green of the Forsab Plains stretches far and wide.

"The Forsab Plains, they are still as beautiful as I remember them to be," The nostalgic warrior gazes across his former home and world, ready to confront them.

Mortikai breathes deeply and begins to run down the inclining side of the butte. With gravity pulling him, he sprints faster and faster, trying not to fall. Approaching the bottom of Mt. Émigré, Mortikai leaps over the small base of jagged rocks that divided the grass from the rocky terrain. He tucks and rolls, breaking his fall, and lands on his rear end. Smiling at the awkwardness of his landing, Mortikai stands to his feet. He beams at being a Lásian again. Mortikai marches forward, his tunic clinking lightly with each step, across the Forsab Plains. He spots a herd of wild unicorn mares and stallions, roaming the plains freely. As he saw them running and rearing up high on their powerful hind legs, Mortikai immediately reminisces of the time he had a unicorn of his own.

Prynn was the name of his noble unicorn colt, his coat white as virgin snow, just like the royal unicorns that all of the royal family rode. He was so remarkable; Prynn was skilled enough to be a charger, courser, and palfrey all together. His mane was so long; it could be used as mock reins and billowed in the wind, gracefully as a hanging sheet would. He was the best, and that's what Mortikai needed and deserved. After he left the kingdom, he never saw Prynn again. He knew Prynn would be a full-grown stallion now and it would be nearly impossible to find him now. Mortikai remembers how Prynn would always respond to his call and whistles.

The warrior continues on walking across the plains until he comes within range of Symbra. He sees knights out in the surrounding fields of the city, practicing sword handling with their young squires. He also sees knights riding on their coursers, the unicorns sprinting at full speed, trying to teach their squires how to ride like the wind on the back of a mount. Mortikai smiles and takes a deep breath.

"I know these guys are going to remember me. Just ignore their jeers and insults and move along. Your priority is to see Queen Panela. Although I know Akitus had most likely taken my spot, I must pay no heed to him also." Mortikai gives himself a pep talk, approaching Symbra, the home he left years ago. He walks proudly past the squires. One stops his activities and stares wide-eyed.

“Look, it's the Fallen Warrior.” The sixteen-year-old boy says aloud. Soon they all crowd together, talking about him rather loudly. Mortikai ignores the boys' comments until he hears a single squire stand up against them.

“He is *not* a fallen warrior! He is Mortikai the Grand Warrior, my cousin!” Mortikai stops in his tracks at this and whips around, his long hair swaying, to see a young boy with blonde hair, bounding toward him. Mortikai squints, studying the boy's face, struggling to remember him.

“Mortikai you've come back! I've missed you so much. When my sister was kidnapped, I was the only one who thought you were capable of rescuing her. Where have you been all this time, Mortikai?” The boy eagerly asks, joy overflowing from his eyes. Mortikai frowns, not knowing what to say. It felt as if he was talking to a familiar stranger.

“Prince Orian, please return to your training. You wouldn't want to disappoint your mother.” The boy's knight advances toward him.

“*Orian, Orian. The name is familiar,*” Mortikai thinks as the name opens a floodgate of memories. “*That's right; Eva did have a little brother. Orian was about six-years-old when I left. I never did get to see him that much,*” He fully recalls. “You've missed *me*? I've missed *you*, little Orian! You've grown quite a great deal. So, why are you out here with the squires and knights?” Mortikai asks in a smile, finally finding someone who knew the real him.

“When I heard you left the castle, I was really upset. So I decided to become a knight just like you and become the Grand Warrior in your honor.” The boy answers faithfully. Mortikai smiles, as he loved the feeling of being admired again. He then looks up at the knight standing behind Orian. Mortikai studies the man's face. Short brown hair, crystal blue eyes, and a scar on his right cheek, he knew this man before.

“Mortikai, ah you've returned! It's been years, man!” The young knight shakes Mortikai's hand in greeting. The man's name suddenly appears in Mortikai's head, as he remembered the cause of the scar.

“Koalu!” Mortikai exclaims, remembering the young knight. “I remember your days of being my squire. Sorry, I abandoned you after the accident happened,” Mortikai apologizes, looking away for a moment. “Did you ever keep Prynngot yourself?” He moves on to a lighter note happily.

“No, he wouldn't let anyone ride or barely touch him. It was if he *knew* you were gone and was angry. He wanted and is a part of you. Akitus tried desperately to break his spirit and keep Prynngot himself, but Prynngot gave him a boot to the right thigh so hard, that Akitus was in the nurse's care for weeks, and hasn't been the same ever since. After that, I coaxed Prynngot into coming outside and I let him free. He sniffed the air, presumably for you, and then gave up, bounding away, forever to be wild and untamed like his ancestral roots.” Koalu cites in a fair voice.

“There you go again with that poetry stuff,” Orian sneers. “I hate it!”

“I understand, he used to cite that stuff whenever I'd work him too hard in training,” Mortikai adds. But

he was one hell of a smart kid!" They all laugh as Mortikai pulls Koalu into a weak headlock. "After I left the kingdom, I stayed in the Vela Wood since that day. The dryads accompanied me and when I got a letter from Princess Eva, which I don't know how, I had to put my past behind me and become a warrior again," He explains his former life. "She's asked me, personally, to come and save her. I don't know *exactly* where she is, but Dragonlady Ilena is the one who kidnapped her." Mortikai confesses, looking past them at some of the training squires.

"Ilena of the Dragonlords?!" Koalu exclaims in disbelief. "I thought they stopped that grudge with us after the Dragon War." He responds, frowning as he tried to comprehend a reason.

"They're planning to use her in some way to resurrect Geoterra, just as their former leader warned before I killed him, so I must hurry to save her," Mortikai shakes his head in discontent. He turns to Orian, "Is Aunt Panela in right now?" He asks eagerly.

"Yes, she should be in the dining room. I've eaten already." Orian replies, pulling his pants up.

"Well, I'd better go so you can finish fulfilling your dream. I'll see you later, little cousin." Mortikai pats him on the back before leaving.

The anxious warrior runs across the training grounds, dodging the squires, who were to be the next generation of leading forces for the Symbra Kingdom. Mortikai stops in front of the threshold of the capital city. The massive gate was raised for as long as the sun was out. He begins to walk through the city, smiling to see its renovations. The people of the Kingdom were housed in beautiful white terrace apartments alongside each other. A majority of people stood on their balconies, high above the street, tending to plants, tanning, or just getting fresh air. Storeowners' huts were set up near the street, the vendors beckoning for new customers. Mortikai held his head high, smiling as he admired the beauty of Symbra. Anonymous whispers soon flood the streets as the people began to remember him. Many of them didn't know whether to welcome back a lost, great warrior or shun him for being responsible for King Ophius's death. Mortikai ignores the numerous undertones, and continues walking. He suddenly breaks into a run down the cobblestone street. He dodges giant grildas, as they pulled heavy wagons loaded with supplies, food, or anything else the owner needed shipped. Grildas were stocky, bull-like animals with black hair and gigantic, ivory horns on the sides of their heads. Possessing strong muscles, they were capable of hauling large loads and running a person down and killing them in a matter of seconds.

After running through the city, Mortikai reaches the Symbra castle's courtyard. Following the paved path to the castle, he notices the numerous servants trimming, watering, and keeping the courtyard tidy. Reaching the castle's main doors, two guards stood silently on patrol. Mortikai steps forth and is abruptly halted.

"Excuse me; no one is permitted to enter the castle at this time," The uniformed guard steps in his way.

"Does that rule go for the Royal Family, also?" Mortikai angrily retorts, baffling the guards.

"Prince Orian is the only Royal Family member allowed to leave and enter. There are no other Royal Family members outside the castle at this time." The second guard returns spitefully. Mortikai stops and takes a deep breath, feeling his anger rising. Reaching up and massaging his temples, he looks

intolerantly at the guards.

“You must don't know me. I am Mortikai Leone of the Symbra Kingdom. Princess Eva is my cousin and I possess urgent news about her that I need to tell Aunt Panela.” He lays it all in their lap, trying to hold his temper. The two guards unexpectedly unsheathe their swords and stand, ready to fight.

“We will not allow you to come here shouting blasphemies and such nonsense. You will respect our queen and address her as, “Majesty”! If you do acquire information about Princess Eva, tell us now!” The two soldiers demand, ready to attack at a moment's notice. Mortikai feels his blood starting to boil as he hesitates whether to unsheathe his sword or not. Sighing loudly, he frowns forebodingly. The guards suddenly advance to seize him!

Mortikai swiftly unsheathes his sword, slashing the nearest guard across the chest in the process. Repositioning his feet, he brings the blade down powerfully, hacking across the shoulder of the preceding soldier. The force of the attack wasn't enough to sustain fatal damage, but they were both against the castle's doors, bleeding, eyes widened in astonishment.

“Now listen,” Mortikai quietly orders through clenched teeth, “I am Mortikai Leone, the one that left the castle seven years ago,” Desperately using a trump card to get them to remember, not wanting to hurt them. “I ask that you think highly of your lives and let me pass.” He threatens, still in his stance of bent knees and holding the blade of the double-handed sword low to the ground.

“Never!” The guard with a bleeding chest shouts, advancing again with his sword aimed for Mortikai's chest. The confident warrior sticks his chest out, letting the sword strike the chain mail. The guard pauses for a moment and Mortikai takes advantage. He sternly brings up his hilt and butts the man in the face hard enough to drop him to the ground as blood flowed from his bruised face. The remaining soldier performs a quick horizontal chop directed for Mortikai's head. The wary fighter ducks the attack and slashes the ligaments and tendons in the soldier's right leg before standing. The guard falls onto the ground, screaming in pain. Mortikai stares at the two downed soldiers. Leaning over, he whispers an apology to the conscious soldier and proceeds into the castle, leaving them.

Closing the giant double doors himself, Mortikai marvels at the redecoration of the castle's lobby. The last time he resided in the castle, the entire lobby was composed of carved stone, now the floors had floorboards with a cherry wood finish. In the middle of the room, there was a large, stone pillar and there were light fixtures set up around the room. The elaborate lanterns were on almost every corner of the ceilings and there were signs on the walls, instructing people to where things were located.

“Looks like Aunt Panela really remodeled the place. It looks good.” He comments, walking around the room. Mortikai walks to the right and around the pillar, his heavy boots loudly thumping on the wood. Something so unconceivable suddenly catches his eye, making his heart stop.

On the present side of the pillar lay the resting place of King Ophius. His uncle's body, in armor, was set in the small area surrounded by silk covers and pillows of red, was encased behind a sheet of glass. Staring at the cadaver, Mortikai reaches out and touches the glass. It was icy to the touch. Holding back the approaching tears, the forlorn warrior smiles and continues on. Ignoring the instructions on the wall, Mortikai heads to the already known path to the Royal Chambers.

Mortikai ascends the claustrophobic stairwell, ascending its stories. Occasionally he looks out of a window every few steps to see out to the courtyard. Finally reaching the floor where mostly Royal Family members were allowed, he approaches closer and closer to his aunt.

The giant double doors finished in cherry wood, just like the floor before it, were guarded. The chunky sentry, dressed in a light, casual armor, wielded a battle axe. Mortikai bravely proceeds forth.

“What is your business here?” The guard asks, tossing his red hair from in front of his face.

“I am Mortikai Leone and I am here to see Queen Panela.” He royally introduces himself. The guard falls silent, staring at him with wide eyes.

“The Mortikai, that killed King Ophius?” The guard inquires slowly.

“I did not kill King Ophius!” Mortikai shouts back. “He was my uncle! Why the hell would I kill him?!” Mortikai lashes out. “By me killing the Dragonlords' master, I unleashed a curse on Geoterra and this family! Now I have urgent information to tell Queen Panela. Please step aside, before I am *forced* to move you!” Mortikai threatens, fed up with all the questioning. The guard frowns menacingly.

“You'll do what?” The guard requests, leaning forward, his bulk making his ego grow. With no words being said, Mortikai strongly thrusts his elbow into the man's throat, incapacitating him. He steps aside as he falls forward heavily. The floor rumbles as all of his being hits. Mortikai opens the doors and continues on, closing them behind him.

Beautiful chandeliers suspend from the ceiling, brightly flooding the large banquet hall in light. The room had a second floor where other rooms were located. The rails of the halls of the second floor were crafted from cherry wood, as the rest of the room, in the rococo style. The ecru-colored pillars standing before each door on the first floor possessed the ornate rococo style. Mortikai notices the banquet table in the middle of the room, extending a large feast. Numerous roasted grilda legs, roasted owls, plains hare, steamed potatoes, spinach, croissants, and different beverages. The smells pulled Mortikai to the table, but he had no intent.

Suddenly two doors open on the right side of the room. The elegant, Queen Panela Leone walks out gracefully, dressed in a cream-colored evening gown. With her tan skin and long, brunette locks pulled into a tight bun, she certainly wore the look of royalty. Mortikai notices her remaining slender figure as the way it was the last time he saw her. Her face still possessed impeccable beauty, he could see that time had taken a small toll on her.

Queen Panela takes her seat at the north end of the great banquet table. While smiling at his aunt, he suddenly catches a sight he thought he'd hoped never to imagine. Akitus enters the room after the Queen and stands at her right. According to the emblems on his uniform, his long blonde-haired rival was moved up to Head Knight and now had the duty of escorting and personally protecting the Queen. She notions for her knight to sit, after the dukes, duchesses, (Mortikai's second cousins presumably) Akitus's squire, and the ladies-in-waiting, were seated. He takes his seat at her right as Queen Panela says grace.

After the prayer, they all begin to eat and talk lightly. Neither one of them noticed Mortikai leaning

against the pillar near the entrance, where he'd been the whole time. Mortikai decides to step forward. Everyone looks up from the sound of his heavily booted feet. Queen Panela looks in a double-take. Akitus does the same as they both stare longingly at him.

"Oh my Lord. Mortikai," She softly exclaims, standing to her feet. She briskly walks across the room, holding her dress, careful not to trip over it. She embraces her long absent nephew and kisses him on the cheek.

"I've missed you so much, my nephew. So I take it you *did* receive the Letter of Assistance." Queen Panela smiles, happily staring into his face again. Akitus walks across the floor to join them. He eyes Mortikai and falsely smiles.

"So, you survived by yourself." He jeers, with his hands on his hips.

"Well, I *am* the Grand Warrior of course," Mortikai rebuts, returning the eyeballing.

"Was the Grand Warrior," Akitus corrects him, smirking. "I now hold that title and have been moved up a couple ranks to Head Knight and Her Majesty's escort," He boasts, reaching over and softly laying a kiss on the back of his queen's hand. "The years have been, how should I say this, unusual without you." He says sarcastically with a smile.

"I bet they have been. By the way, how has that leg of yours been?" Mortikai retaliates with one of his rival's sensitive memories. "I hear my handsome Prynne struck you some years ago when you tried to break him," Mortikai falsely smiles. Dropping the façade, he steps into Akitus's face. "Don't try to break anything of mine, because you will never have it for long." Mortikai seriously affirms.

"Okay, you two," Queen Panela speaks up, interrupting their opposition before it became too serious. "It's nice to see you two having fun with your reuniting. It has been so difficult having to think of how Eva's doing," Her mood completely changes. "I've been wondering whether she's safe or even still alive." Tears fill her eyes, revealing her feelings.

"That's why I've come," Mortikai steps in front of her, giving her a comforting embrace. "She's still alive. Yesterday I received a letter from her. As crazy as it may seem it's true. There was no address, but she says that Dragonlady Ilena is her captor. I have no exact idea of where she is, but I am going to get her back!" He vows determinedly.

"Why on Lásia would she send a letter of distress to you and not the castle? We have an entire brigade of troops that could have saved her." Akitus coldly asks, attempting yet again, to douse Mortikai's spirits.

"Because she knows I'm the greatest warrior alive and she trusts that I'm the only one capable enough of saving her!" Mortikai declares. "Your men have been searching for more than 72 hours and nothing has come up, huh? I've decided to put forth great effort and become a Slayer, myself, as you can see," He shows off his scabbard and pulls off his left glove, exposing the Symbol of Slayer, carved deep into his skin. While putting the glove back on, Akitus scoffs and rolls his eyes.

"Slayer by mouth, not by heart," He says crossly.

“Do you have a problem with me or something?” Mortikai steps into his face, scowling at him. Queen Panela stands back, awaiting their action. Akitus swallows hard and slits his eyes,

“Yes, I do,” He calmly answers. “I find it quite preposterous that you think you can just waltz back here after seven years and be accepted with open arms. I think not! You are still the dishonorable fool who let the King die years ago!” As soon as the ending of the sentence rolled off of his tongue, Mortikai swiftly jabs him in the face, knocking him onto his back! Akitus touches his cut open, bleeding lip.

“Looks like you should watch that lashing tongue of yours, Akitus. Julius, come and clean him up.” Smiling, Queen Panela calls his squire to assist him. She wraps her arm around Mortikai's and leads him into one of the sitting rooms to the left of the banquet hall.

The room, painted all white, was adorned with beautiful, wispy, sheer curtains on the windows. White and sky blue-splotched carpet reached across the clean room. The chairs and sofas were also white. Queen Panela sits on the sofa and Mortikai follows.

“May I ask what happened the day Eva got kidnapped?” He starts his investigation.

“I know something was strange and didn't seem right when Dragonlady Ilena showed up with a few of her people. After I talked to her about a peace treaty, we sat and drank tea. I can't even remember what we talked about because after she left the room, I blacked out. I guess I took a nap or something.” She confusingly tries to remember.

“She may have slipped something in your tea or had one of her minions in the kitchen. Eva told me that when she woke up, everyone was gone and she was calling your name,” Mortikai pauses sadly.

“She then said while searching the halls, Ilena appeared and shot her with an incapacitating orb. When she came to, she was on the back of a dragon and fainted again. She recalled seeing Dragon's Peak nearby, so that's probably where she is,” He reveals. “She's now their prisoner. Eva told me she overheard them preparing a ritual to use her body to resurrect Geoterra. That is why I decided to become a Slayer,” Mortikai shifts his weight and sits up. “I'll have to battle hundreds of dragons and possibly Geoterra himself if he is resurrected.” He explains.

Queen Panela, looking as if in deep thought, looks Mortikai in the eyes.

“Ophius would be so proud of you. I know he would have loved for me to give this to aid you in your journey. Come with me,” She stands and turns toward the door as Mortikai follows. Entering the banquet hall again, Queen Panela notices the table still full of hot food; it would be cold in a moment's time. “Well, before I get you the gift, why don't we sit and eat some of this prepared food.” She bashfully requests. Mortikai smiles, while nodding in agreement. She joins her company at the table again in her seat at the head of the table. Mortikai seats himself on her right, Akitus's seat.

The Queen eats one roasted owl, two grilda legs, one serving of potatoes, and a glass of champagne. Mortikai topples that by eating three roasted owls, a grilda leg, one serving of potatoes and greens each, and two glasses of milk. He leans back, completely stuffed so he wouldn't have to worry about eating for the next three days or so.

“C'mon Aunt Panela, try to top that.” He challenges her.

“No thank you, nephew,” A light burp escapes her mouth. “Oh, excuse me! But I need to keep this lavish figure. Most women of power don't look this good in my age.” She pushes away from the table and stands. Mortikai stands after her, along with the other women at the table. Maids and servants immediately flood the room, collecting the dirty dishes and half-eaten or not touched food for the servants and peasants in the courtyard. Queen Panela wraps her arm around Mortikai's once again, and leads him up the staircase behind them. Walking to the second floor, she leads him to the right and into her royal bedroom.

The entire room was an antique white. The bright sun of the afternoon brightly lit the room. Her queen-sized bed contained four bedposts with a white sheer canopy. A white sofa and chair sat in the far corner of the room. There was a door adjacent the bed that entranced an elaborate bathroom. It was entirely composed of white and gray marble down to the tiles, bathtub, sink, and ceiling.

Queen Panela glides over to her bed and sits upon her soft comforter. Mortikai follows and stands awaiting whatever trinket she had to present to him. Reaching over and opening a drawer of the nightstand, she takes a moderately-sized, purple velvet music box. She lifts the lid as a soft melody is played. A model of the castle's emblem spins slowly with the song. After it ends, Queen Panela grips the top of the emblem and turns it left five clicks, right two clicks, and left three clicks and pushes it down. She pulls it up to cleverly have the entire interior come out.

The secret compartment held a hidden weapon. Queen Panela clutches it, pulling it from the box. Sitting the box aside, she observes the well-crafted weapon. Her hand wrapped tightly around the thick, leather handle. She runs her finger along the sides of the silver, crescent blades attached of each side.

“I was skilled at using the Karaka,” She reveals its name. “It belonged to your uncle before his—mishap. I learned to use it after a few weeks of defense, just in case I needed to defend myself. I always kept it tied securely around my thigh whenever I left the castle on business trips,” She effectively slices through the air with the lightweight weapon. “But now I pass it along to you. I'm sure you know how to use it, right?” She hands it to Mortikai.

“Yes.” He nods, studying the beautiful craftsmanship of the deadly throwing weapon, remembering the grueling training he went through with his uncle. He then ties it around his waist. “Thank you Aunt Panela,” He leans forward, embracing her. “Well, I'd better go and get started on this quest,” He holds his hand out, helping her to her feet. “Goodbye. And I will make sure Eva's safe. You'll be able to hold her in your arms again shortly.” He kisses her on the cheek and smiles before turning and leaving.

Mortikai steps out into the passage and looks over the banister to see the banquet table completely clear. He walks toward the staircase and descends onto the main floor. Akitus unexpectedly appears as if on cue, from the door on the right of the hall. Noticing Mortikai, the scorned warrior cuts his eyes at him. Gradually it changes into a smirk and he begins to approach him.

“That was some feat you pulled back there in front of Her Majesty. Don't ever let anything like that happen again,” He calmly forewarns. “I've never been more humiliated in my life!” Akitus angrily shouts, his mood quickly changing.

“Not even more than when Prynn kicked you?” Mortikai sarcastically jokes.

“Jokes! That's all you are now! I am not joking with you, I am serious!” Akitus stares at him.

“I have an image to uphold around here. I tell you, solitude has softened you greatly!” He eyeballs him.

“See, that's where you're wrong,” Mortikai's expression shifts in seriousness. “Solitude has made me stronger in mind and body and more focused than ever. Now if you'd excuse me, I have a princess to save. Or should that be your current job at the moment?” Mortikai criticizes him, pushing past. “How dare they call you the Grand Warrior?” The disappointed warrior walks toward the exit. The doors suddenly open as Orian enters.

“You're leaving already, Mortikai?” Orian exclaims. “But, you just got here!” He protests.

“I'm sorry Orian, but I need to be off to save your sister,” Mortikai puts his hand on his young cousin's shoulder. “I'll see you soon. Remember; train hard to be a good warrior, if not a great one. If you want to follow in my footsteps, you must take the title of Grand Warrior,” Mortikai glances back at a scowling Akitus. “Especially from anyone who doesn't deserve it, even if he does seem strong,” He adds more tension to the room. “Well, see ya Orian.” Mortikai shakes his hand and pulls him close into a hug. After embracing his cousin, he lets go, smiles, and exits the banquet hall.

Mortikai leaves the castle, the two guards he injured before, staring at him with fear and respect. He walks through the streets of Symbra, his head held high in determination until leaving his previous home. Mortikai walks out onto the Forsab Plains to see all the knights and squires gone.

“Hmm. Where to start? I suppose I'll go to the ruins of Fortla. Maybe I can find some clues.” Mortikai mentally decides, looking around, wondering where to start. Looking far across the plains, he could see the remaining ruins. As he begins to advance toward his destination, a herd of unicorns quickly gallop across the plains. They all break into a race. Mortikai notices one unicorn stallion building speed and pulling away from the rest of the herd, its mane billowing in the wind. Its hooves pound the ground gracefully, looking as if it was running on air. After coming out first in the herd, a majority of the mares were impressed.

“That unicorn reminds me of Prynn,” Mortikai whispers to himself. Following a hunch he had, Mortikai puts his fingers to his lips and whistles loudly. The shrill whistle catches the attention of the stallion, as it stared in Mortikai's direction. A mare nuzzles its neck, but is blown off by the unresponsive stallion. He forgot about the race and the fame received from his winning, as he stared attentively at the origin of the familiar whistle. The herd begins trotting away and grazing, forgetting about the new celebrity.

A breeze of wind begins to blow. The two beings feel the wind on their scalps as it blew their hair. Mortikai slyly smiles, returning his fingers to his lips, whistling again. The stallion whinnies loudly, rearing up and shaking its head. As its hooves return to the ground, the contented unicorn swiftly gallops toward Mortikai. The smiling warrior stares at the gleaming, white body of his now full grown horse as it ran. He stares in wonderment at the visible muscle tone of his stallion, as it circled him cheerfully.

“I knew it was you, boy,” Mortikai says happily, reaching out and rubbing his old friend's mane. Prynn nuzzles Mortikai's hair, massaging his scalp with his lips. “You're probably wondering where I've been

these past few years, huh?" Mortikai begins talking to the horse like he did in its days of youth. "I had to leave for a while to clear up a few problems. But now I need your help greatly." He requests. Prynn rears up again on his powerful hind legs and darts in one direction, circles, and dashes toward Mortikai. Watching the charging horse, he times his impending action. He nonchalantly grabs Prynn's mane as he passes him, leaping onto the wild stallion's back. Together they ride like the wind toward the ruins of Fortla.

Dragonlady Ilena sits in her tall, ruby-encrusted throne. The Mistress of Dragons rests her chin in her hand, growing tired of waiting for a reply about the ritual's status. Ilena waves her right hand, creating a small funnel of swirling fire. The flames crackled as they spun. Suddenly she hears the giant doors of the throne room creak open. Extinguishing the display of fire, she gives her attention to one of her entering scholars.

"Dragonlady Ilena, I have the report on how the ritual's going," The Dragonlord smiles.

"Proceed." She willingly tells him.

"We have located Geoterra's body. He is confined 15,840 feet underground, or three miles, under that Hinderer's Circllet. According to his position, his head will be the first thing to protrude through the ground when we resurrect him." The underling gives his first piece of information.

"Splendid!" Ilena exclaims. "Proceed."

"We've found the correct dagger for the ritual. It is called the Dagger of Erebus. The incantation used to resurrect has been discovered also. It is a sort of, counter to the incantation that Trine used those many years ago. We got the information from the raid in the Symbra Kingdom. All we need to finish the ritual is to recover a dormant egg of his clutch. That alone will prove very difficult."

"Hmm," Ilena thinks of a plan. "Is there some way we can use the dragons to locate them?" She inquires, motioning to a young Imperial dragon that sat in the corner. The jade-colored dragon flaps its small wings, carrying its lizard-like body through the air. Landing softly in her lap, it squeaks loudly, as it wouldn't have its full-grown roar until puberty.

"We've actually thought of that theory, and it would indeed be a good idea. But the egg we need is dormant. Dormant can either be alive or dead and if it is dead, it will have no scent," The bright researcher educates his mistress. "So, we will have to read up on where Geoterra laid his eggs and locate the clutch—if it was recorded that is." He ends his report with a bit of uncertainty.

Ilena strokes the smooth skin atop of the dragon's head. It squeaks in pleasure and licks her hand with its long, slender tongue.

“You are so pretty. I know you'll grow to be a beautiful dragon,” She admires its attributes. She then notices her researcher still standing there. “Oh, you may leave now. Start the search as soon as you're prepared.” The beautiful woman instructs. Bowing deeply, he turns on his heels and leaves where he entered.

“Geoterra, you will be resurrected soon. And together we can rule this planet. Dragons will reign again.” Dragonlady Ilena vows aloud, looking down at the baby dragon.

Mortikai, riding on the back of his reunited friend, Pryn, arrives at Fortla. He dismounts the white stallion and looks at the red sand that lightly blanketed the city. What remained of the city were broken pueblo-style homes. The city had fallen victim to the cyclone of battles from the Dragon War. The remaining people residing in the ruined city were now hags, thieves, and beggars.

“Wait here a moment, Pryn. I'm going to investigate and I'll be right back. I don't want you getting that white coat dirty,” The smiling warrior shows concern for his understanding unicorn. Mortikai pats the side of Pryn's thick neck and enters the red-lightened city.

Walking down the deserted streets, Mortikai peers in the direction of the many dark alleyways. An occasional beggar would be sighted here and there. He notices trinnas, squirrel-like animals that could survive in any climate, running across the dirt road. The creatures were a traveler's joy! Mortikai spots a family of homeless people huddled together as the bony mother breastfed her malnourished baby.

“I can't believe we did this to these people,” Mortikai feels guilt. *“I wonder if there is a shaman around here or someone who can tell me anything about the dragons.”* He thinks, shielding his eyes from the blanket of red sand caught in the blowing wind. A beggar swiftly crawls over to the unsuspecting warrior. He was of an emaciated state, as all twelve of his ribs were visible through his hugging skin. The man was bald and had sun-baked tan skin.

“Please sir; can you spare me anything without any trouble?” The man pleads, looking away in self-doubt. Mortikai smiles, feeling remorse for the man and squats to the man's crouched position.

“We'll do it like this; I will give you what you need in exchange for what I need.” He bargains with the panhandler.

“But, I have no money, nothing to reimburse you with! I lost everything when those Symbrian fools and Dragonlords ran through here fighting and destroying our city, some time ago.” The man angrily rants in a raspy voice.

“Calm down, I didn't mean anything—material,” Mortikai relieves the man. “I just want to know if there is anyone here who could tell me about dragons, Geoterra, or curses of any kind.”

“The only person I know who would have knowledge of that is Kria. She is an old hag who lives up the street at the top of the highest pueblo,” He pauses to vigorously scratch under his neck. “Now that I've given you what I wanted, I was wondering—if I may—have something in return?” The beggar hesitates through a rotting smile.

“What do you need?” Mortikai asks, keeping his side of the bargain.

“I'll appreciate anything that'll give part to my health.” The beggar keeps his needs concise. Mortikai looks down at his belongings and spots his flask. He takes it from his flask and opens it.

Mortikai takes a quick gulp, just to have a taste and hands the flask to the man.

“That's the only thing I have that can contribute to your health. You can have it all if you want,” Mortikai bravely gives up his water. “Drink it all and let me have my flask back.” Mortikai watches the man humbly take it. The starving man ravenously swallows the water. He sighs; his thirst quenched and hands the flask back to Mortikai.

“Thank you, dear sir. I haven't had a drink for days.” The beggar praises him in his natural voice. He then crawls back toward his sheltered pueblo. Mortikai smiles at his good deed and proceeds.

He travels down the road until he spots the tallest pueblo on the right. A giant throw rug covered the front door. Mortikai enters, pushing the rug aside. It was dark inside except for the crack of red light from the outside through the door. A musty smell was heavy in the air. Searching through the dim light, he could see the movements of a few beggars in the corner, sleeping. Hurrying past them before they had a chance to ask for anything, he ascends the adobe stairs. The building was structured a lot like an apartment. At the top of the stairs he notices a flickering light from the last room of the hall. Mortikai advances cautiously toward the room. Moving the hanging rug aside, he gets a view of the candlelit room. There was a large desk ahead of him on the far wall. Dust-covered bookshelves occupied the right wall of the room. On the left side of the room, a pallet and disarranged covers sat on the floor. He steps into the room and looks ahead to notice an elderly woman sitting at the desk, staring at him. She looked at least over 80 years of age, the runny, mud-like wrinkles on her face telling it loudly. Her beady eyes meet and stare focused.

“Welcome, what do you want?” She asks softly.

“Excuse me, but I was told that you could provide me with the extensive knowledge that I need,” Mortikai steps forward nervously, sensing something about the woman. “The knowledge of either curses of the land or dragons would provide useful.” His eyes never leave hers as he beckons to sit down and she nods. “My name is Mortikai Leone and I am a Slayer. I am on a quest to save my cousin and I need to know some things about dragons.” He requests.

The woman stares at him long and hard, examining him. Then the slightest curl of a smile appears on the corner of her closed lips. She leans forward, resting her chin in her hand.

“You say you are a Slayer, correct?”

“Yes ma'am.” He uneasily answers.

“But aren't you required to know every bit of knowledge about dragons, since you will be hunting them your entire life?” She sardonically inquires.

“Yes, that is true. Truthfully, I only christened myself a Slayer yesterday. And in order to complete my task, I need to know how to fight them.” He pleads determinedly.

The old woman smiles again and sits back, nodding softly.

“Well, you would fight them just as you would anything else. But they *do* have two distinct advantages, fire and flight,” She pauses to smile again. “But I guess damaging their wings would knock one of those advantages right off the bat. To dodge the fire, you will have to be extremely nimble, as they may shoot it in a single stream or in orbs, but only for a moment's breath of air. As you should know, as any warrior should, stabbing anything through the heart will deliver a quick kill. Also, a good deal of magic will work.” She nods.

“But I have no magic, except simple survival spells.”

“Well we'll drop that subject now,” She rolls her eyes, stroking the side of her face with the lengthy fingernail on her left index finger. “Now, onto the types of dragons,” She stands from her seat and smiles at him, hoping he had something in return for this lesson. She walks over to one of the small bookcases. Searching the bindings of each book, sliding her finger across them, she grabs one. She carries the large brown book back to the desk, the strange sheer fabrics she wore, wisping mystically. Sitting down, she searches through its delicate, yellow aged pages.

“There are three types of dragons that exist in the world today. The first type I will explain, are the Serpentine dragons. They have long, slender bodies and bat-like wings that curl at the tips of the protruding thumbs and fingers. They are very swift fliers and can coil themselves very tightly for hiding and waiting to strike or during battle, the treacherous demons,” She remarks with scorn toward them. “Physically, these dragons are weak though, so there's one advantage for their opponent. They make up for strength with their speed and poisonous fangs, so be wary. Their breath alone is enough to make one sick or poisoned with the fumes alone.” She turns the book around and pushes it to him. Glancing at the picture, it looked like a snake with wings and small limbs with sharp claws. The needle-like fangs were horrendous, dripping with poison.

“Hmm, they look like a handful.” Mortikai replies, handing her the book.

“The second type are the Massivus dragons, named after the god, Massivus, that those pagan fools believe in for their tremendous strength. Their tails alone could sever a tree in one swing. Their claws can rip through stone in a matter of slashes. Their horns could do the same. With all these strong advances, they do possess one weakness. The damned beasts are so heavy that it takes them a long time to become airborne and even then they have to take a break now and then if flying long distances,” She laughs lightly. “But other than that, sheer power.” She swivels the book around to show Mortikai its size and how it lived up to its name. Bulging muscles were everywhere on the dragon. Their horns protruded in large twists. Their massive jaws looked wide enough to eat anything in its way. Mortikai set to memory that he never wanted to come face-to-face with this beast.

“Lastly, the third type of dragons, are Imperial dragons. They are called imperial because they are the most royal of dragons. Possessing both strength and speed, they are at the top. Most of them are colored either white or the lightest of hues. In size, they are larger than a Serpentine but smaller than Massivus. Their bodies are lizard-like with beautiful wings and a long tail. The hardest to fight in battle, because you must be fully aware of everything going on and stay focused on it.” She turns the book for the last time to show him the stunning dragon. Mortikai sees the picture. It was everything she described it to be. It looked too striking to be deemed evil or even have to be killed, but would have to.

The woman closes the book and stands, walking back to the bookcase.

“Now what did you say about a curse?” She asks, pulling another book out as she returned the previous.

“Some years ago, seven to be exact, I killed the last Dragonlords' leader. And by this occurrence, I passed a curse onto Geoterra. I am fighting to save my cousin, for they are planning to use her to resurrect him. And I need to know the harshness of this curse.” He quickly explains to her.

“Geoterra?! Looks like you have been meddling with some serious people,” She comments, sitting back down at the desk with the book. Flipping through the pages she stops. “Well, I've discovered that you've bestowed an ancient Dragonlord curse upon yourself. In order to save the one used to resurrect, the one who allowed the curse to be conveyed must be killed—first.” She pauses, staring at him, as no emotion changed in his eyes. Mortikai had no problem dying on the battlefield. Nodding, he accepts his fate.

“Thank you for the lesson you've given me. I am sorry, but I have nothing of value to repay you.” He reveals disappointingly.

“Oh no, it is fine,” She reassures him. “Just tell me, who are you and how exactly did you get in this predicament.” She requests.

“I am Mortikai Leone. And during the Dragon War, I killed the Dragonlords' leader after he killed my Uncle, King Ophius. Before I killed him, the bastard told me that when he died he'd pass a curse onto Princess Eva and Geoterra. That was seven years ago, when she was young, but I received a letter from her, telling me that they kidnapped her. And now I must save her.” He talks to the wide-eyed woman.

“You are of Royal Blood?! I had no idea! I thought you were some fool that got caught up in serious affairs,” She concedes. “You would have definitely repaid me by killing Geoterra so Trine and I can finally rest and not have to worry about him.” She smiles in relief.

“What did you say?!” Mortikai exclaims, standing from his chair in disbelief. She motions for him to wait and opens a side drawer of the desk. She pulls out a gold coin and sits it on the desk near the candle. Mortikai squints, studying its design. There was a symbol on each side. The first sign he couldn't distinguish. Grabbing it in his hands, he sits back down. Flipping it, he recognizes the familiar symbol.

“The Symbol of Slayer,” He looks up at her.

“Yes,” She nods in confirmation.

“So, you were a Slayer back then?” Mortikai asks interestingly, handing the coin back to its owner.

“Yes. Trine and I created the legion of Slayers. I am Kria, the greatest female Slayer there is. My partner was Trine, the one who confined Geoterra under the planet. We were a splendid team,” Kria smiles, showing a slight nostalgia. “I see you call yourself a Slayer. Where is your mark of recognition?” She searches his body with her eyes. Mortikai pulls off his left glove, revealing the carved symbol on the back of his hand.

“Here it is,” He holds his hand forth. “I’ve studied and precisely carved it myself.” He adds.

“Ah, you seem determined enough. Well, I just had to find out for myself. Here, take this coin,” She slides the coin across the dusty desk. “In order to kill Geoterra, you will need the Sword of Slayer. To activate its latent powers, this coin will help. It needs the two coins of the highest-ranking Slayers since the last time it was used. This coin should be the only one you need for now,” She pauses, looking off.

“The other coin and the sword—I’m sure he holds them.” She informs Mortikai.

“I greatly thank you, Slayer Kria. One last thing, can you tell me where Trine stays?” Mortikai stands from his chair, ready to leave.

“Somewhere in the Dark Range. I don’t know the exact location, but you’ll know when you’ve found it.” She riddles him. Mortikai looks peculiarly at her, ready to ask another question.

“Shhh,” She hushes him. “Turn and go, you have a long ways ahead of you.” Kria shoos him away to leave him thinking. Mortikai nods and turns, leaving the room. He hastily walks down the adobe stairs and back out onto the streets of Fortla. Mortikai runs down the street and to the entrance of the city to see Prynn patiently waiting for him. Mortikai walks away from the deserted city, brushing the red sand from his body. He gazes in wonderment as the falling sand drifts back to the city to fall back upon the grounds it came from. Ignoring the strange act, Mortikai climbs upon Prynn’s back and they both ride west, to search for more information.

Meanwhile, Princess Eva sat, confined, in her small cell. She sat on the twin-sized bed with her legs crossed, thinking. She closes her eyes and tries to think back to the good times she knew.

“This just makes no sense at all. I can’t believe they are trying to use me to resurrect that dragon. I cannot stand by idly and let them do this!” She says, tired of being helpless. “I almost forgot that I do have an extensive knowledge of the wind spells. I only wanted to use them for a last resort though.” Eva stands to pace around the room. A small puddle of water under the sink catches her attention and she closes her eyes, concentrating. Eva feels a sensation in her palms. Opening her eyes, she aims an

outstretched palm to the still puddle. A gentle breeze ripples the water. Focusing harder, a quick gust of wind splashes the water against the wall.

“It seems I have it!” She says joyfully. “I guess this will finally be of some use.” Princess Eva smirks. She sits back down on her bed and tries to remember her other past teachings of elemental magic.

Five miles past Symbra, Mortikai and Pryn travel the Sands of Johari. The climate of this area was cool with white-colored sand spread about. Large rocks and boulders were embedded in different areas throughout the sand lands. Mostly reptiles and cold-blooded animals lived in the vicinity.

In the distance, Mortikai notices a camp and a group of people. Focusing his sight as they approached closer, he could make out who they were.

“Are those, Symbrian Knights?” He asks himself, recognizing the armor. They soon turn to see him. “Yes, they are knights!” He brings Pryn to a trot and approaches his past teammates. One of them a tall, muscular, brown-skinned man, advances toward Pryn. He looks up into Mortikai's face and a smile slowly tugs at the corner of his mouth.

“Jaxon!” Mortikai exclaims, jumping off of his mount. He greets his old friend with a handshake. The two men embrace and pull back to smile at each other.

“Man, I haven't seen you in ages!” Jaxon bellows with his deep voice.

“I know man! So, how's leading the troop going?” Mortikai inquires, seeing some of the men searching along the sand and some watching them.

“Oh, they're good. We're just out here following some clues to get Princess Eva back. I take it you found out, huh?” He looks at Mortikai's attire.

“Yeah, she sent me a letter somehow and now I am a Slayer. It goes deeper than we all thought. The Dragonlords are planning to use her body to resurrect Geoterra,” Mortikai informs him.

“You mean the ancient King of Dragons, Geoterra? Man, you gotta be kidding!” Jaxon exclaims, finding it hard to believe.

“Yes,” Mortikai nods, seeing a familiar female soldier approaching them. “Atria.” Mortikai says her name as she steps by Jaxon's side.

“Hello Mortikai,” She addresses to him. “It's good to see you again. Where have you been all this time?” She asks in a concerned tone.

“After the accident, I—fled to Vela Wood,” Mortikai explains in a shamed tone. Atria smiles, understandingly. Mortikai smiles back, admiring her green eyes, mocha skin, and long, sandy hair.

Suddenly, some of soldiers yell in alarm!

“What in the—!” Jaxon yells, turning around. The soldiers were screaming, swatting blindly in front of their faces. One of the men scrambles over, pulling at something latched onto his face. The man collapses face-first, near Atria.

“What's wrong?” She turns him over to reveal numerous bite marks in his face and a foot-long, slender creature with wings and claws, biting into his cheek! She gasps, taking a step back. The creature unlatches from his face and hisses, shooting toward hers. In that split second, Mortikai grabs the creature by the neck. Thrashing its body and spitting a green liquid, Mortikai holds its head toward the ground.

“If I'm not mistaken, I'd say this was a baby Serpentine Dragon.” He frowns, looking at the navy blue body and lime green stripes. He grunts as its claws began scratching his hand. Mortikai takes the dragon in both hands and breaks its body.

“What are these dragons doing around here?!” Jaxon asks, seeing the rest of his troops covering their faces and running for safety.

“I don't know, but here they come!” Mortikai unsheathes his sword. Atria equips the dagger at her waist, standing beside Jaxon with his brandished war hammer. The small fleets of serpentine dragons fly through the air, aimed at their targets.

The three warriors spread out into a formation and attack the upcoming swarm. Mortikai sliced numerous dragons in half with his long blade, Atria efficiently defends herself against the creatures, and Jaxon pommels the dragons into a pulp with his heavy war hammer.

“Watch out for—their venomous bite.” Mortikai warns, thwarting a snap for his arm. Looking past the remaining dragonlings, Mortikai notices two suspicious figures fleeing the scene, dressed in suspicious attire.

“Hey, look at those two!” Mortikai shouts, sheathing his sword and withdrawing from the battle to pursue. While sprinting, Mortikai hears a whirring noise behind him. Jaxon's war hammer quickly flies past him, spinning in a violent succession. One of the fleeing men is struck in the right shoulder by the hammer, his bones loudly breaking. Remembering he also had a range weapon, he reaches for his Karaka. He powerfully hurls it at the last fleeing man. Mortikai visibly sees its blades snag the man's tendons behind his knee, rendering him incapable of walking. Resembling a boomerang, it flies back to Mortikai as he catches it. He then approaches the first injured man.

“Who are you?” Mortikai demands, the man lying face-down. As he advances to kick him over, the man surprisingly vaults onto his left hand and flips to his feet. He braces himself, ready to attack.

“Who are you?!” Mortikai repeats himself, reaching for his sword. The man cuts his eyes, debating whether to flee or fight. Mortikai takes a step and to his surprise, the man swiftly hurls a small bag at

Mortikai's face. The wary warrior instinctively slices the bag, dispersing a beige powder meant to blind him. Luckily, he shields his eyes from the virulent substance. A sudden lash quickly flies across his face, bringing a stinging reaction to the open wound. Mortikai unveils his eyes to see his assailant holding a strange-looking whip. Letting rage overtake him, Mortikai rushes the man full-on!

As the man raises his whip to give another crack of his whip, Mortikai swings his sword in an arc, cutting the vicious rope in two. In the next instant, he grabs the man's wrist, bending it backward in an awkward position as the man screams in anguish. The butt of Mortikai's hilt is brought down upon his forehead, dazing him as he falls onto his back.

"I'm going to ask you for the last time," Mortikai sheathes his sword to pull the man up and turns, slamming him onto the ground to stir him. Placing half of his weight on the man's broken shoulder causes him to cry out.

"Okay! I'll talk!" He surrenders in an accent he recognized to belong to a certain people. Before the man could talk, he feels projectiles bouncing off his mail-covered back, rising up toward his neck. Crouching down and spinning on his toe, he sees the second man, running toward him!

"Impossible!" Mortikai exclaims as the man leaps, kicking him in the face. The warrior anticipates the next attack, and grabs the man's foot, failing his roundhouse. He lifts the man off the ground, swinging him around thrice to gain momentum and letting him go. The man flies into the nearest boulder, as planned, hitting with his back. Regaining his breath, Mortikai looks down to see the three uniquely designed shurikens. The agitated warrior picks up his first victim and carries him over to the boulder. Sitting the injured men together he catches his breath before interrogating them.

"Good work, Mortikai," He hears Jaxon's deep voice behind him, sensing Atria with him. "I knew you still had the warrior spirit with you." He crouches to pick up his war hammer and tie it to his belt.

"Did you take care of the dragons?" Mortikai asks, ignoring the compliment.

"Yes." Atria replies while studying her dagger. Mortikai nods, standing over the first injured man.

"Okay Dragonlord," Mortikai reveals their race. "Tell me who the two of you are." He calmly orders. Scowling at him completely, the men knew they had no choice.

"Tinoco," The first man speaks his name as though it hurt.

"Tamarus," The other cites, with the same look of grief. Mortikai nods and begins to shoot his next question.

"What are you two doing over here? Dragon's Peak is in the other direction." Mortikai inquires, squatting down in front of the men. Tinoco suddenly clams up, not wanting to speak anymore. Mortikai grabs his Karaka and places the edge of the blade against his neck, a persuasive smile on his face. Cutting his eyes, Tinoco continues.

"We—were leading the troops off course, so they'd never find where we're holding Eva!" He laughs at the plan. Atria steps forward, kicking the man onto his back. She presses a boot to his neck.

“Look here you bastard!” She screams, applying more pressure. “You better tell us where Princess Eva is or else!” Atria demands, ready to take his life. Tinoco sits there in silence, looking at her in disgust. Atria removes her foot and stomps down on his shoulder. The injured man screams out in agony as she twists her boot on the swollen wound.

Tamarus watches as his comrade was being tortured. He quickly reaches for the hanging whistle from his neck and blows it loudly. An almost silent noise is produced and he drops it, smiling. Jaxon averts his attention to him. Walking past the others, he grabs Tamarus by the shirt, lifting him from the ground.

“What was that little whistle you just blew now?” He snarls in his deep voice. Tamarus struggles, trying to break free. Waiting for an answer, Jaxon stares him in the face. He then powerfully hooks him in the stomach, knocking the wind out of him. Hanging limply as Jaxon held him, Tamarus forces a laugh. Jaxon raises an eyebrow, looking around peculiarly. Suddenly in the blink of an eye, Tamarus reaches up, clutching Jaxon's powerful biceps.

“Vulcan Tenok!” He cutes, producing fire from his palms, engulfing him in flames! Jaxon yells in pain, dropping Tamarus, and patting himself furiously. Tinoco subsequently grabs Atria's right foot and kicks her left, supporting knee, making her lose balance. The retaliating Dragonlord rolls backward to his feet. Shuffling backward quickly, he joins his comrade.

After putting out the flames, Jaxon ragingly rushes the two Dragonlords.

“Jaxon, wait!” Mortikai yells to him. The burly man stops, looking back at him in confusion. Mortikai looks up at the sky. Everyone else then follows suit. The deep roar of a dragon is heard and then they come into view.

“Massivus dragons,” Mortikai utters, his eyes locked on their every movement. The winged behemoths slowly descend in all their muscular glory. Tinoco and Tamarus smile, nodding at the seemingly-frightened warriors.

“That's right, keep your distance.” Tamarus mocks them, watching the dragons land. Mortikai, Jaxon, and Atria stand completely still; watching their only lead to finding Princess Eva, begin to escape. Mortikai feels a burning in his chest.

“*No. I will not be known as a failure again!*” He contemplates a decision. Mortikai sprints in the direction of the immense dragons before they were able to fly off. Tinoco's dragon projects an orb of fire unswervingly at Mortikai! Timing his steps, the determined warrior leaps clear over the projectile. He unsheathes his sword and leaps into the air at the dragon, bringing his sword back for an overhead slash. Instead of slicing through to the dragon's brain, his sword digs deep into one of its horns. The dragon roars, swinging its neck up, hurling Mortikai high into the air. While rolling in mid-air, both Massivus dragons breathe orbs of fire at Mortikai's body. The hovering warrior, sees the attacks and slashes each sphere of fire effectively, the degree of the flames heating his face. Further falling toward the ground, Tamarus, bent on killing him, begins hurling shurikens at his body. Jaxon witnesses the assault and retaliates by hurling his war hammer at the dishonorable man.

The heavy weapon twirls through the air, heading for its target. Tamarus sees the dangerous weapon

approaching out the corner of his eye and ceases throwing to face the attack head-on. His Massivus dragon unexpectedly knocks the threat aside with its solid horns! Jaxon stares in awe at the feat. Seemingly frozen, he watches the dragons breathe numerous fire orbs in his direction.

“Jaxon, move!” Atria slaps him, bringing him to attention and pulling him aside.

Mortikai falls safely to the ground in a crouch and stands, backing away. Tinoco's dragon flaps its wings, slowly becoming airborne. Mortikai, his heart beating a thousand times a minute, rushes Tamarus's dragon. The defensive dragon spins, swinging its tail. Mortikai is struck from the side with all its sheer power. Knocking him twenty feet, Mortikai watches the dragon ascend and everything fading to black.

“You soldiers are poor excuses for men! I can't believe you all ran away like cowards! You are supposed to be representing Symbra's strength and you go and run off! I'm sure the little mongrels weren't *that* difficult to kill! We might not be skilled against dragons, but *never* give up! Now all of you pack up this camp and all your belongings. We are heading back home to report to Her Majesty!” Jaxon's deep voice roars throughout the base camp at his soldiers. Mortikai stirs and sits up to feel soreness on his right side. Pulling the covers down, he sees bandages rapped around his upper torso. The recovered warrior looks around to see himself in a small tent. His armor, weapons, boots, elastic shirt, and chain mail tunic sat in a heap off to the side. Mortikai slowly moves onto his hands and knees, ignoring the slight pain from his injuries. He assumed having a few broken ribs or something like that. Crawling over to his equipment, he first grabs his elastic shirt and slips it over his bruised body and then the tunic next. Hearing nothing but silence outside the tent, he sits back and puts his boots on. Mortikai stands and leaves the tent.

“Mortikai!” Atria exclaims, standing near his tent's entrance. “You aren't ready to leave yet. I don't think your body's in condition to.” She attempts to restrain him, showing concern for him.

“Atria, I'm fine,” He takes her hands. “I'm just a little sore,” He scrunches his face, stretching with slight pain. He looks up to see the sun's position well past noon. “Besides, I still have a mission to complete,” Mortikai tells her, turning and looking around. “Where's Prynn?” He inquires about his unicorn.

“He's near Jaxon's tent.” Atria answers while looking down toward the ground. Her face displayed her sadness. She secretly loved Mortikai back then and still felt some of those feelings. She felt bad not being able to help him.

Mortikai notices this and fights back the feeling to help her. She was a soldier and she was supposed to be tougher than this. Atria had always shown great independence and strength. This new emotion she was showing was foreign to him. Shaking the feeling, Mortikai walks off in search of Jaxon's tent.

After asking a few soldiers, he finally found Prynn. He was peacefully grazing when he approached him. The unicorn stops, pricking his ears as he catches Mortikai's scent. Prynn lifts his head and trots over to his companion, nuzzling his face. Mortikai smiles in return, reaching up and rubbing his face.

“That unicorn sure is a calm fellow,” Mortikai hears a deep voice behind him. He looks back to see Jaxon standing there.

“Thanks Jax, for everything.” The humble warrior expresses his gratitude. Jaxon nods in return.

“We should be thanking you, or our entire fleet would've probably died in the middle of nowhere,” He laughs sincerely. “I take it you're ready to leave?” Jaxon watches his former partner climb upon the unicorn. “I hope those ribs don't bother you too much.”

“I should be fine. I need to go find Eva. So I'd better leave now,” He turns Prynn in the direction of northeast. “Well, it was nice seeing you all again. I pray you all make it home safely,” Mortikai wishes them good fortune before riding off with Prynn.

Sitting in front of the mirror wrapped in a satin sheet, brushing her long, jet black hair, Ilena prepares herself to leave. Her lady-in-waiting prepares her battle armor behind her. The red body armor sat on a bust of Ilena's body type. After brushing her hair as straight as possible, Ilena applies her makeup.

“Dragonlady, why must you go? Wouldn't it be best for you to stay here in the safety of the fortress?” The servant pleads, opening the storeroom containing Ilena's weapons.

“I'm sorry, Shay, but those fools act like they can't complete a simple task. They are taking too long to find the sacrosanct treasures to resurrect our master and Tinoco and Tamarus failed to stay concealed and lead the Symbrian knights off course. I hear there's some prodigy out there who isn't afraid to attack a dragon head-on,” Ilena says nonchalantly, applying mascara.

“A fool!” Shay remarks, lining Ilena's small throwing knives across a table.

“Yes, indeed. He is searching for the Princess also. This man also single-handedly captured both Tinoco and Tamarus. So he is a force to be reckoned with,” Ilena stands from the stool. She walks over to the manikin and lets her sheet fall to the floor, exposing her naked body. Ilena ties on each piece of armor with the help of her lady-in-waiting. She attaches the extra knives to their niches and grabs her cherished weapon, the Ryu Halberd.

“Never send a man to do a woman's job!” She smiles, standing after lacing her spiked heels. “Go and ready a Serpentine.” Ilena lastly orders, walking out of the room behind her running servant.

Prynn gallops like the wind northward with Mortikai riding on his back. As the sun was beginning to set, the two were approaching the Shadow Marsh. The seemingly cursed quagmire was home to a limited amount of creatures. Its muddy land and forever dark status was difficult to sustain much life. Judging by the bright orange sun's position, Mortikai saw it was past eight in the evening. He urges Prynn to pick up speed. The stallion's incredible speed proves worthy and they make it to the outskirts of the Shadow Marsh before dark.

Mortikai slows Prynn to a stop as they see the Marsh's shadows on the grass. He looks up to see nothing blocking the sunlight between the trees. He shakes off the eerie chill he received from the

strange phenomenon. Mortikai dismounts his unicorn and they walk through the introductory forest of a few trees here and there waiting for it to fade into the Marsh. Trudging through the thin forest, Mortikai notices the flora becoming gloomier. He glances back quickly to see the dimmer orange light of the setting sun still on the Forsab Plains, finally proving how it got the name, "shadow".

Traveling deeper, Mortikai looks around him and in the trees, to avoid any ambushes. His pheromone was alert and running, ready to sense any enemies in his vicinity. The ground quickly becomes noticeably wetter and muddier. The trees also began to thin out until he was in the full fledged marsh. The sky was blocked by the thick canopy of the sparingly, immense, dentro trees. The thick blanket of fog made it hard to see as they trekked through the squishing mire with each step.

"So far I haven't noticed any signs of life, although I do hear cicadas. I hope this mud returns to this place after I leave," Mortikai sighs from the joke. *"If this is how dark it is during sunset, I'd hate to be out in the open during the nighttime. I really don't see any shelter around here to sleep. I could probably sleep on the Prynn's back if he could hold my weight for the entire night while he sleeps,"* Mortikai reaches over to rub his unicorn's barrel-like rib cage. *"I've been here only twenty minutes and already I want to—wait a minute! What was that?"* Mortikai breaks all of his thoughts as he hears the death cry of an animal in the distance. The cautious warrior crouches down low, pulling on Prynn's mane to follow, but the unicorn refuses to shy away. Mortikai admires his stallion's courage with a smile and stands his ground also. He hears the sound of bones breaking and animal whining again.

"Sounds like a Chilalfa Deer," Mortikai recognizes the call of the rare, out-of-season, game animal. Next he hears numerous high-pitched shrieks and clicks. "It seems like there's life out here after all, nocturnal life," He apprehends. "We'd better watch out, since they seem intelligent." The warrior whispers aloud, continuing on. Mortikai glances around once more to see small red lights illuminating and disappearing now and then. It was the light of fireflies. He was amazed to see them in red, while used to seeing them in blue. While trying to catch one in his hand, he steps on something that snaps like a twig. Mortikai looks down and picks up the half-broken object. Wiping the muck off, he reveals an arrow. It was made of a smooth, durable wood and the arrowhead was composed from a sharpened rock. The shaft of the arrow was painted with three rings.

"Beautiful craftsmanship." Mortikai marvels at the item. Soon after, he discards it, hoping it wasn't made from whatever creatures killed the deer a while ago.

Mortikai and Prynn walk slowly through the shin high mud for at least two hours. The two climb up a knoll that slightly protruded through the dark mud, and over it. Mortikai trudges slowly, struggling to stay awake. Heedlessly dozing off, he quickly regains his balance before falling into the mud.

"I need to rest, now!" He confesses, looking around. His eyes search for one of the gigantic trees. One catches his eye at least two hundred meters away. Mortikai walks quickly, with high knees, through the thick mud, ready to reach his destination and finally sleep. Together, he and Prynn reach the tree to see it bore a large swell at least a yard from the tree and circled the entire trunk.

"This is good enough for me to rest on." Mortikai says, sitting down on it. "Now I don't have to climb the tree." He rubs his hands on the swell to feel a soft moss. It would make due for cushion. Mortikai lies down on the enlargement of bark and stretches out. Without a moment's notice, he quickly dozes off as Prynn keeps an eye out for danger, but then falls asleep himself.

"Looks like the unicorn has finally dozed off, now I can make my move." A mysterious person inches slowly, branch by branch. He lowers himself silently, making sure not to attract any attention. The lowest branch was right above the sleeping warrior's body. The lurker locks his legs around the width of the damp branch and swings around, suspending upside-down. He reaches for the warrior's sword, but sees it too risky to remove from the scabbard. He then turns his attention to a foreign weapon tied to his waist...

The stalker descends more, now hanging by his boots. He reaches toward the warrior's waist, gripping the double-edged projectile weapon. He sees it was tied by means of string. The thief then begins untying the weapon. His work was so careful; it might have taken him five minutes to finish untying the knot. As he inches slowly back up, something unexpected takes place...

Mortikai's eyes shoot open, his senses flaring, and sits up, to catch a quick swipe toward the neck from his own Karaka! He feints back, avoiding the attack and grabbing the thief's wrist, wrapping his ankles around his neck. He pulls down strongly, forcing the thief to let go and crashes his head into the swell of the tree. His body falls limply and he slides into the mud. Mortikai ties the Karaka back to its place and stands to his feet.

"What the hell was this kid thinking?" He says aloud, kicking his body over onto his back. Mortikai sees the face of his attacker. He was a teenage boy with a grubby face. His defined cheek bones revealed he was well in shape. The unconscious boy was dressed in a pair of dark leggings, a black long-sleeved shirt and a pair of black boots. He squats and reaches toward the boy's head, placing his fingers on the boy's jugular vein. His pulse suddenly speeds from steady to rapid!

Mortikai unexpectedly catches a boot to his forehead and falls back onto his rear. The boy kick-flips to his feet and turns around quickly. He reaches toward his boot and grabs a small cleaver, up and ready to fight! As Mortikai begins to stand, the boy lunges forward, attempting to slash him in the chest. Mortikai lies back, grabbing his wrist and kicks him completely over his body. The boy splashes face first in to the mud and Mortikai quickly stands. He unsheathes his sword, hoping he wouldn't have to do what he was trained to do in a situation such as this.

The young assailant furiously jumps to his feet and turns around. He hastens toward Mortikai, swinging his cleaver frantically. The small attacks were deflected away by Mortikai's double-handed sword.

"This kid is very quick on his feet," Mortikai observes, stepping back with each deflection, needing more room to block the furious swipes. *"I need to unarm him quickly before I have to kill him!"* Mortikai decides, trying to interpret each move. Timing it just right, Mortikai swiftly frees his left hand from his sword. He grabs the boy's wrist and drops his sword, trying to wrench the cleaver from his hand. The plan backfires, as the boy grabs Mortikai's wrists and jumps, kicking him in the chest with both feet and falling as Mortikai releases him.

"This damn kid is skilled! Let's see how good his reflexes are!" Mortikai picks up his sword and hurls it like a javelin at the kid's chest! The experienced attacker jumps backward, simulating a backflip, landing on his hands, just missing the sword through his open legs, and jumping back to his feet. He abruptly catches a blow to the face! Mortikai delivers a left hook to the boy's gut and uppercuts him with a right. The force of the blow picks him up off his feet as he lands on his back. Stunned by the sudden chain of attacks, he lies there as Mortikai lunges forward, grabbing him by the shirt. He violently lifts him from the ground, swinging him like a rag doll, and pinning him against the tree's thick trunk.

"Now tell me, what are you doing here?" Mortikai questions him.

"Okay, okay just don't kill me!" The boy cries in distress.

"Give me one reason why I shouldn't!" The angered warrior yells.

"My name is Jodo Zidane and I was raised as a thief—

"I can see that! Tell me something I don't know!" Mortikai cuts him short.

"I'm 15 years old. I—don't even know my mother or father and I have been living by my wits. I've been in this Marsh for almost a week now. I can fend for myself—by ways of stealing that is," He explains his expertise. "It is all I know; all of the thieves of Fortla raised me. I escaped the Circle when I was almost killed by one of my fellow thieves who tried to steal my winnings from the local street fights," Mortikai, showing mercy, lets him down from the tree. Prynn walks over and exhales deeply through his nostrils.

"It's okay Prynn." Mortikai calms his noble unicorn. Prynn, satisfied with an ear rub, turns and continues keeping watch.

"Thank you," Jodo thanks him, rubbing his sore jaw. "Anyway, when I saw you I thought you had some riches, since most warriors do. I am sorry for what I have done. I may have been a thief most of my life, but I do have a sense of moral," He pauses to pick up his dropped cleaver. "Well, I thank you for sparing my life. I have to be on my way now." Jodo smiles before walking in the opposite direction.

"Hey Jodo, where are you headed to?" Mortikai sympathetically asks.

"Wherever comes my way." The loner coldly answers.

"The road ahead for me is a bit dangerous, but do you want to come with me anyway?" Mortikai asks, feeling guilty if he was to let the kid leave alone.

"Are you sure? I can fend for myself if I need to," He reassures. "But I guess I'll come along, and be

your apprentice or something,” Jodo quickly answers his own question, not giving Mortikai anytime to reply. “You were the first to ever beat me, especially when I had the upper hand.” He confesses, walking over to the swell and sitting down. Mortikai smiles and laughs under his breath.

“Slow down, kid. You think you're so tough, huh? I'm sure you know a lot about this Marsh, right?” Mortikai hopes to hear a “yes”.

“Actually, no. I've heard noises here and there but other than that, no,” He confesses. “I've been finding food here and there to survive off of and I slept in the trees.” Jodo scratches his neck, staring Mortikai in the eyes. Mortikai nods and searches the muddy floor of the Marsh, finding his sword. He picks it up and flings the muck from its steel blade before sheathing it.

“Well, I guess I can continue on, now. I don't feel like sleeping anymore,” Mortikai walks over to Prynn and rubs his back. The stallion looks backward and steps around to face him. “It's time for us to go, boy.” Mortikai motions for his unicorn to follow. Jodo stands to his feet and walks over to walk side-by-side with his new “master”.

“So, what kind of quest are you on?” Jodo sparks a conversation.

“I am off to save my cousin, Princess Eva, from the Dragonlords and their mistress, Dragonlady Ilena. They plan to use her body somehow to resurrect Geoterra. I'll have to kill numerous dragons and people and possible, Geoterra if somehow I'm too late,” Mortikai explains, his eyes never leaving their focused gaze ahead.

“So that makes you a Slayer, right?” Jodo curiously inquires.

“Yes,” Mortikai nods, ending the conversation. The walk from then on became a bit silent. Mortikai was beginning to become accustomed to the noises of the Marsh and remember each animal call from Jodo's knowledge. As the party traveled while talking, Mortikai began to like the young boy and find him to be quite useful.

“I know it's mostly unheard of but, do you ever get scared in battle?” Jodo stares him in the face, wanting an honest answer, ready to catch a smidgeon of lying on his face. Mortikai smiles, ready to answer the unexpected question when something catches his attention. His pheromone rages as he hears something piercing through the wind.

“Jodo, watch out!” The swift warrior pulls his newfound apprentice toward him, unsheathes his sword, and deflects an arrow in one graceful move. The arrow was aimed directly for Jodo's head! Mortikai squats down and picks up the broken arrow to recognize the same markings as the previous arrow he found. Mortikai shoots back to his feet, searching the darkness, guiding his hearing with his eyes. He suddenly hears a shriek and clicking noise following it. It was also the same from earlier in the night. Faintly, he hears the sound of bows being loaded with deadly arrows.

“Run!” Mortikai shouts, running with Prynn and Jodo in the opposite direction. They run as fast as they could through the high mud. As Mortikai hears the twang of their bowstrings, he searches through the fog for a tree to take cover behind. Unfortunately, there were none...

He hears the wind-piercing arrows closing in for a kill and quickly spins around, unsheathing his sword. At the final; second before life and death, Mortikai swiftly deflects the arrows from killing Jodo and Pryn. Jodo, crouched down and covering his head, realizes he was still alive. He stands to his feet in anger and steps beside Mortikai.

“Show yourselves, cowards!” He yells into the darkness. Mortikai looks down at him in a mixture of anger and bewilderment, hearing their enemies descending from the trees they were elevated in and begin to advance toward them.

“Get ready for battle, because your wish is about to be granted!” Mortikai orders Jodo, reaching for his Karaka. He hurls it into the darkness and listens to hear the blade rip through flesh and a following death cry. The Karaka circles back around and Mortikai leaps up, grabbing it by the handle as it passes overhead. Bringing it to face height, he sees the blood and hanging entrails on its blades. He attaches it back to his waist. Suddenly, six figures emerge through the fog. They walked slightly bent over. Their fur-covered bodies had humanoid hands with claws and squirrel-like faces. Their basic armor composed of a row of thick sticks tied together around their midsections, thighs, forearms, and backs. Their weapons were also primitive. Their knives were constructed from large, carved or jagged rocks tied to wooden handles.

Mortikai and Jodo stand their ground, ready to defend themselves. The black and gray colored creatures come into view and stand tall on their hind legs, showing their ability to be quadrupedal and bipedal.

“Those must be the Zangalan!” Jodo exclaims, looking up at Mortikai.

“Is that what they are called? How do you know?” He inquires, keeping his eyes locked on the enemy.

“I've heard stories about them and the thieves warned me about them before,” He looks back toward the creatures. “They certainly fit the description.” He adds. The Zangalan suddenly shriek and charge forth!

Mortikai bends his knees, gripping his leather hilt tightly, ready to sever any limbs if necessary. Jodo clutches his cleaver's handle with anticipation. The first three Zangalan pick up speed, running toward their chosen enemy. Mortikai sees two running toward him and another toward Pryn. Jodo's heart beats like pistons as he sees one approaching him. Mortikai brings his blade down in a vertical slash at his opponent, but to his surprise, it was evaded. It quickly rolls out of the way and attempts to trip him. Mortikai shuffles back and stabs down into the ankle of the black-furred Zangalan. It shrieks in anguish before Mortikai unmercifully stomps down on its fragile skull, crushing it.

Pryn whinnies, charging the oncoming Zangalan, his horn aimed to kill. The gray-furred Zangalan nimbly hops over the horn and onto the stallion's back. As it begin to bring its blade down, Pryn rears up, throwing the foe from his back. The stallion turns around and runs to trample his enemy. The dazed Zangalan rolls out of the way a moment too late, to have its right arm broken by Pryn's weight. The creature shrieks, scrambling to its feet. Pryn snorts loudly and charges again. The Zangalan was ready this time, slashing at the forthcoming unicorn. Pryn rears, meeting his hooves with the blade, kicking. As his foe stumbles, Pryn charges, stabbing the creature through the chest! It shrieks, raising its blade slowly to kill. Pryn shakes the creature wildly and stopping, throwing it from his horn.

Jodo and the black Zangalan he battled were going toe-to-toe with their swift attacks. Jodo shuffles back as the creature slashes violently at him. Jodo waits, and swiftly grabs its wrist, countering its attack with a kick in the jaw. It pulls back and shakes the pain off. Jodo quickly delivers another kick to its face. As its head snaps back from the blow, it swipes horizontally. Jodo drops his cleaver and promptly grabs its wrist, laying his left ankle on its shoulder and jumping, locking his feet around its neck and pulling as they fall into the mud. As they were on the ground, Jodo twists his hips, breaking the creature's neck. He rolls backward to his feet, ready for the next attack.

The remaining Zangalan were black-furred. They fall down onto all fours and quickly dash toward Mortikai and Jodo. They identically kick off of their hind legs, performing double somersaults and aiming kicks for their foes' chests. Mortikai lunges his sword forward powerfully, stabbing the Zangalan between the legs and literally making a Zangalan shish kabob. It shrieks in downright agony. Blood runs down Mortikai's sword as he kicks the suffering creature off of his blade.

Jodo received the kick to his face and it succeeds in knocking him onto his back. The Zangalan lands above him and stabs down for his head! Jodo slides back, with help from the mud, and rolls to his feet. He kicks the creature across the head and slashes a deep gash in its face. It looks him in the eye as if nothing happened and pounces atop of Jodo, pinning his shoulders under its knees. It raises its blade and brings it down toward his face to have it suddenly halted!

It looks to its left to see Mortikai holding its wrists. The warrior strongly slugs it in the face. It falls back, squirming and clicking in pain, holding its bashed nose. Mortikai bends over and helps his young apprentice to his feet.

"Remember; stay aware of every attack, even if it isn't anticipated. And try to get the job done quick and easy, no playing around." He explains, as Jodo nods and turns around ready for a second round. The Zangalan stands, looking viciously at Mortikai, baring its teeth. It hurls its weapon at him and holds its claws up. Mortikai evades the projectile and steps back, shaking his head and pointing to Jodo so he could battle it. It switches its attention to the boy and jumps at him. It slashes him across the chest, almost ripping through the shirt though he felt the sting of air from cut wounds. Jodo steps back, avoiding its swift, vengeful swipes. He times the attack and slashes at its face, cutting it again. The Zangalan shrieks loudly and pounces again, Jodo was ready this time.

He falls onto his back, but quickly reverses it, rolling on top of his enemy and holding its wrists in his left hand. Jodo holds the struggling Zangalan still and forcefully slashes toward its throat. It moves aside just in time to get cut across the shoulder. It shrieks once more and slashes across Jodo's left cheek, then right and left again! It quickly rolls backward onto its feet and turns tail, running toward a tree.

Mortikai grabs his Karaka and throws it in the fleeing creature's direction. He hears a loud shriek and a splash of mud. Before going to check if it was dead, he looks over his shoulder at Jodo. He was sitting down, facing the opposite direction, shielding his face.

"You alright?" Mortikai kindheartedly asks. Jodo sighs and stands up, his back still facing him. Mortikai walks around to see numerous cuts in his face from the Zangalan's claws. Mortikai's brow rose high as he saw how deep they were. "You okay, right?" He asks again.

"No, I'm not. This shoot hurts," Jodo calmly answers, looking him in the eye.

“You can say that again. You left your face wide open. You need a better weapon, because that cleaver is almost useless. You can only deliver sufficient, quick chops with it,” He surveys the cleaver. “Well, I guess you can just wipe the blood from your face because there's no water around here from the look of things.” Mortikai suggests.

“No, I can't leave this wound open. I'll make a mud poultice.” Jodo squats and grabs a handful of mud. Tearing it into strips; he presses them onto his wounds, seeing no trouble in it at all. Mortikai shrugs at the survival act and walks off to retrieve his Karaka from the corpse. He reaches the Zangalan's motionless corpse. Mortikai sees his Karaka dug deep into the back of the creature's neck. He squats and pulls it from its flesh. Prynn walks over to Mortikai with Jodo following beside him. The group continues on, anxious to get out of the retched Marsh. As they trudge along, they are surprised to hear a rhythm to the west of them. Mortikai stops and looks in that direction to hear bongos and other rhythmic instruments. It sounded like a celebration of some sort.

“I wonder what's going on.” Jodo curiously comments.

“Let's go check it out. I bet it's where the Zangalan come from.” Mortikai changes course and leads them west now. He recalls the map in his mind. It wouldn't be too off course for him. They walk hastily in the mud, determined to find out. An orange light is then seen dancing against seemingly imaginary walls. Mortikai frowns and paces slower, ready for an immediate drop. He suddenly starts to feel himself slide and backs away.

“This part dips down into some kind of ravine. Let's climb down as much as possible and try to see what's going on,” Mortikai plans. He turns to Prynn. “Stay here and make sure our exit is secure, buddy.” He says to his stallion. Mortikai and Jodo slowly walk down the slippery, steep hill. It had no grip whatsoever, so one slip and one of them could slide down into the heart of the Zangalan's Pit. The fire becomes brighter and the drums louder as they descended more. It looked deep, but the mud created that illusion. The two make it close enough to see what was going on. Luckily, there were a few giant rocks for them to hide behind. Mortikai kept his pheromone high and alert.

They saw the Zangalan dancing around a bonfire and humongous weeping willow behind it. Some of the Zangalan hung from this tree, clapping with glee and happily clicking. Some of the females sat outside the fire, holding their babies and clapping contentedly. The young Zangalan were running and playing around. The elders were sitting near the fire, their long, gray beards explaining their age. The drummers sat outside the fire, beating joyfully.

“Looks like I was right, but what are they celebrating?” Mortikai whispers to Jodo. No response. He looks over to see Jodo absolutely speculated at how advanced they were living in this Marsh. Mortikai smiles to see him happy to be learning. Suddenly his pheromone flares wildly! His eyes widen and he turns and looks, searching the darkness with his ears. Overhead, a giant flapping is heard. The Zangalan look up and shriek and click, wondering what was disturbing their gala. It was too dark for Mortikai to see, but he could hear just as well. Sweat forms in his palm as he waits to see what was descending down into the ravine. His eyes narrow and his body heats as he saw who it was...

A red, slender body descends and lands on its small, hind legs. Next the upper torso, with small legs and the extended, curled wings with purple underneath. Lastly, the head appears, chameleon-like with a

roaring muzzle and thousands of needle-like teeth emerging. Mortikai notices the poisons dripping from its atrocious jaws. Mortikai's eyes take focus on the rider seated on its neck. She was a woman of beautiful proportion. She possessed long, jet black hair wearing revealing, red battle armor, sitting on her shoulders, a fire red metal bustier, red talon gauntlets, a roman-looking battle skirt, short greaves guarding her shins, and battalion heels. The corrupt look on her face displayed evil. Just by premonition, he could tell she was Dragonlady Ilena...

Mortikai's breathing begins to quicken as he reaches for the hilt of his sword. Jodo notices and looks at him.

"What's wrong?" He asks worriedly.

"It's Dragonlady Ilena. I have to kill her now!" Mortikai's instincts were up front and in control. "We're outnumbered by that dragon and what if the Zangalan interfere?" Jodo tries to reason. "But, if you're certain we'll make it out alive, I'll have faith in you, master." Jodo respectfully decides.

Mortikai stares at Jodo and a slight smile spreads over his face, as another name was added to his persona.

"Alright kid, I see what you mean." Mortikai comes back to his senses. They both look toward the dragon to see Dragonlady Ilena leap from the dragon's neck and land before all of the Zangalan. Mortikai sees the deadly halberd in her hand. All the Zangalan shriek and shy away, showing their fear of the woman.

"Silence!" She demands. "I am Dragonlady Ilena and I have a task for you to complete. I am going to resurrect my master, Geoterra, in a few days. We have the majority of the artifacts needed, a pure heart, the Dagger of Erebus, and a certain incantation. All we need is a dormant egg of Geoterra's. This is where you creatures come into play," She smiles, waving her hand her right hand in an arc and bringing it down. She then "sits" in thin air. "I want you to search the entire Shadow Marsh for one. When you've found it, send a scout to Dragon's Peak in the Dark Range to have us come and collect it. If you decide not to do this, I will burn this tree to the ground!" She turns around, pointing her hand at the giant, weeping willow. The Zangalan all shriek in mercy. "Well, I see you don't want me to burn the oldest tree in Lásia, do you? Well, I'd better have the egg in three days!" She specifies, turning around.

"Ilena," One of the elder Zangalan stands and ambles toward her, his loose robe and large sleeves billowing with each step. "How will we find this egg in three days? And how do you know it is even here in the Marsh?" He asks in a rough, elderly voice. She turns around and stares him in the eye.

"I suggest you get to work now." She says coldheartedly.

"But—"

"Just do it!" She screams, swinging her halberd horizontally and broadsiding the elder across the face with her halberd. The Zangalan flies off to the side and falls unconscious.

"That evil wench!" Mortikai stands and readies a leap.

“What are you going to do, master?” Jodo asks, watching Mortikai. The warrior quickly runs a few steps and leaps off of the giant rock, leaping out! Mortikai unsheathes his steel sword and the blade glints in the light of the fire. The Zangalan shriek as they see the unknown man soaring through the air. Dragonlady Ilena looks up to see him. She smirks, reading the rage in his eyes. Mortikai brings his sword into an overhead slash as Ilena raises the iron staff of her halberd horizontally in defense. The interception of their weapons forms a loud chime and a bright spark. Mortikai pushes strongly, bringing the balanced weapons closer to her neck and moves his face closely to hers.

“You will die for trying to kill my cousin!” He assures her in a harsh whisper. Her mocking expression instantly changes into fury, making her muscles bulge. She pushes her staff strongly, throwing him back and swinging her halberd overhead and horizontally, aimed for his midsection. Mortikai performs a backflip through the fire to avoid the deadly attack. Ilena fiercely screams, jumping through the fire continually swinging her halberd. Mortikai ducks each attack, and sweeps her onto her back. Wasting no time, he steps forward and drives his blade forcefully down toward her head!

Dragonlady Ilena rolls toward the fire and right of the ground onto her feet. With his sword deep into the soil, Mortikai stares at her through the dancing flames to see her smirking and standing with her halberd in hand. Pulling his sword from the dirt, he notices her hand wave forward, signaling her dragon to attack. Mortikai freezes on the spot, his heart beating wildly. He looks over his shoulder to see a few female Zangalan sitting with faces of terror at the dragon in front of him.

“Go! Get out of the way! All of you!” Mortikai turns and demands as they scatter, with their babies in arm, and running to other sides of the ravine. Chivalrously seeing that they were safe, Mortikai turns back toward the fire to see the serpentine dragon lunging through the fire's wavering flames. In that split second, he witnessed its horrible, open jaws and the rows of needle-like teeth dripping with poison. In defense, Mortikai holds his sword vertically. The dragon rotates its head, biting the length of the sword and pushing its prey backward. Mortikai's heart nearly leaps out of his chest, to see himself face-to-face with the horrendous beast. He feels the dragon pulling against his braced stance, either attempting to wrench his sword away or pull him into a more dangerous position. Taking a chance, Mortikai positions his feet onto the dragon's teeth and sternly pulls the sword up, cutting the sides of its mouth, and flipping backward onto his feet. The dragon shakes its head violently and opens its mouth. Without warning, a stream of poison is shot at Mortikai!

He leaps aside avoiding the dark green venom. The dragon slithers forward swiftly and coils itself around Mortikai's body. He pulls himself up before being coiled around the upper torso. The trapped warrior supports himself by his hands on his enemy's coiled body and pulls up to be constricted tighter around the legs!

“It seems like my dragon has you in its coils.” Dragonlady Ilena mocks. As Mortikai looks up at the dragon's mouth, it gives him a glance that if given a name would have been a smirk. It shrills lightly, ready to attack!

As it constricts tighter, attempting to pull the strength from its prey, Mortikai glances up to see Jodo gliding through the air! The boy lands on the neck of the dragon, repeatedly slashing the creature's head. The thick scales prevented the cleaver from cutting too deep. The serpentine dragon shakes wildly, trying to pry Jodo from its head. It lastly reaches back, using its claws to wrench the brave boy from its neck and around it its face. It slits its eyes in anger and opens its ferocious mouth. Jodo hears

the fire rolling in the back of its throat and sees its light coming forth against the reddened flesh. He instinctively hurls his cleaver deep into its throat! It shrills and roars, flinging Jodo at the muddy, yet firm side of the ravine. He pushes out and lands on his feet. Looking to his right, he sees Mortikai slipping from the loosened grasp of the dragon.

“Are you okay, master?” Jodo runs over to him.

“Yes, I’m fine,” The tired warrior answers, catching his breath. “That was very brave of you, thank you.” He expresses his gratitude.

“It was nothing; I needed to pay you back anyway.” Jodo modestly says. Mortikai smiles and turns his attention to the squirming, vomiting beast. He clenches the hilt of his sword and looks for an open spot on the neck to slay it.

“Come back to me!” Dragonlady Ilena commands. The dragon slowly looks back and Mortikai runs, leaping for the kill. Ilena aims her palm and he is smacked backward by the dragon's whip-like tail. Mortikai lands onto his feet to see her eyes glow red along with the agonizing dragon. Controlling her means of transportation, it slithers harmlessly through the fire and she jumps onto its neck as it ascends immediately into the sky. Not wanting to let them escape, Mortikai runs around the bonfire and hurls his Karaka at the dragon before it was completely out of sight. He hears another shrill cry and his attack is answered with a stream of fire! Mortikai shuffles backward as the flames explode on the bonfire, throwing flames to and fro.

Mortikai pinpoints the whistling sound of the Karaka and stands under it. He lets it fall in front of him. He retrieves it from the soft dirt and returns it to his belt. Mortikai averts his attention to his right to see the Elder Zangalan leaving his area of cover and ambling over. Mortikai turns to him and bows deeply, respecting the elder before him.

“We Zangalan thank you dearly. You risked your life to save us. You even saved our kind from that dragon's attack,” He turns toward Jodo, welcoming him with open arms. “What are your names?”

“I am Slayer Mortikai Leone.” He gives his full name.

“Jodo Zidane.” He says, nodding.

“Well, Slayer Mortikai, is there anything that we can grant you with?” The elder offers him a gift of honor.

“I would like to know the quickest way out of the Marsh and if there're any springs or sources of water nearby.” Mortikai explains his needs humbly.

“To exit the Marsh, continue west from here,” The elder turns backward and points. “Stay in a complete straight line until you approach a small weeping willow such as this one growing,” He points to the ancient tree beside them. “This is the oldest tree in Lásia, and we worship its presence. In turn it protects us, such as tonight,” The elder smiles and turns back toward Mortikai. “After passing the willow, there will be a thinning of trees and a pond will be at the end of this wood,” He finishes, reaching behind his neck. He lifts a necklace from around his neck. “Take this.” He offers, as Mortikai kneels.

The Elder puts the necklace of beads and claws around Mortikai's neck, knighting him in a way. "You are now the Savior of the Zangalan. Now continue Slayer, and don't let the Dragon woman resurrect the Dreadful Evil of Lásia." He nods and puts his hands together inside the large sleeves, dismissing him. Mortikai bows once more and turns to walk away.

"Come on Jodo." He calls out to his apprentice. The two begin to climb the walls of the ravine and make it back to the muddy entrance. Jodo looks up toward the sky to see it was dawn.

"The sun's out. It will be easier to see once the sun rises higher," Jodo says, peeling the mud strips from his face. He touches the scars on his face and looks up at Mortikai. "How does it look?" He turns his head left and right, enabling him to see both sides.

"Pretty good, the scars will barely be there once fully healed." He confesses, looking around for Prynn. Putting his fingers to his lips, Mortikai produces a loud whistle. Prynn whinnies and trots from around the other side of the ravine. Mortikai rubs Prynn's face and sighs, turning west.

Dragonlady Ilena lands on the balcony of the dragon stable and leaps off of her wounded dragon's neck. Walking briskly across the stone floor in anger, the stable mate approaches her, looking at the injured dragon she left behind.

"What happened?" He cautiously asks. She stops and lets out a quick laugh.

"What happened? You want to know what happened?!" She screams in anger. "I went to the Shadow Marsh to collect some scavengers for Geoterra's egg and while I was telling the Zangalan's leaders what I needed, some—warrior leaps out and decides to do battle with me!" She looks back to see Shay enter the balcony in her cream, satin gown, and rushing over. "Battle me?! *Me* of all people!? He threatened to kill me for trying to kill his cousin. So whoever this man is, he is related to Eva. After fighting with him I sent the dragon after him and some little bush boy jumped out to save the man. He threw his cleaver down the Serpentine's throat. I had to gain control of it just to get home! No one treats me this way!" She shouts in fury, aiming her palm at the wounded dragon as a stream of fire exits her palm. The dragon shrieks in pain and silences as its entire essence falls off its skeleton in ash. Ilena sighs, feeling a bit relaxed.

"I need to rest now and when I wake up, that little princess will have to deal with me!" Ilena threatens, gliding across the floor and into the citadel.

"It looks like we have to walk a little more." Mortikai confesses, as he, Jodo and Pryn timer trudge through the thinning mud. After a few more paces, the mud suddenly appears to be solid. Mortikai and Jodo mount upon Pryn timer's back and gallop further west.

After about twenty minutes of galloping, the swaying leaves of the weeping willow catch Jodo's eyes.

"Look master! There's the weeping willow!" He exclaims, pointing to the tree signaling the end of the Marsh.

"Looks like your vision has improved, you could see it through the mist." Mortikai compliments him. They dash past it upon Pryn timer's back through a path between trees on each side.

"Yah!" Mortikai yells, as Pryn timer picks up speed. They all finally make it out of the forest. Mortikai and Jodo squint from the sudden flash of sun. There was a small, clear water pond. A few fruit-bearing trees stood on the outskirts of the forest, near the pond. Slowing to a walk, the thirsty unicorn approaches the pond and bends his neck down to the crystal blue water and drinks. Mortikai and Jodo dismount the thirsty unicorn's back and kneel at the spring. The warrior hungrily lowers his head and takes big gulps of water. Jodo basically submerges his entire head. Mortikai exhales pleasantly and reaches for his flask. Unscrewing the top, he submerges the entire container into the spring, watching the air bubbles escape and cease, signaling it being full. The content warrior returns the flask back to his waist. Relaxing and sitting on his rear, Mortikai looks into the clear water to see his reflection. His face possessed the stone hard look of the warrior he saw years ago. His new crest from the Zangalan hung from around his neck. The claws looked like they were cut from a beast of some sort. He was definitely that warrior again, only better.

"So where are we to go now?" Jodo breaks the silence, as Mortikai looks over to see him climbing one of the trees.

"I'm still deciding," The warrior stands to his feet. "We either go straight to Dragon's Peak to kill Dragonlady Ilena and save my cousin, to Trine's Cave to obtain the Sword of Slayer, or to Frio so we can destroy the egg and prevent them from ever awakening Geoterra. I'm contemplating which one is more efficient." Mortikai paces in thought.

"Hmm, why don't we go to Trine and get the sword, just in case you're too late and then to Frio so we can destroy the egg so won't have to worry, and then back to Dragon's Peak so we can take Eva back. In that order we'll be more prepared for any error." Jodo maps out a plan, showing his intelligence as usual. Mortikai smiles at his apprentice's skills and look up at him in the tree as he removed his tunic and elastic shirt. The young man was reaching for a sort of fruit.

"Are those cherimoyas? Mortikai looks up at the heart-shaped, shingled, dark green fruit.

"I guess." Jodo peculiarly looks at it, tossing it down to Mortikai. He catches it and puts it to his ear. He heard no noise and squats to wash it. He bites into it greedily as a white, creamy fluid ran down his mouth. There was a sweet taste to it. Jodo copies this act, grabbing another and putting the fruit to his ear. When he brings it back in front of his face to bite it, he notices something boring through the surface. A large black beetle emerges and hisses loudly.

“Aghhh!” Jodo screams, hurling the cherimoya far away and jumping out of the tree. Mortikai smiles and watches all this while still chewing and removing the bandages from around his upper torso.

“Aren't you glad you listened before you bit into it?” Mortikai presses his bruised ribs, looking up.

“I hate insects. Ugh, they're so nasty!” Jodo quivers at the thought.

“I thought you were a valiant thief, not scared of anything.” He teases, standing wiping his rear.

“You're the only one who knows.” Jodo looks at him angrily. Mortikai smiles and approaches the tree. He begins shaking the branches as a few cherimoyas fall onto the hardened ground.

“Here's an easier way to do it. See as they fall, some of them rattle a bit?” Mortikai points them out as Jodo pays attention. “And even then, still check them. Topus beetles bore into the plant by lifting the shingles and burying itself inside the cherimoya. They even make sure to somehow “paste” the shingles back behind them. They usually lay eggs and the babies eat the fruit from inside. So yeah, you have to be careful. Topus beetles are attracted to the fluid in the ear and that's why they come out when you put it close to your ear.” Mortikai explains before grabbing a few ripe cherimoyas and bringing them over to Prynn. The hungry unicorn eats them in one to two bites. He then runs into the small prairie behind them.

Mortikai looks across the prairie behind them, getting dressed to leave. The sky was gray as the sun hid behind the thick clouds. The two travelers walk away from the pond out onto the field. Prynn gallops to and fro across the field. He seemed to be relaxing, rolling across the grass, scratching his back with the coarse grass. Standing back tall, he notices his smiling companion and races over. He stops and circles around his two partners. Mortikai mounts the eager unicorn's back as Jodo jumps on behind him. They hold on as Prynn races down the natural dirt path toward the mountainside.

After galloping for about ten minutes, Mortikai gazes toward the sky, allowing himself to think.

“I wonder if Eva's okay. I just hope that encounter with Ilena doesn't put Eva in peril.” He worries, staring into the thick clouds overhead.

“Master, are we going to get me a new weapon along the way?” Jodo taps Mortikai on the back, breaking his thoughts.

“Oh yeah, I forgot about your lost cleaver. I'd like to buy you a new weapon, but I don't have one tugrik on me.” Mortikai confesses to being broke. They both fall silent. Mortikai then slows Prynn down to a stop. There was a large house of some sort on the side of the road. There was talking and laughter heard inside. It sounded more like a tavern than a house. Mortikai and Jodo dismount the strong unicorn. Mortikai leads him to the front of the unknown place.

“Prynn, stay here and let no one touch you.” Mortikai rubs his unicorn's face as it whinnies in return. He smiles and he and Jodo leave the unicorn unattended. They walk into the tavern to see a bar with a burly man behind it. He was bald with only a vest on and sagging trousers. He was cleaning a glass when the two walked in. Mortikai looks around the room to see a few all-night drinkers sitting at small

round tables arranged in no specific order. A group of women sat in a corner to the right of the door. Two men sat at the bar and a suspicious-looking man sat alone at his own table, dressed in a black trench coat, twirling a long dagger point into the table. He was dressed almost identical to Jodo. The two newcomers sit at the bar.

“So what did ya two ride in here on?” The bartender asks in a rural accent, sitting the glass down.

“On my Unicorn,” Mortikai quickly answers. “We need some instructions.”

“You came in on a Unicorn? Wow, ya' must be a paid man,” At that exact moment, Jodo notices the man stroke his right ear lobe, slide it down his cheek, and press his thumb against his lips. The young man frowns, knowing that only an odd movement like that could be a signal. He makes eye contact with the bartender.

“So, what'll it be, my man? The bartender leans over the desk.

“We just want the instructions.” Mortikai calmly insists.

“Why not talk it over with a beer?” The bartender persuades, trying to keep Mortikai seated for some odd reason. Jodo attempts to read through these desperations and looks around to see the man dressed in all black was gone! He slowly reaches to Mortikai's belt and grabs the Karaka.

“I'll be right back, Master.” He whispers into his ear, standing and leaving.

“Uh, kid! Do ya want somethin' ta drink?” The bartender yells at the exiting young man. Mortikai notices a droplet of sweat roll down his face. Jodo ignores the man, continuing on.

“He is a minor. Tell me what is making you so nervous.” Mortikai stands, intimidating the man.

“N-nothin'. Now what instructions do ya need?” The bartender composes himself.

“I would like to know if you know of a man named Trine.” The warrior directly requests.

“This guy owes ya money or somethin'?” The bartender laughs, wasting more time.

“Just answer the question, please.” Mortikai demands through clenched teeth, remaining calm.

Meanwhile outside, Jodo finds the man dressed in black outside. He notices him slowly waking toward Prynn. His footsteps were familiar.

“*That's the Raccoon Step.*” Jodo familiarizes, knowing that was a thief's tiptoe. The thief slowly passes the unicorn and whirls around, admiring Prynn's beauty. The unicorn effectively watched each step, his confidence giving him no reason to be timid. The thief suddenly lunges forward, clutching Prynn by the horn, unsheathing the dagger at his side, and holds it against the creature's solid neck.

“You make one sound and I'll kill you.” He whispers into the understanding unicorn's ear. The moment the man removes the blade from his neck; Prynn rears up, picking the man up off the ground, and

kicking him repeatedly in the chest! The man falls onto his back and rolls over, evading Prynn's trampling. Quickly standing to his feet, he grips the hilt of his dagger, and leaps, ready to kill the stallion!

"Merlinus!" Jodo calls out to him, hurling the Karaka. Hearing his name in mid-attack, the thief looks at Jodo and remembers him. He was the young boy in Fortla who won all the street fights and took the fame from him. The skilled thief ducks and dodges the projectile, landing on his feet. He quickly shuffles away from Prynn. He eyes the young man, watching him catch the boomerang-like weapon.

"Jodo, what brings you all the way out here?" He smiles, putting on a fake mask of friendship.

"I am on a quest. And that's my Master's unicorn you are trying to steal. I will not allow that to happen." The young man stands bravely.

"Master? Someone actually took you in? I'm sure he saw how cowardice you were, considering you fled from Fortla." Merlinus taunts, twirling the long dagger in his hand.

"You know damn well why I left!" Jodo shouts back. "It was because of immoral, envious bastards like you!" He positions himself into a battle stance.

"Oh, I see you haven't lost your bravery. Or should I call it stupidity? I don't think you want to fight me Jodo." Merlinus insults him, smoothly reaching inside of his trench coat. Jodo watches him cautiously, knowing the tongue of a thief was as good as any blindfold. In his mind, thoughts raced quickly back and forth.

"I'm able to do this. This weapon isn't as lightweight as his dagger though. Just calm down, stay alert." Jodo tries to clear his thoughts. To his surprise, a steel needle is inconspicuously thrown at him. Jodo's eyes widen, watching the needle fly toward his neck. He sidesteps it, averting his attention to the rushing Merlinus. Jodo leaps off the ball of his right foot and meets the thief's dagger with his own weapon. A clang of steel is heard and the two leap backward. The two brethren begin a succession of quick leaps and slashes. Their fighting styles were a bit matched as they both used the Thief Style. Jodo finds his weapon a disadvantage as he couldn't quickly meet the swift dagger each time. Merlinus takes advantage and reaches back to grab another, smaller dagger. Jodo desperately performs a low sweep, tripping his foe and putting space between them.

"He was gonna use the Blade Squall technique against me. I need to take him out!" Jodo's brain screams, as he pants heavily. Wiping the sweat from his brow, Jodo grips the Karaka and hurls it forcefully at his enemy's throat. Merlinus bends backward, avoiding the spinning projectile, just as Jodo wanted. He stands back up to catch a drop kick to his chest! The thin-framed man flies back from the force of the kick. As they land, Jodo grabs Merlinus's right hand, restraining the dagger. Sitting on his chest, Jodo catches the returning Karaka and recoils his arm to strike. To his surprise, Merlinus uses his feet to wrap around his wrist. The two skilled thieves were at a seeming standstill. Jodo quickly twirls to the right, releasing his foe's armed hand. Foreseeing the attack, Jodo breaks from the hold and meets his attack at the wrist, cutting off his entire right hand!

Jodo rolls backward and stands, watching the thick, dark blood spill over the road as Merlinus squirmed in pain. He looks up at the young boy. All his hatred was for him. Although no one could defeat the boy, he always thought he would be that hope and prove them all wrong. And now in his eyes, Jodo couldn't

be defeated. Jodo stares at him coldly and steps on his bleeding nub. Merlinus screams out in agony.

Inside the tavern, the bartender drops a glass purposely, trying to drown out the scream. Mortikai stares at him peculiarly, as he already had to struggle crazily to get some information. Mortikai eyes him suspiciously, and looks to see a man exit the tavern as if on cue, his beer half finished. He then knew something was up. Before turning back to the bartender, he feels the cold steel of a dagger on his neck...

"Don't move," The bartender orders in a low voice. "Search `im." The man sitting beside Mortikai stands and pats the constrained warrior's body, searching for anything of value. Mortikai, with the speed of a slug, inches his left hand toward the hilt of his sword.

"I said, don't move!" The bartender demands, drawing blood from Mortikai's neck from the dagger's pressing edge. Mortikai feels his blood boiling from his controlled rage. He suddenly lets his instincts take over...

Mortikai's hand blindly shoots up, gripping the bartender's wrist. He twists around, grabbing the man's hair in front of him, pulling the bartender's shoulder out of its socket as he screams in agony. Mortikai threatens the bartender's life, bringing the dagger to his own throat in a seemingly impossible position. The furious warrior forcefully throws the thief to his knees and steps between his shoulder blades, pushing him down and keeping him down.

"Now do you know a man named Trine? No gilda shoot this time!" Mortikai commands with the seriousness of a lion, his eyes glaring.

"He's some ancient Slayer that lives straight up the mountain." The bartender's voice trembles in fear.

"I'm aware of that! Where!" Mortikai presses the dagger closer to his neck.

"In some crystal cave. And that's it, I ain't telling ya shoot else!" The bartender curses, grunting from the pain in his broken arm. Mortikai finds no place for mercy in their deed and slashes deeply into the bartender's neck, slowly watching the fear in his eyes as his neck opens and lets him go, choking to the floor. The raging warrior then snatches the dagger and pivots around, driving it deep between the thief's shoulder blades, hearing him scream in anguish. Mortikai removes the dagger and slowly wipes the blood onto its dead owner's shirt. He regains his senses and realizes the two dead men. He shakes the building guilt and turns, walking past the women in the corner, as they continued to drink their beers, oblivious to what just happened, as it was just another of hundreds killed before them.

Walking outside, Mortikai sees the previous man lying on his side, panting for air. Mortikai kicks him onto his back to reveal his abdomen sliced open and his intestines hanging out in a large mass as he held them. Mortikai switches his attention to Jodo, with bloody Karaka in hand. Mortikai smiles at Jodo's accomplishments and raises his left hand, motioning for the dangerous weapon. The young man approaches his master and hands him the Karaka. Mortikai squats, wiping its blade free of blood onto its dying owner's pants.

"Good job, Jodo. Here's a weapon for you." Mortikai offers the bartender's dagger. Jodo shakes his head in disagreement.

"I have this." The young man reveals the long Thief's Dagger.

"Where'd you get that?" Mortikai studies the dagger, tossing his gift aside.

"I got it from him," Jodo points at Merlinus's dead body. "He tried to steal Prynn and we got into a fight. He's the one who tried to steal my fame from Fortla. It meant a lot for me to kill him." Jodo sheathes the weapon. Prynn trots over, wanting attention. Mortikai rubs the nuzzling unicorn's face.

"I need to find a vertical path to Trine's cave." The warrior mounts Prynn with Jodo behind him.

Riding down the scenic, dirt path, the group finds them self between two mountain walls. They stretched as high as they could see. The higher elevation possessed dark clouds above them, obscuring the blue, daytime sky. Mortikai observes the jagged walls around them for some kind of clue. His eyes then catch a line of rocks leading up into the shadowy sky. Mortikai brings Prynn to a stop and dismounts the unicorn as Jodo follows. The eager warrior approaches the line of rocks in silence, except for the shrilling wind.

"Jodo, give me a boost to that rock above," He points to it. Jodo kneels, cupping his hands with his intertwined fingers. Mortikai places his hands on the young man's shoulders and steps into his hands. He is then slowly raised to the rock. The warrior clutches the rock and pulls himself up the next three, using the mountain's wall for foot grip.

"Watch Prynn for me. I'll try to return as quickly as I can from seeing the elder." Mortikai looks down at his apprentice. Receiving a nod in agreement, he makes his way up the mountain. Climbing continuously, the strong warrior climbs forty feet in no time. At this height, he could no longer see Jodo and Prynn or the ground for that matter. A heavy mist forms gradually, filling his nose with its smell.

The mist heavily hazes the already dim light of the sun. With darkness around him, Mortikai was forced to climb slower for his safety.

"It's too dark to see anything. And I can feel the air thinning." Mortikai looks around, taking deeper breaths.

A luminescence catches his eye through the fog ahead. From his distance, it was further up and to the right. The glowing light was a soft blue. Mortikai fixates his vision on that single point. He climbs toward the beacon, his eyes never leaving the light. It becomes brighter as he approaches closer. Soon, he makes it to the outer perimeter of the cavern's opening, with rows of sharp crystals lining the edge of the opening. Mortikai reaches up and grips the pointed crystals. The chain mail leather gloves protected his hands from the precious rock that would have ripped through the skin of an unprotected hand. He pulls himself up into a handstand and flips over the crystals, landing inside the cave.

The cave was pitch black; so black he couldn't see his hand in front of his face. The curious warrior stands and slowly walks into the dark, damp cave. All of his senses were heightened to maximum use and he could hear the dripping of water. Sensing the walls becoming narrower, Mortikai feels the walls, trudging slowly.

"Trine must really like his privacy," Mortikai reflects, looking around blindly in the darkness. He quickly

locks his vision onto a horizontal strip of light. It looked as if it was leaking from under a closed door. Feeling blindly in front of him, Mortikai feels the contours of the rock wall. Slowly crouching, he feels along the wall and reaches under it toward the unknown light. It was pale blue like the glowing crystals surrounding the cave's entrance outside. The determined warrior lies on his stomach and attempts to slide under the narrow opening. He slowly enters his arms, moving ever so slightly to not make any noise, and gradually slides through into another room. He stands to a crouched position, marveled by the sight of the room. The small chamber was encrusted with blue crystals resembling blue topaz. Stalagmites protruded through the ground, composed of a glass-like crystal. Mortikai stands at his full height and looks around amazed at the worth of the room. He walks around the small corridor in front of him to see an elderly man sitting on a bed. Mortikai meets his eyes as the man stared patiently, knowing he was there all the time.

"Are you Slayer Trine? The Elder of Slayers?" Mortikai breaks the awkward silence, kneeling to show his undoubted respect.

"Yes, I am. And who might you be?" The senior stands to his feet, walking toward the warrior, his white robe dragging across the clean floor.

"I am Slayer Mortikai Leone and I am on a quest to Dragon's Peak to prevent Dragonlady Ilena from sacrificing Princess Eva for the resurrection of Geoterra." Mortikai lays forth his plan. Trine pats Mortikai's shoulder, signaling him to stand.

"Hmm, that seems like a lot to take care of. Why have you come to see *me*? Shouldn't you be trying to save Eva?" Trine slyly smiles at him, the countless creases in his face moving with the corners of his mouth.

"In order for me to save my cousin, I need the Sword of Slayer," Mortikai reveals the coin Kria granted him. "That is what I've come for." Trine stares at the sacred coin with eyes wide as saucers.

"Where did you get this?!" The elder demands, staring in wonderment.

"Slayer Kria granted me this coin. She told me that I would need your sword in order to kill Geoterra for good. She also told me that I would need this coin to activate its powers." Mortikai replies matter-of-factly. Trine slyly smiles, stroking his long, white beard.

"So, she's still alive. Where does she reside now?" Trine asks about his old friend.

"Fortla, in the Forsab Plains," He briefly tells him the location. "Now sir, may I please be granted the sword so I can leave you in peace and continue my journey?" Mortikai impatiently requests.

"You sure are in a hurry. I am 513 years old. I was only thirteen when I confined Geoterra underneath the planet so long ago. My magic skills were vast, even at a young age. Kria was only eleven when she accompanied me," Trine walks back to his bed and takes a seat. "When we imprisoned Geoterra, we hoped to never hear of another threat from him, because the sword needs to rest. But after all these years, it seems the time has come." Trine pauses for a moment. Mortikai clenches his jaw, growing more impatient by the moment.

"I can sense you are not alone in your quest. There is a boy with you by the name of—Jodo," He squints his eyes, concentrating. "You also have your old unicorn, Prynn, with you. I can also sense a dark secret inside of you. It's fed by humiliation," Trine reads his mind, staring Mortikai in the eyes. "Ah yes, you are the one given the disgraceful name of 'Fallen Warrior'," Trine pauses again, testing the warrior. Mortikai stands in silence, tight-lipped in respect. "Nonetheless, you have redeemed yourself. Your path is true although, your power is limited," He ceases focusing. "You will need help in killing Geoterra. Here, give these to Jodo," Trine opens his hands as small, cylindrical bottles appear in each hand, one possessing blue contents and the other with green.

"He has a magic potential growing inside of him. This will ignite it," He shakes the green liquid from the bottle in his left hand. "And he'll know when to use this one." The aged man nods toward the bottle in his right hand. Trine ambles over to Mortikai and hands him the items.

"Thank you. Is it now time for me to acquire the Sword of Slayer?" Mortikai bows, sticking to his motive.

"The Sword of Slayer is of limited power. Unless you were going to slay Geoterra this very moment, its power would die out. So I advise you come back in the gravest hour—and you will know when. That is all." Trine turns his back to Mortikai, his hands folded behind him.

"That's it? So all I get is a no?" Mortikai quickly shoots back. "I am trying to save the world from this evil and you turn me away? I have had it with these riddles! Please, give me the sword!" Mortikai commands desperately. Trine whips around and points his right index finger at the ungrateful warrior. Mortikai feels a clenching inside his chest and his muscles lock up as he drops the bottles. The delicate containers float where they are in mid-air. Trine approaches him with cut eyes.

"This rage of yours can be a splendid thing, *if* you learn how to control it and when to use it. You could have just squandered any chance of saving the planet, just because of your little hissy fit! And I could have cared less because I've lived long enough and Geoterra fears me!" Trine is fiercely honest with him. "Now calm down and don't be so demanding. Learn to be patient. Now go, I have nothing else to say to you. You still have time to save the world if you stop wasting your time with me." Trine lowers his tone before grabbing the bottles. He releases his magic and Mortikai takes a sudden breath, staring Trine in the eyes.

"Is this—fear I am feeling?" Mortikai catches his breath, accepting the bottles.

"Thank you Elder Trine. Forgive me for any inconveniences." Mortikai ends the encounter and secures the bottles at his belt. He approaches the wall and kneels, ready to leave the way he entered. Trine suddenly taps him on the shoulder.

"I'll help you." He lastly says, placing his hand on Mortikai's forehead. The shapes and blue light of the cave becomes hazy and fade to white...

Mortikai opens his eyes to see himself sitting at the bottom of the mountain. He looks aside to his right to see Jodo leaning against the mountain wall, studying his new dagger. He happens to glance over and sees his master. Frowning confusedly, he sheathes his weapon and advances toward Mortikai.

"How'd you get here?" He peculiarly looks at him.

“Trine,” Mortikai says the only explanation, just as confused as his apprentice. He stands to his feet. “Trine told me to come for the sword in the gravest hour,” He quotes his words. “He says we still have time. He asked me to give you these,” Mortikai searches his belt for the glass bottles. He hands them to Jodo. “He said that he sensed some power in you and that the green would awaken your magic power. Save the blue one, you'll know when to use it.” Mortikai rids himself of the burden and walks over to Prynn. He rubs the unicorn's muzzle contentedly.

Jodo studies the bottle containing the green contents. He bites the cork off and spits it aside. The curious thief sniffs the liquid, not knowing whether to frown or smile at its scent. Shrugging his shoulders, Jodo knocks back the liquid. His face twists in disdain at the bad taste. His eyes widen as he feels sudden warmth in his chest. A tingling sensation subsequently travels throughout his body from the center of his chest. After those few moments, his body returns to normal.

“How was it?” Mortikai smiles at the many faces Jodo made.

“Disgusting, but I wonder when it starts working.” Jodo looks around, searching for something to test his powers on. He spots a small bush and immediately thinks of fire. Smiling mischievously, the young man approaches the withered bush. Pointing his palms at the defenseless shrub, he feels the warm feeling in his chest from before. Jodo concentrates and as his hands quiver. An abrupt flare of fire emerges, engulfing the bush in flames! Mortikai whips his head to the side, wide-eyed at the feat. Jodo turns around, smiling bashfully.

“I guess I should try to control it a little more,” He shyly admits, stomping the fire out. “I wonder what other kinds I can conjure,” He imagines, resting his chin in hand and thinking. “Oh well, I'll experiment later. We need to go to Frio and try to get to that egg first.” Jodo gets back on task, turning to look at his master. Mortikai smiles, admiring his ethic. Mortikai mounts Prynn as Jodo jumps on also.

“Now which way is the fastest to the North?” Mortikai thinks aloud, overlooking the map in his mind. “Okay, if we continue back that way, past the tavern, and back to the prairie, we can turn north. Prynn, you'll have to run like the wind if we're going to make it in time.” Mortikai challenges the unicorn. Prynn whinnies in agreement, rearing up and galloping back toward the prairie.

In Dragon's Peak, hidden from view in the Dark Range, Princess Eva sits in her cell. The dim, dank cell wasn't as bad as it was before. She sat with her legs crossed, eating her breakfast of roasted trinna, potatoes, and a drink of ale.

“*Whoever is the cook for these hoodlums, my compliments go to them,*” She thinks, eating the nicely prepared dish. She then picks up a conversation going on many floors above her. Eva's magic allowed her to listen to Dragonlady Ilena lead a tirade against her minions. Eva sits her plate aside for a moment to focus in.

“This is an outrage! You haven't found the egg yet?! Its bad enough my plans were foiled by that man in the Marsh last night. Now you can't even find the damned egg!” Eva overhears, before reverting her hearing back to normal.

“*Man in the Marsh?*” Eva thinks for a moment, grabbing her wooden plate in hand. “*Surely she means Mortikai. So he's had an encounter with Ilena. I just pray that he hurries along.*” Eva ponders, finishing the last of her breakfast. She sits the plate aside and stands to her feet. The captive princess stretches and yawns loudly, releasing any tiring feelings of the morning. She approaches the wall adjacent to the foot of her bed. Eva kicks her right leg up, holding it against the wall with the heel of her foot. She stretches forward, her forehead touching her knee and then down, performing her regular exercises she had grown accustomed to from her trainer back at the palace. And she would need them if she was going to escape. She then overhears the guards conversing down the hall.

“Her Lady is pissed off!” He says to his friend. “She wants to see Eva face-to-face, now!” Eva's eyes widen and she brings her leg down. Somehow guessing that she was going to be interrogated about Mortikai, she hurriedly stretches her left leg. Eva hears the jangling of the guard's keys as he unlocked her cell door. She looks back, her long, blonde hair swinging over her shoulder.

“Yes?” She smiles coyly. “I'm finished with my breakfast—if that's what you came for.” Eva brings her leg down.

“No. My Lady wants to see you face-to-face right now!” He walks across the floor. Adjusting the short pant-legged pants and brown sleeveless shirt they provided for her, she holds her head high, regally exiting the cell with the guard. He leads her through the dimly lit dungeon, up numerous flights of stairs, and through numerous corridors. Eva eyes the citadel's interior, finding a liking in its taste.

“*Hmm, seems like Ilena isn't just another crazy, savage beast-woman.*” Eva smiles, holding back a laugh. The guard and prisoner approach two large double doors. Eva stands back as the doors are pulled open in front of her. Her jaw drops at the sight of the elegant room before her. The hall's floor was made of gray marble. Massive burgundy curtains shielded long windows that reached up near to the ceiling. To the left of the double doors, there was another set of thick, stone doors. Eva ponders at why such large doors would be needed. Adjacent from the doors, she could see a regular door leading to another much smaller room maybe. To her right, a ruby encrusted throne sat atop of three long steps. Her eyes focus in on a familiar person sitting on the comfortable-looking throne. The two's eyes meet.

“Princess Eva,” Dragonlady Ilena calls out to her guest, her legs crossed and chin resting on her fist. “Now tell me, who is this man that claims to be your cousin? He threatened me and I don't appreciate that.” She calmly speaks, shifting in her seat of power. Eva is lightly forced to walk into the middle of the room by the guard.

“I have no idea who you are talking about. Maybe it was someone from my kingdom. I don't know.” Princess Eva lies nonchalantly. Ilena sighs agitatedly, standing from her throne. She was dressed in a red pantsuit with her coattails billowing across the floor. She descends the steps, not finding her prisoner's charade amusing at all. Her hair hung freely over her shoulders and she adorned a rare ruby necklace and earrings. Ilena approaches Eva and stares her in the face.

“Like I said, he claimed to be your cousin. I'm sure you have knowledge of who your relatives are, since I assume he's apart of the royal family somehow. So tell me who he is and what he is capable of doing.” She demands, eyeing her up and down in disgust.

“Like I told *you* before,” Eva sasses her. “I have no idea who you are talking about.” She refuses to tell any information. Ilena's right eye begins to twitch along with a frown. Her blood began to boil from her lack of cooperation. As quickly as the thought came, Ilena backhands Eva across the face! Eva stumbles back from the blow and catches herself. Feeling the stinging corner of her mouth, she glances to see blood on her hand. Eva angrily looks up at Dragonlady Ilena; never had she experienced such disrespect. Her captor smirked with satisfaction.

“Come on Eva,” Ilena beckons her, removing the jewelry from her neck and ears. “I need to let off some steam right now. And fighting you would do just that.” She calmly announces, making eye contact with the guard across the room. She swiftly tosses her jewelry to him as he catches the trinkets in one hand. The determined mistress slips off her coat and whistles as a small, jade-colored dragon trots over, its nails clacking across the marble. Grabbing the collar of her coat in its mouth, it takes flight and sits it on her throne.

“Show me what you got, Eva.” Ilena stretches her arms before going into the ancient fighting stance of the Dragonlords. Eva narrows her eyes and holds her head high, knowing she had no choice but to defend herself. Spreading her feet shoulder-width apart and holding her fists up, she proves herself to not be defenseless. Ilena smiles in delight, ready to take her on.

Meanwhile, Prynn gallops at a consistent pace across the short grassland of the cooler climate. As they traveled further north they noticed the twenty degree change in temperature. The travelers were fairly okay now, just battling the cold breeze.

“I can just imagine how much colder Frio will be. I hope we don't stay there too long.” Jodo anticipates, blowing his hands for warmth, positioned behind Mortikai.

“Don't worry, young one, we won't,” Mortikai reassures his apprentice. “Prynn, speed up a bit.” He requests as the unicorn snorts, picking up speed. After a silent three-mile run, Mortikai catches a faint scent in the air.

“Prynn, stop!” He orders abruptly. The unicorn slows to a stop, as Mortikai leaps off of his back. Jodo assumed nature called for the man, so he moved forward, hugging Prynn's neck. Mortikai takes a panoramic view of each side of their position, holding his nose to the air, letting his olfactory sense decode the surroundings.

“*There was a dragon here. I can still smell it.*” Mortikai takes one more looks before climbing back upon Prynn. The three continue on north, their destination still many miles away.

Dragonlady Ilena leaps forward, throwing a punch intended for Eva's face. She smoothly sidesteps the attack, grabbing her wrist and twisting it behind Ilena's back forcefully. Hearing her scream in agony, Eva palms the back of her head, pushing her to the ground.

"Where did *that* come from?" Ilena asks, standing up from her hands and knees.

"I *was* taught basic defense. I'm not helpless." Eva answers crossly. Ilena swiftly catches Eva with a haymaker, dazing her. Ilena takes the upper hand and continues a flurry of punches. Eva finds her bearings and shuffles back. Timing it just right, she reaches past the barrage of Ilena's fists, gripping her shirt. The princess pulls Ilena into a strong headbutt! The Mistress of Dragons screams in pain, pulling away and holding her aching nose. Eva springs at her wounded foe, grabbing her face. She rams her face into her knee powerfully as Ilena falls onto her back.

"You...you've marked my face!" Eva responds angrily, wiping the thick blood running from her nostrils. Eva begins to concentrate, searching inside herself for a hidden power. Feeling a slight breeze across her face, her eyes flash open, her eyes glowing sky blue.

"Anemos Fyso!" She shouts an incantation as everything in the room sways from the powerful gust forming. Her hair billows wildly as she stares into Ilena's awestruck face. A gust of air discharges from Eva's hands, throwing Ilena across the room! She's thrown against the far wall and falls onto the solid floor. Eva then aims her palms toward the giant stone doors, attempting to gain enough of a gust to push them open. Unexpectedly, she feels a clawing at her head. Eva thrashes her hands around to see the baby dragon clawing at her. Occupying herself with trying to escape, she falls victim to the sneak attack from behind. Eva finds herself on the floor staring at Ilena, her foot on her throat as everything fades to black.

The harsh arctic climate of the northern regions was horrible. Pryn timer seemed to fair well as his steady run kept him warm. Jodo on the other hand was nowhere near properly dressed for the weather. Mortikai attempted to help keep him warm by pressing his body as close as possible. It helped the shivering Jodo somewhat. Mortikai himself ignored the whipping cold against the face. He had too much on his mind and ahead of him to let a little winter's frost stop him.

"You alright, Jodo?" Mortikai assures him for the ninth time to make sure everything was okay.

"Yes, I'm fine for right now. I feel the chill but I'm okay." Jodo answers, trying to suck it up and look tough. Mortikai nods and looks ahead, hoping to see any signs of Frio. They had taken the correct directions according to the map imprinted on his brain. While letting his eyes rest, looking over the map in his mind, Mortikai catches another familiar scent through his nostrils. It was stronger this time around. Mortikai slows the unicorn to a stop and dismounts him again.

Jodo presses himself closer to Prynn's neck once more, thinking a second nature called for Mortikai. The curious warrior deeply sniffs the frosty air. The scent was the same as before. He takes a few steps in its direction and looks down to see a footprint imprinted into the solid permafrost of the surrounding area. He squats down to get a closer look.

“Apparently, whatever made this footprint is heavy if they could push through frozen soil,” Mortikai stands to his feet to smell the air again. *“It is definitely a dragon,”* Mortikai concludes, as a claw print catches his eye. *“Looks like I was right,”* He crouches, feeling it with his hands. *“But what kind is it? It could be a Massivus taking one of its breaks, but the claws are far too small. It must be an Imperial. It doesn't matter. I haven't time to worry too much about it,”* Mortikai ignores anymore thought about it. Scanning the area one last time, he spots a small, steaming puddle a few paces aside. Raising an eyebrow, Mortikai strolls over and stands over it, not wanting to get too close to it. The puddle was of a pale green color and possessed a strong smell. He frowns and turns away, finally knowing what it was.

“That's where most of the scent came from. It's still warm. So that can only mean,” He pauses in thought before mounting Prynn. *“They're on their way to Frio also!”* He whispers harshly before mounting his unicorn.

“Yah!” He commands to Prynn as the strong unicorn accelerates to top speed. Mortikai smiles as he remembers the vast speeds that Prynn reached back when they were young companions and how their hair would blow in the wind. After ten minutes of the constant speed, Mortikai notices a column of smoke in the distance. Approaching closer, a large hut comes into view, then smaller ones.

“That must be Frio.” He uses his advanced sight to focus in on the numerous huts and warm lights flooding through the windows. He also saw two men dressed in thick, tan parkas and moccasins. The Friotians wielded pikes with white feathers tied around the base of the blade. Mortikai blinks repeatedly, gradually reducing the strenuous pressure of the advanced sight back to normal.

“Jodo you still holding up?” Mortikai checks up on his apprentice, looking down at his shielded face.

“Yes, I'm fine.” He answers like before.

“Well, we're nearly to Frio so hang on.” Mortikai comforts him. Jodo raises his head and squints through the rushing wind as he saw the faint lights of the huts. He returns his head back to Prynn's thick neck.

The Friotian sentries notice Prynn's galloping and rush over to the entrance of the colony. Prynn is brought to a halt and Mortikai dismounts.

“What is your business here? If you need warm shelter, we will be glad to give it.” They surprise Mortikai with their hospitality.

“Thank you. I am a Slayer and I was looking for—well can I get my apprentice here inside before he freezes to death?” Mortikai changes the subject lightheartedly. He turns toward Prynn and helps Jodo down. The young passenger walks around stiffly, trying to get the blood back to his legs after staying in the same position for more than an hour.

“Do you have a place for my unicorn, because I would hate to leave him by himself?” Mortikai requests

while passionately rubbing on Pryn's neck.

"Well, you can put him in the stable with the other snow unicorns." One of the men suggests.

"I would like that. You have unicorns up here, also?" Mortikai smiles in interest.

"Yes, they are particularly bred to withstand the harsh temperatures of this climate. They're so carefully bred that they wouldn't survive anywhere else on Lásia. Where did you and your unicorn come from?" The man inquires, walking toward the hut with Mortikai and Jodo following.

"We're originally from Symbra. He's a thoroughbred, able to reach unimaginable speeds and stand anything from temperatures, fights, different terrain, you name it he'll do it," Mortikai boasts.

"Alright Pryn, go in there with the other unicorns, we'll be back shortly," He talks to his unicorn. The men stand, hiding their smiles. Pryn exhales loudly, stamping the snowy ground. "Pryn, it's just for a little while. You're still the wild bachelor I know." Mortikai jokes, raising an eyebrow as Pryn whinnies in satisfaction. He then follows the second sentry into the stable. Mortikai turns around to see the remaining man staring at him strangely. "He understands me." You see how he refused?" He explains.

"I said nothing," The man laughs. "Right this way." He opens the doors of the main hut.

Mortikai feels the warmth of a fire as he enters the hut. Jodo walks directly over to the large hearth and sits in front of it. The room was adorned with couches and chairs. Male and female Friotians sat in the chairs or on elaborate rugs and blankets spread across the floor. The people were dressed in thick earth-toned skirts, dresses, or slacks. They were all conversing and sipping from steaming mugs.

Mortikai looks around the room to see a beautiful young woman sitting around a few older women. There was something about this woman's face that made her stand out. Her smooth vanilla skin was flawless and there was some kind of sequins on her face that looked like teardrops when reflected off of the light. Her hair was long and chocolate brown. She had a nice proportioned build, hidden behind a white fur throw. Beside the beautiful woman sat a glaciobo, a large wolf bearing white fur with a bushy crest, chest, and tail. The creature was indigenous to the cold climate. After staring for so long, her almond eyes made contact with his and she stopped talking. The women surrounding her also cease talking and soon the entire room as they all saw the broad-shouldered warrior. Mortikai smiles, feeling a bit nervous and accompanies Jodo by the fire.

The woman stands, wrapping the fur around her body, and walks over to the sentry that brought the two travelers in.

"Who are those two, Toki?" She speaks softly.

"They are just two travelers seeking shelter. He is a Slayer and he was going to tell us his destination. Maybe it's time we have another storytelling," Toki smiles mischievously.

"Yes, warriors do seem to have the best stories while journeying." She adds, eyeing him suspiciously as he talks to the young boy.

“Don't worry Lady Kei; he seems like a nice man. He is of no threat.” Toki reassures the chief's daughter. She nods and smiles, trusting him. Kei returns to her spot and rubs her glaciobo across the face, her eyes locked on Mortikai the entire time. Toki walks over to the warrior and his apprentice to see them looking comfortable. Mortikai looks up, recognizing the man he met earlier.

“We want to thank you again for being so hospitable to us. What is your name?” The grateful warrior asks.

“I am Toki. It is custom for visitors to tell us a story of their current journey. Would you be so kind as to tell us where you're from?” He offers, smiling. Mortikai shrugs his shoulders and stands as Toki turns around.

“Our visitor is going to give us a story about his journey thus now.” He catches everyone's attention. The people of the room quiet down and give Mortikai their full attention.

“My name is Mortikai and I am a Slayer. My journey started when I was at home in Vela Wood. I received a letter from my cousin, Princess Eva Leone of Symbra. The letter informed me that Dragonlady Ilena, current ruler of the Dragonlords, had kidnapped her and that she was trying to sacrifice her to resurrect Geoterra,” Mortikai reveals as everyone gasps, whispering amongst themselves. “She requested I rescue her before the Dreadful Evil of Lásia be revived. I left right away and went to the castle. I talked to my aunt, Queen Panela Leone of Symbra. She gave me a new weapon and I promised her that Eva would be in her arms soon. This is the weapon,” Mortikai reaches for the Karaka at his belt and reveals the shining, silver weapon for a few moments before putting it away. “I found my childhood steed, Pryn, outside in the Forsab Plains. The unicorn still had and shown his thoroughbred attributes and responded to my whistle. So now we are reunited after seven years,” Mortikai pauses for a moment.

“How did you two get separated?” Kei speaks, wrapped in her luxurious fur. Mortikai smiles shyly at her.

“I left the castle to live by myself and he stayed in the castle. No one could tame him and he wouldn't let anyone else ride him, so he was released into the wild,” He answers her question, staring captivated into her eyes. She nods and waits for him to continue. “I traveled to Fortla, a city not too far from Symbra's kingdom, and met an elder Slayer by the name of Kria. She gave me a lot of knowledge on dragons and the curse that was upon Geoterra, my cousin, and I,” He pauses sadly as he hears the whispers.

“The ancient Slayer gave me a coin that would be needed to activate the Sword of Slayer, which would be needed to slay Geoterra if resurrected,” Mortikai looks over at the table to his left. He reaches over and grabs a mug filled with the drink that everyone else was drinking. He takes a sip to discover it was hot chocolate. He has a seat and continues his story.

“I would have to find Trine, another elder Slayer, the one who holds the sword. He stays somewhere in the Dark Range and in order to reach him I'd have to go through the Shadow Marsh,” He eludes the story from Johari, shortening the story. “While traveling blindly through the ever dark marsh, I fell asleep on the swell of a tree when I was attacked by a thief in my sleep!” He stands up to make the story dramatic. “I woke up to see him holding my Karaka while hanging upside down from a tree branch. He

swiped at me and I fainted back to avoid my throat being cut. I grabbed his wrist, wrapped my legs around his neck, and pulled him out of the tree and onto his head. He was dazed for a moment, but not for long! He woke up and was feisty! We were toe-to-toe, evenly matched, but I had to outwit him. I threw my sword at him and when he dodged it, I punched him in the face,” He gestures the moves.

“I then delivered an uppercut that dazed him and I picked him up. I swung him against the tree trunk. He begged for his life but remained tough,” Mortikai looks over at Jodo humorously. “He identified himself and it turned out he was this little guy,” He ruffles Jodo's hair. “This is my apprentice, Jodo.” He introduces him as the boy stands.

“I've become a better person as well as a better fighter under this warrior.” Jodo smiles before sitting down. The crowd smiled nervously, not quite hearing a typical story.

“We continued on together until we encountered a group of intelligent creatures called the Zangalan. They walked like this,” Mortikai gestures, bent over and baring his teeth. The women laugh aloud at his act. “We followed the sound of drums to their lair. They were celebrating until Dragonlady Ilena intervened. I saved their elder by fighting Ilena. She made me fight her Serpentine dragon instead of standing up to me. Jodo risked his life to save *me* from the dragon's poisonous jaws. He sacrificed his only weapon to save me. Ilena retreated and their Elder granted me this necklace of honor,” He touches the piece around his neck “We got directions out of the Marsh. While out, we stopped for more directions at a tavern. After a few complications, Jodo received a new weapon. After leaving the bar, I climbed the near mountain to Trine's crystal cave. He granted Jodo new powers but told me to return for the sword in my gravest hour,” Mortikai takes another drink of his chocolate. “I climbed down the mountain and decided to come here to destroy Geoterra's clutch, since that is all they may have left to resurrect him. The end.” He smiles, hurrying the story to a close. Toki stands, clapping as everyone joined in.

Mortikai looks over at Lady Kei as she was clapping lightly. She then stands, removing her fur to reveal her great body and what she was wearing underneath. Kei was dressed in a bikini of tan, velvet skin from a Chilalfa deer. There was a small scarf of the skin wrapped around her waist and tied to the right of her waist. She glides across the room, her eyes meeting with Mortikai's. She stops in front of him.

“That was a great story you told us. It seems you've been through a lot in your journey. I appreciate you trying to save the world. That's a *lot* of responsibility. And you do all this while still remaining apart of the Royal Family. What is your full name, noble knight?” She eyes him up and down, admiring his muscles.

“Mortikai Leone of the Symbra Kingdom.” He regally introduces himself, holding his head high.

“Well, I am Lady Kei Inuk, the daughter of Chief Onaka Inuk,” She extends her hand out to shake. Mortikai takes it in his and kisses the top of her hand. She smiles, looking him charmingly in the eyes. “You are a very strong man. You seem like a different kind of warrior, and I like that.” She enchants him.

“Thank you. I do enjoy learning, unlike most burly warriors,” Mortikai jokes, looking past her at the attentive beast waiting for her. “What is the name of that animal you were sitting next to?” Mortikai asks, looking at the wolf-like animal.

"Oh, Kikuyu? She's a glaciobo," She looks back at her pet. "They are a species of wolf native to this area. They can survive in this area for years. She's my personal protector. I've had her ever since she was a pup. We grew up together and she stands tall and fights ferociously when provoked," Kei turns back to face Mortikai. "I found it quite coincidental that you came here searching for Geoterra's clutch. There was a man on a dragon who asked for the same thing just moments before you arrived." Mortikai's eyes widen in surprise and his head snaps toward Jodo.

"Jodo!" He calls him as the boy hurries over. "Lady Kei just told me that there was a man who arrived on a dragon moments before us, looking for an egg!" He informs his apprentice as his jaw drops.

"Forgive me, I should have told you earlier." Kei apologizes.

"It's not your fault. Thank you, Lady Kei," He bows respectfully for a moment before turning and approaching Toki. "Come with me, please." He requests, swiftly walking toward the exit.

Toki anxiously retrieves his parka and pike, following him. Jodo watches his master leave, judging from his glares, that he should stay put. Lady Kei smiles doubtfully and walks back to Kikuyu and the shelter of the older women.

"Where is Geoterra's clutch located? I have to kill that man before he takes an egg back to Dragon's Peak!" Mortikai urgently demands.

"Behind the village and through the crevasse. The clutch is through the mountain." Toki instructs.

"Thank you. I should be right back!" Mortikai breaks into a sprint.

"You should make it in time; it would take a while to burn through all that ice. Do you need any help?" Toki shouts through the wind.

"No, but be on standby!" Mortikai yells back, not looking back.

Mortikai sprints past the many huts of the village. There was a snowfield between the village and mountain. Determined to end this war once and for all, he trudges on. Mortikai reaches the relatively small mountain. He sees the crevasse's edge dripping with water. It seemed the dragon had recently burned through the thick ice, widening the gap for its size. Mortikai carefully walks inside of the chasm.

The floor was composed entirely of sheet ice. Large, ice stalactites hung from the ceiling. Jagged ice walls reached out for him. He could see a faint orange light at the end of the cavern. The unwavering warrior walks as fast as he could across the sleek ice floor, knowing he'd fall if he attempted to run. The flickering light of fire dances on the walls of the clear ice at the end of the cavern. Mortikai slowly inches toward the exit. He could hear the medium-toned voice of a man talking. Mortikai crouches behind one of the ice pillars and peers out.

"These eggs are magnificent. And they're so huge. I'm sure this won't be a problem for you, Lady," The dragon grunts lightly. "Ilena will be pleased. I can picture it now, `I knight thee, Nexus, as my political advisor and companion", He fantasizes laughing lightly. "Well Lady, lets get to work. All we need is one of these. Then to our master's entombment." Nexus finally prepares to deliver the egg.

"I need to stop him!" Mortikai comes to an immediate decision. He takes a few deep breaths, calming his raging bloodstream, and gripping the hilt of his sword. After a mental three count, Mortikai charges from behind the pillar.

"Stay where you are." Mortikai says calmly, his sword prodding the kneeling man's back. Mortikai takes in his surroundings to see they were enclosed in vast walls of ice. The giant eggs before them were lined in a circle. A deep hissing catches his attention from the right. Glancing over, he sees the powder blue Imperial dragon, low to the ground, its mouth open and ready to attack.

"Calm the dragon." Mortikai twists the sword's point against his back, just enough to break skin.

"It's okay Lady. I'll be okay." Nexus reassures his dragon.

"Don't make a promise to her. Now tell me, is this the last key needed to resurrect Geoterra? Or are there other options?" Mortikai starts his interrogation, staying wary of the dragon.

"Yes, and when I take it back to Ilena we can begin the ritual."

"If you take it back, that is!" Mortikai prods him in the back again.

"You seriously believe you were going to stand in the way of our master's resurrection?! Nonsense!" Lady suddenly propels a stream of fire from her mouth!

Mortikai pushes away from Nexus, avoiding the scorching flames. He lands on his rear and another stream is blown in his direction. Mortikai rolls backward onto his feet and sprints to the other side of the deserted nest as the stream of fire follows him, swathing the eggs in fire. He intuitively swings his sword horizontally, slashing a few of the eggs. They crushed as frozen entrails blew with the wind. Mortikai slashes again, breaking another.

"Stop that!" Nexus rushes in his direction. Mortikai thrusts his sword forward in an attempt to halt his attack. With great speed, Nexus grabs the blade of the sword, slides into a scissors kick, tripping the warrior and snatching the sword from his hand. Mortikai performs a cartwheel to regain his footing. His anger then begins to boil over as he sees Nexus holding his sword. Mortikai narrows his eyes, acknowledging he was outnumbered and his slim chances of escape.

"Maybe I should have had Toki come with me." He regrets, looking back and forth at his foes. With Mortikai's sword in hand, Nexus motions for Lady to grab the nearest egg. The beautiful dragon flaps its wings and uses its claws to clutch its trophy. As it flaps its wings harder, attempting to ascend, Mortikai slowly reaches for the Karaka at his belt...

In one quick motion, he hurls it at Nexus, widely cutting his shoulder and making him drop the sword. As the blade hits the snow, Mortikai dive rolls over, grasping the hilt of the sword. He then holds the blade against Nexus's neck.

"Tell the dragon to cease!"

"It is done. You cannot stop the inevitable." Nexus calmly tells him tight-lipped.

"*Killing* you isn't inevitable!" Mortikai threatens, bringing his neck to bleed, trying to give him mercy.

"You can kill me! Nevertheless, Lady *will* deliver the egg!" He affirms. Suddenly, Mortikai hears a roar and the excruciating burn of fire. The warrior screams in agony, clutching his enemy's wounded shoulder. Nexus breaks the hold and backs against the walls of the mountain. Mortikai falls to his knees and rolls over onto his back, letting the snow cool his scorched back and heated mail of his tunic. Searching the darkness, he finds Nexus shimmying up Lady's tail and onto her back as she flaps her wings, ascending higher with each strong flap.

"I—have to stop them." Mortikai whispers to himself, struggling to sit up. Forcing himself to his feet before they were out of sight, Mortikai grabs the Karaka beside him from the snow and uses the last of his strength to heave the Karaka at the retreating couple. He lets the momentum of the throw, shove him onto his back. The tired warrior faintly hears a yell and someone shout "bastard". Mortikai lie there on his back as the Karaka plummeted into the snow, blood tainting its blade.

"No. I've—failed." He says, fighting to stay awake.

Dragonlady Ilena sat apathetically at her throne. Growing restless of waiting, she entertains herself with her gifts of magic. The anxious mistress gently twirls an orb of fire over her fingers and palm.

"*I have the egg Mistress. I am on my way to where our lord sleeps.*" Ilena extinguishes the orb as her face fills with content. The telepathic message was sent from Nexus.

"Finally, Nexus has the last key," She stands, staring up toward the ceiling. "Now—I can go to you master," Ilena descends the stairs with a quiet prayer, her battle skirt clinking with each step. "Guard, unchain Miss Eva and ready her for the ceremony." She orders, as the guard bows in respect. The burly man briskly walks toward the corner of the room, right of the large, stone doors. The imprisoned princess was wearily awake, her strength not returned to her yet. The guard grabs a key from around his neck and unlocks her shackles. Eva falls helplessly into his arms. He primitively throws her over his shoulder and meets Ilena in the middle of the room.

"What would you like me to do with her?"

"I want you to ride on a separate dragon and make sure nothing happens to her." Ilena instructs, turning toward the small chamber beside the throne. She enters the room to see Shay sitting, going through a few scrolls, double checking the ritual agenda. The lady-in-waiting was dressed accordingly for the event. A red evening gown fitted her athletic body. Her brunette barrel curls fell over her shoulders, slightly masking the adorned pearls around her neck.

“Shay, you look stunning,” Ilena compliments her. “Are you ready to go?”

“Yes. I was just double checking a few things. Do you want Zina readied?” She sits the scroll down, ready to do her job.

“Yes, but you look too beautiful to be preparing a dragon,” Ilena shows her softer side. “Just tell someone else to do it and I’ll—” They both look toward the throne room’s direction. A loud thump was heard and a moan of pain. Ilena and Shay’s eyes meet and putting on her warrior face, Ilena enters the Throne Room.

Standing in the middle of the room, was Eva, her hair billowing wildly. Ilena gasps in surprise. Eva whips around; her eyes possessing raging tempests in them. Ilena looks over to see the guard on his knees, his head smashed into the wall. As soon as the thought of attacking entered Ilena’s mind, Eva aims her palm in her direction! Leaping aside, she avoids a gust of wind that crushes the dressing room door! Ilena rushes toward Eva, ducking and dodging each large gust of wind thrown at her. The Dragon Mistress leaps, hoping to kick Eva, when she is thrown up toward the ceiling! Ilena feels her body being pressed into the concrete ceiling. Eva faces the stone wall and holds her arms out to her sides. With the dust in the room making it visible, a tornado began to form around her. Eva was ready to escape now!

Hearing the metallic scraping of the stone doors opening, Ilena forces her right arm down and aims it at Eva’s twister. She was not going to let her escape.

They were much too close to their goal to have their most valuable key escape. The Mistress of Dragons wills a flare of fire from her palm. Upon contact with the violent twister, it ignites immediately!

Eva screams from the heat of the cyclone around her. She releases her hold on the forged wind and drops to her knees, breathing for air. With all the wind in the room ceased Ilena lands softly on her feet and rushes toward her wounded prisoner. To her surprise, Eva sweeps her legs, tripping her onto her side. Eva is immediately on her feet and desperately runs out of the throne room and into the numerous halls. Running as fast as she could down the hall, she continually looks back, ready to dodge any orbs of fire shot at her from behind. The failed attempt to escape drained her of all her energy. Eva looks back to see a woman standing in a red evening gown. She was beautiful and had a caring look in her eyes.

“Are you lost?” The woman asks, watching Eva slow to a stop. “I’m one of the maids. Are you a guest of the Lady?” She lays a hand comfortingly on Eva’s shoulder.

“No. I—have to go!” Eva weakly pushes her aside. Before taking anymore steps, she’s grabbed by the roots of her hair and pressed against the wall beside them. Struggling against her captor, she sees the evil in her eyes and the sharp needle that was jabbed into her neck. Using the last of her strength, Eva slugs the woman across the jaw before slipping into unconsciousness.

Hearing the sound of stilettos against the hard floor, Ilena looks over to see Shay holding Eva over her shoulder.

“I’ve recovered her for you. Zina is prepared for you outside.”

“Good, now she’ll be less of a nuisance. Thank you, Shay.” Ilena turns toward the stone doors.. She

cites an incantation and the stone doors open as if a giant shoved them open. On the large balcony were a beautiful white Imperial dragon and a red and purple Serpentine dragon. Shay throws Eva's limp body over the slender dragon's back. Ilena nods and mounts her favorite dragon.

"Oh Zina, you are more beautiful everyday." She warmly compliments as they fly toward triumph.

Mortikai opens his eyes and looks up into the dark, starry sky. The flames of the fire were still burning strong. He barely felt any strength to even breath, let alone stand by himself. But common sense told him that he would suffer from hypothermia if he stayed exposed to the cold like this.

"I need to get up," He whispers in the still air. Mortikai slowly sits up, his back painfully sore from the burns. He stabs the blade of his sword into the frozen ground for support and struggles to his feet. Bending over, he grabs the bloody Karaka and ties it back to his waist. The wounded warrior then limps toward the crevasse. He trudges cautiously across the icy floor of the cavern, not wanting to fall and injure himself further. Taking his time he made it out in about five minutes. It took the injured Mortikai another seven minutes to travel the snowfield. Slowly dragging his feet through the snow, he returns to the main hut.

Mortikai opens the door and steps in as the people in the room turned to look at him. His hair was scraggly and his breathing was slow, steady, and deep. His face was hardened with the look of fatigue. Feeling it safe now, he loses all his strength, dropping his sword and collapsing to the floor...

Mortikai awakens slowly and glances around the room. It was a small room with wooden walls. Looking around with his eyes, he could see small candles lighting the room and realized that he was lying on his bare chest on a plush mat. To his right he noticed Kikuyu, Kei's glaciobo. The great wolf was lying down with his head resting on its paws. Suddenly a soothing relief rushes over him as hot water is poured onto his back. Mortikai looks back to see Kei sitting on his lower back, tending to his wounds. The Friotian princess looks him in the eye, giving him a seductive smile. Feeling relaxed, he rests his chin on his folded arms.

"Thank you Kei. I really appreciate you doing this for me." He breaks the silence in the room.

"You are welcome. You know, you really should have accepted that help from Toki." She reassuringly says, sounding motherly.

"Yeah, I know," He admits. "Where are we?" Mortikai looks around the room once again.

"We are in my hut. I wanted us to be alone somewhere—quiet." She somewhat hesitates to reveal. Lady Kei stops wiping the burns and reaches over to the low table near her. She grabs a tan, cylindrical bottle. Biting the cork off, she smiles, presumably enjoying this also. She pours the oil onto Mortikai's back. Sitting the bottle aside, Kei begins to deeply massage his back muscles. Mortikai breathes deeply and

moans heavily, enjoying the massage all too much. Kei smiles slyly, knowing that the oil would tenderize each muscle, making each one sensitive to her touch.

She notices his breathing becoming deeper; the delightful sounds of male satisfaction making her fantasies run wild.

“This feels—great. Does everyone—get one of—these?” Mortikai asks between breaths.

“No,” She whispers seductively in his ear. “You are special. And such a brave warrior deserves one.” Mortikai looks back after the reply and turns over, holding Kei up with his hip as he turns over onto his rear. Kei sat on his pelvic region, staring him in the eyes. Kikuyu looks up sleepily, eyes the two, and goes back to sleep. Mortikai sits up as they end up enveloped in each other, both sitting on their rears.

He reaches forward to lightly caress Kei's face. Leaning forward, he kisses her deeply. Kei accepts his kiss, placing her hands on his broad chest and taking the love that she yearned for.

Mortikai gently lays her onto her back. As he hovers over her, she stares into his eyes and reaches under herself to unfasten her top. She timidly reveals her breasts, allowing Mortikai to stroke each sensitive part of her.

“This—this isn't right, but it feels like it should be. Mortikai is exactly what I've been looking for and needed. But I cannot let this happen unless I surely know that he will marry me. Oh Mortikai, I am sorry,” Kei unhappily decides, as her thoughts become action. She grasps his wrists and removes them from her chest, a feat that took every inch of willpower. Kei pulls away from him, refastening her top with disappointment on her face.

“Is everything okay?” Mortikai calmly asks, feeling he had done something wrong.

“Yes, it's just,” She searches for the right words to say. “I cannot let this happen. I—I would really love for us to become eternal lovers, but I have to know that you are true. I would have loved to have been enraptured in your essence as I bathed you. But I have to take responsibility and—stop this.” She explains with her hand placed on his chest. Mortikai nods, fully understanding. Kei exhales, breaking the silence and shifts onto her knees. Mortikai leans back, supporting himself by his arms. A knock on the door startles the two.

“Who's that?” Mortikai whispers worriedly, his eyes looking back and forth at Kei and the door.

“I don't know. It may be my father, possibly Toki,” Lady Kei answers calmly. “You may enter.” She grants the guest permission to enter. The doorknob twists and the door creaks and opens slowly. A tall man dressed in a Chilalfa deer-skinned cloak and heavy moccasins enters the room.

“Hello father.” Lady Kei respectfully addresses him. His solemn face, matching the snowy owl perched on his right shoulder, eyes Mortikai and looks back at his daughter. The repeated glances give proof to him assuming something was going on. To disperse the tension in the room, Mortikai stands to his feet to face the Chief.

“Excuse me, Chief Onaka. I am Slayer Mortikai Leone. I came to your village to destroy the dormant

clutch of Geoterra to prevent his awakening. My journey was postponed by my confrontation with a dragon and its rider.” Mortikai explains himself. The Chief stares, examining the man before him.

“How is your back?” He reaches out, sternly gripping Mortikai's right shoulder and turning him around without an answer.

“Your daughter had helped it to heal some.” The nervous warrior clarifies. The chief removes his hand from Mortikai's shoulder, letting him turn around. His never-changing expression intimidated the warrior.

“Are you working to have my daughter's hand in marriage?” His question shocks the two.

“Uhh,” Mortikai hesitates, looking back at Kei. She smiles and raises her brow, signifying him to say whatever he felt. “Well, we haven't decided that, let alone discussed it.” Mortikai pathologically lies to him. Chief Onaka nods and turns, exiting the room almost disappointedly. Mortikai finally exhales in relief and looks back to see Kei smiling at him.

“Where are my clothes?” He returns the smile. Kei reaches behind Kikuyu and grabs his items.

After getting fully dressed in his cleaned clothes and new elastic shirt, the same as the previous one he wore, his items were equipped and the two leave the hut together, Kei riding on Kikuyu's back. The Friotian princess and the warrior accompanying her, enter the main hut as a few people stop talking to look at them. Everyone begins to whisper amongst themselves, passing friendly gossip. Searching the room for a familiar face, he sees Jodo wrapped in a fur and sleeping in front of the fire. Mortikai notices Chief Onaka sitting down near the middle, sipping from a large mug. The corners of the warrior's mouth slowly turn up in to a smile. Swallowing his pride on a thought he steps forward...

“Excuse me everyone,” He speaks loudly, catching everyone's attention. With everyone staring at him, he continues. “I want to thank you all for your hospitality. You have only made my journey easier. My apprentice and I will be leaving now,” He looks over to see Jodo sitting up watching with everyone else. “And the people of Frio, I would be happy to ask—to take Lady Kei's hand in marriage.” Mortikai finally announces, trying to hold back a giant smile. Kei gasps, covering her face. The overly excited girl leaps at her fiancé, hugging him around the neck. Chief Onaka stands and begins to sing a song in a language Mortikai couldn't interpret. His eyes met with the Chief, it was his first time seeing him smile. Everyone in the room began to clap in unison with the rhythm of the song.

“You have made me so happy!” Kei stares at Mortikai with tear-filled eyes.

“Yes, I guess there is a true thing as love at first sight,” He jokes. His smile slowly begins to fade into a look of disappointment. Kei stares at him, her face matching his in question.

“I just remembered, I must finish my mission and then return for a wedding ceremony. I am so sorry.” He explains, embracing her around the waist.

“It's okay. As long as my father has witnessed, it is counted as official. But listen warrior,” She places her palm to his face. “You come back to me. Don't get yourself killed.” Mortikai nods promisingly and motions for Jodo to follow him. Before turning to leave, Kei pulls him into an emotion-filled kiss one last time. He smiles, staring her in the eyes. He imprints her blissful face onto his brain and leaves the hut.

Toki was waiting outside.

"I have heard the good news. Congratulations!" He pulls Mortikai into a hug.

"Thanks," He smiles a bit nervously. "I was wondering if you could fetch Prynn for me." He requests. Toki generously nods and runs toward the stables.

"Wow, so you're about to be a married man." Jodo converses, rolling a snowball in his hands.

Yes," Mortikai shyly smiles. "It was a sort of, love at first sight thing. I feel she needs me. Kei has told me that I'm the one thing she's been looking for. I can tell by the look in her eyes that she was longing to find a reason to leave this place. And her father, he was happy to finally see his daughter marry." Mortikai stares off at the blanket of white, explaining his thoughts to his apprentice.

After a few moments, Prynn dashed from around the barn-like structure. Mortikai grabs his mane, leaping onto his back as he always did. They make a wide circle and return to Jodo.

"Jodo, I feel this is my gravest hour, or at least it *will* be soon. I ask that you take Prynn and ride back to Trine's Cavern," He reaches into his sac for the coin he received from Kria. "Get the Sword of Slayer and ride back as fast as possible! I will need it when fighting Geoterra," The burden is dropped.

"How will you get there? Wherever *there* is?" Jodo awkwardly asks.

"Geoterra is confined under the Hinderers' Circlet, far to the west. I'll have to run a long way to make it in time," Mortikai dismounts the unicorn, laughing to pull away the stress of the situation. "Pray for my well being, Jodo. And if I don't make it, take care of Lady Kei, as my last request as your master." Mortikai shakes Jodo's hand, pulling him into a hug. "Prynn." He averts his attention to the unicorn. "Allow Jodo to ride you to the Dark Range. And if you never see me again, protect Jodo for as long as you live." Prynn steps closer to nuzzle Jodo's hair and receive a kiss on the face from his companion. Mortikai exhales deeply and steps away from the embrace. Jodo holds his head high, realizing that so much was in his hands now. The young mage mounts Prynn and sets out on his journey. Jodo looks back one last time before riding off. Mortikai watches as they disappear over the horizon. Taking a deep breath, the determined warrior faces the west, ready to meet his destiny.

"Mortikai!" He hears a familiar voice, halting his run. Mortikai questioningly whips around to see Lady Kei! She was dressed in a pair of fitted, tan, Chilalfa-skinned pants and an open, belly-cut white jean jacket revealing her bikini top. Her long, dark brown locks were tied tightly into two pigtails. Kikuyu stood by her side. Mortikai frowns, curious as to why she was there.

"I want to accompany my husband on his journey," She approaches him, the tomahawk tied to her belt loop swaying with each step and her glaciobo following closely behind. "Plus, you'll never make it to the Hinderers' Circlet in time on foot." She cleverly tells him, embracing her husband.

"So how are we supposed to get there?" Mortikai sternly asks.

"On Kikuyu," Kei warmly scratches the large canine's head.

“Kikuyu?! Are you sure she can manage both of our weight?” He makes an excuse. Kei stands with her hands on her hips, looking at him as if he was a fool.

“Yes, she is strong enough.” She mounts Kikuyu and pats her back, coaxing Mortikai to climb on also. Raising his eyebrows in hesitation, he approaches the beast. With the utmost care, he climbs onto Kikuyu's back and wraps his arms around Kei's waist.

“That wasn't so hard, was it?” Kei laughs. She scratches Kikuyu's crest as the glaciobo howls extensively before bounding swiftly across the solid permafrost. Mortikai stares blankly, becoming focused before his destined fight.

Far away south in the Symbra Castle, Orian sits in his bedroom, decorated lavishly as his mother's, as he begins to get a bad gut feeling.

“I hope Mortikai and Eva are okay. He said he'd be back soon,” The young prince stands from his large bed. He paces to sort out his thoughts. *“Forget it! I'm going to request permission from mother to find Mortikai and have Koalu accompany me. I'm skilled enough with a sword to take on a dragon and save my sister and Mortikai.”* The frustrated prince paces quickly around the room. He decides to make his thoughts action and as leaves his room to rush into the armored chest of Akitus, just as he was about to enter.

Orian eyes him in disgust, he was the last person he wanted to see right now. The nuisance stares at him with a smug look on his face, a face he wanted to rip the smirk from.

“Step aside, Akitus. I have business to attend to.” Orian seriously speaks at him.

“Whoa, whoa. Where are you off to little one?” Akitus suspiciously inquires, blocking his way.

“I am not obliged to tell you anything!” The young prince snaps, trying to push past him.

“Hold on, I'm just here to help, Orian.”

“Well if you *must* know,” He gives up. “I am going to request if I can go and help Mortikai save my sister,”

“Young Orian, you are neither experienced nor old enough to go out into the field. You could be killed and then who will be the heir to the Symbra Kingdom if you *and* Eva are gone? Not to mention, how your mother would feel.” He tries to reason with the young man. Orian stares at him in contempt. There was no way he was going to be doubted.

“Don't talk down at me! I am *your* superior!” Orian shouts at the knight, utilizing his power. “I don't care for your opinion! I am going to save my sister!” He shoves Akitus out of the way in anger, stomping down the corridor and toward his mother's room on the other side of the hall. He knocks loudly on the door.

“Come in.” Queen Panela's voice is faintly heard from the other side of door. The prince enters her chamber, lightly closing the door behind him. His mother sat on a chair in a pantsuit, embroidering a

small handkerchief, one of her favored hobbies.

“Mother,” Orian pulls up a chair and sits informally backward in it. “I was wondering if I could accompany Mortikai on his quest to save Lásia. He said he'd be back soon, but it's been three days now,” He moves closer to his mother. “Koalu could accompany me. I feel that I am experienced enough to go into war and help save my own sister.” The eager prince stares her in the eyes. Queen Panela continued to sew, looping over and under, ceasing all conversation for a moment in thought. She was afraid also for her daughter's life, but to send another child—it was risky. Looking at her son and the emotion in his face and hearing it in her words, she would have to fight against a motherly decision and a queenly decision. Deeply exhaling, the worried mother looks her son in the eyes.

“Orian, understand that you are my only son and I would hate to lose you. And I would hate myself for making the decision that led to your death,” She turns her body toward him, her hands in her lap. “But if you feel you are confident enough to go out and help Mortikai rescue Eva, then I must let you. I know that with your sister's safety on your mind, you will not falter or hesitate on the battlefield,” She gives him the combined answer of her motherly and queenly instincts. Orian jumps for joy and embraces her.

“Oh, thank you mother! I love you so much that I won't *let* myself die on the battlefield!” The ecstatic prince promises, turning and running out of his mother's room. He runs down the stairs and out of the royal quarters. Orian descends the numerous flights of stairs and hurries past the burial place of his father. Running down many hallways, he reaches the door leading to the soldiers' quarters. The anxious prince hurriedly strides down the cool, torch-lit, basement hallway. Stopping at the fifth door on his right, he knocks sternly on the thick wooden door. After waiting a few moments, the door swings open to reveal Koalu at the door. The off-duty soldier was dressed in a pair of slacks and a tank top.

“Orian!” He exclaims in surprise. “What are you doing down here?”

“I've received permission to help Mortikai save Eva!” Koalu smiles at his pupil.

“Our men have been searching for her the last five days. How will we possibly find Mortikai?”

“Uhh,” The young prince gives it some thought. “You have some history books, right?” He tries to prove his point.

“Yes, what kind?” Koalu frowns, not understanding his logic.

“It doesn't matter.” Orian enters the soldier's quarters. It was quite a tidy and nicely furnished room to be a tough soldier's living area. Near the door, Orian turns to his left, facing a large, oak bookshelf. Searching the binders quickly, Orian finds “Lásian History”.

Orian removes the book from its space and flips through its browned pages. After a moment, he finds the information he was looking for. Turning toward Koalu, he reads aloud.

“500 years ago, the most evil dragon born in Lásia was confined under a place designated by the Slayers as the ‘Hinderers' Circlet’,” Orian pauses for a moment.

“But, I know this already.” Koalu protests matter-of-factly. Orian frowns and searches for the recorded

coordinates of the area.

“But do you know the exact location?” He slyly smiles.

“Okay, okay,” Koalu gives in. “But before we leave, a gift.” The knight walks to the bed. Pulling the bookcase aside, he reveals a smaller suit of armor. He takes it from the wall and hands it to Orian.

“I was going to wait, but, you've deserved it.” He grants him the gift. Orian smiles and quickly dresses into the armor like he learned from his current squire training. Without words, he and Koalu leave the castle, ready to assist Mortikai in saving Princess Eva.

“The horses we have won't be able to get us to the Hinderer's Circlet as quickly as we need to.” Orian states disappointedly.

“Let me show you a secret I haven't told anyone.” Koalu says, leading Orian outside of the gates of Symbra and into the Forsab Plains. Pulling a small whistle from the inside of his shirt, Koalu takes the deepest breath he could and releases each filled lung of air into it. The silent sound lasted for almost a minute. Koalu breathes exhaustingly as Orian stares at him in disbelief.

“So, what now?” Orian looks around, wondering what they were waiting for.

“You'll see.” Koalu smiles. After waiting a few minutes, a white figure was seen across the sky. Orian's eyes squint to focus and immediately widen once he recognizes a lizard-like body and majestic wings flapping. It lands and roars deeply.

“You have a dragon?!” Orian was shocked at the unheard of act.

“Yep. I found him in the forest when I was a child and raised him. I trained him to follow this whistle's call,” He scratches the beautiful dragon's jaw as its thick tongue wipes against his face. “His name is Gil. I check up on him whenever I get the free time to.” Koalu mounts the neck of his pet dragon. Looking at Koalu cautiously, Orian hesitates before climbing on behind him. The creature flaps its wings and takes off into the air toward the Hinderer's Circlet.

Jodo held his eyes in a squint as the wind whipped his face. He rode upon the back of Prynn as he reached speeds the young mage would have never imagined.

“I wonder what would happen if I gave him a spell that made him even faster.” His overexcited mind wanders. Making up his mind, Jodo smiles mischievously and concentrates on the fastest form of transportation, forming the spell into his hands. He caresses Prynn's back as he was running. Prynn immediately neighs and his speed is increased threefold! Jodo smiles at his work, feeling his work was doing some good. He abruptly feels a prodding at his rear. Sliding forward toward Prynn's neck, he

observes two protrusions upon Pryn's back. Jodo's eyes widen as they continue to grow! The protrusions extended out and feathers sprang forth! While Pryn was running, he was soon airborne. After a few altercations of learning to use the wings as another set of limbs, Pryn flies as if he did since the day he was born.

"Flying *is* the fastest way of transportation!" Jodo yells through the wind, hugging the unicorn's neck. "Let's hurry, Pryn!" The unicorn flaps its wings strongly. Flying swiftly through the air, the Dark Range began to come into view.

Meanwhile, Mortikai and Kei were closely closing in on the Hinderer's Circlet. Upon the back of Kikuyu, she ran beautifully across the now thawed out grass as they moved further east. The two were silent through most of the journey. Mortikai was in his own little world, focusing and trying to hold back any thoughts of fear that battled their way into his head. Kei gave him his respect and remained quiet. As Kikuyu ran up a steep hill, they all hear roars and chants of celebration.

"Stop, girl!" Kei immediately commands her glaciobo. Kikuyu stops abruptly and lays low to the ground, understanding the situation. Mortikai climbs off of the wolf and crouches down onto his stomach. He crawls over to the top of the hill and looks down into the gully.

A little over a hundred Dragonlords, disciples, about twenty dragons, and above the Hinderer's Circlet stood Dragonlady Ilena in her revealing battle armor and a poorly dressed Eva, confined on her knees were in the gully. The egg that he tried to destroy sat upright near them also. Their backs were to a cliff above the sea.

"That's Eva!" Mortikai whispers loudly, looking back at Kei. He decides to wait a moment and observe what they were doing first. A woman dressed in a red evening gown walks over to Ilena and hands her a long, curved dagger.

"A Dragon Dagger." Mortikai murmurs, recognizing the special dagger made from dragon bone.

One of the underlings hands her a scroll and the lady-in-red reads it in a language that seemingly only the Dragonlords could understand. As the reading became more dramatic, Eva came to. She seemed more dazed or hypnotized than awake. The woman finished the incantation and stroked the egg as everyone cheered. She approaches Eva and rips open her shirt, exposing the beginning of her breasts. The dagger wielding woman turned toward everyone, glances at Ilena to receive a nod, and announces one final thing as everyone cheered loudly.

"They're going to sacrifice her! We must go now!" Kei exclaims, jumping to her feet. Mortikai snaps out of his trance and nods, standing and unsheathing his sword. Together, Mortikai and Kei run down the steep walls of the gully.

“You all will die for this!” Mortikai shouts, reaching for his Karaka. He hurls it at the Ceremony Leader, as its blade hits the dagger, knocking it far from her hand. The Karaka circles widely back to its wielder and is returned to its place on his belt.

All the Dragonlords rush toward the intruders, ready to crush the infidels! Kikuyu leaps and lands in the middle of a small crowd, savagely ripping the limbs of her enemies. She grabs a man's arm in her jaws and shakes ferociously. Dropping him, she rushes through the crowd, tearing through the flesh and armors of her numerous enemies. Kikuyu then leaps up vertically and releases a ruthless beam of ice, killing the unprotected on contact!

Kei and Mortikai find themselves surrounded in a group of Dragonlords. Mortikai holds his sword in defense, ready to protect his wife.

“Mortikai, go! You need to save Eva; I'll take care of them!” Kei orders with her back to him. The men suddenly wield spears, aiming them for the couple. Kei suddenly steps in front of Mortikai and holds her palms together in front of her chest, building up energy. She immediately holds her hands out to each side of them as a dome comprised of ice surrounds the two, protecting them from the thrown spears as they freeze and shatter on contact. A few Dragonlords attempt to break the dome and suffer the same threat. At that moment, Kei releases the dome and clutches her wrist as a gauntlet forged from ice covers her hand with three spikes emerging where her knuckles are. She swiftly grabs a handful of the nearest man's hair and jabs the spikes into his gut. She spins, impaling another in the face and elbowing another in the jaw, whips around, and slashes him across the chest. Kei delivers a spinning back kick into the face of another oncoming foe and guts another. Mortikai sees that she could hold her own and hacks his way through the crowd. Hacking his way through the Dragonlord-infested crowd; he makes it to the Hinderer's Circlet.

“You cannot, disturb the ceremony!” Shay steps between him and the sacrifice. Mortikai stares her in the eye with rage burning in his eyes. Without warning, he grabs her skull and stabs his sword deep into her chest! She gasps and chokes up blood, her eyes widely staring at her killer.

“Shay!” Mortikai looks aside to see Ilena finally grab the Dragon Dagger. He carelessly removes his blade from her chest cavity and kneels in front of his cousin. Sitting his sword down beside him, Mortikai lays his hands onto her shoulders. He peers into her fully dilated pupils. He frowns as her body only moved slowly from side to side hypnotically.

“Eva!” He begins to shake her. After the stern, constant shakes, she snaps out of the spell. The confused princess looks around, taking in her current surroundings. Eva blinks confusedly as she sees Mortikai before her. Finally recognizing him, she takes him into an embrace, hugging him tightly around the neck.

“Mortikai it's you!” She finally recognizes him, taking him into another embrace, hugging him tightly around the neck. “I knew you'd answer my letter. When I heard about you attacking Ilena in the Marsh, I knew you'd come!” She says through tears. Suddenly, Eva pushes Mortikai aside, aiming her palm! Mortikai turns around to see Ilena thrown back by a quick gust of wind.

“Where did you learn that?” Mortikai stands to his feet, holding his sword in defense.

“As I child I learned how to use wind spells,” Eva takes Mortikai's free hand. “I just remembered how to summon them while I was confined.” She stands.

“Good. Eva, I need you to get out of here,” Mortikai orders calmly, his eyes still on the recovering Ilena. “You see that woman over there, killing all the men? She is my fiancée and I want you to go safely with her,” His voice's tone rising as Ilena opens her right hand to have her Ryuu Halberd appear.

“Your Fiancée? It's so nice how love can bloom on a battlefield.” Eva goes on.

“Eva! Go, now!” Mortikai pulls her into a hug and pushes her along. She nods in understanding and makes her way toward Kei. Mortikai goes into a defensive stance as Ilena closes in closer, anger and vengeance on her face.

“You challenge me again? This time, there won't be any running.” She promises determinedly.

The two stare each other down for a moment, circling each other like territorial animals ready to battle. The two suddenly rush at each other! Ilena swings the halberd widely as Mortikai slides onto his hip. Attempting to trip her with a scissors kick; Ilena jumps back to avoid the sneak attack and delivers an overhead chop. Mortikai rolls to the left, evading the chop and is up to his feet. He slashes at her horizontally. The Dragon Mistress pulls her halberd back quickly, defending the attack vertically with the pole of her halberd, creating sparks with the interception. Wasting no time, she unexpectedly, juts the pole end of the halberd into Mortikai's face! The tough warrior recovers and clutches the end of the halberd. He begins kicking her midsection repeatedly, attempting to make her release the weapon. Ilena takes the pain of each kick with a grunt and clenching of her teeth. Frustrated, Mortikai shoves the pole end aside and strikes her square in the face! The force of the blow knocks Ilena to the ground.

“Get up!” Mortikai demands to her, staring angrily down at her. She frowns, struggling to her feet and Mortikai ruthlessly steps on the halberd's blade and powerfully kicks her across the face, rolling the woman to her side. He approaches her and grasps a handful of her jet black hair in his left hand. Gripping the hilt of his sword, he swipes for her neck, hoping to end her despicable life quickly. Ilena cleverly grabs his wrist, striking the inside of his elbow, just enough to lower her head. Evading the fatal blow, she couldn't say the same for her hair, as Mortikai slashed through her thick locks. He tosses the handful of hair away to see her roll backward and jump to her feet. Dragonlady Ilena looks toward her shoulder to see her hair fall just above her jaw line. She touches her new “haircut” and looks ferociously at her sworn enemy.

“You will die, Fallen Warrior...” She whispers, adding fire to both their angers. He rushes toward her, swinging his sword around his head and lunging it forward for her chest. Bracing herself, she kicks it aside effortlessly and slugs him across the face. She kicks her stiletto heel into his abdomen and follows through with an uppercut. His reflexes respond on point, and he sways back to clutch her wrist. In one motion he stabs his sword deep into the dirt and brings his right elbow across her jaw! The dazed Mistress pulls away from him, picks up her halberd and twirls it around, forcing space between them. Supported by the staff of her halberd, she pants heavily, her eyes locked on Mortikai.

“Tired already?” He mocks with a smirk on his face. The anxious warrior advances toward her, ready to end the battle and hopefully the war. Ilena swings vertically in defense. Their weapons intercept and Ilena begins a chain of kicks, making each one connect. Her swift, graceful moves packed a punch

behind each blow. Ilena performs a backflip, slicing Mortikai's lip! Landing on her feet, she sweeps him flat onto his back. Once he opened his eyes, he could see her halberd coming down vertically for his face!

"No!" Mortikai grabs the blade between his palms, six inches from his face! He looks down to see her legs positioned for anything. To put the standstill more in her favor, she positions her left foot above his crotch, ready to crush him at any moment. The two enemies stare at each other, concentrating on two different things.

Mortikai stares up into the menacing face of Dragonlady Ilena. His mind was racing with counter attacks he could use, but none would prove useful against the foot at his crotch. Ilena stares down at her downed foe. She smiles with satisfaction at the steady flow of blood from his bottom lip. Her muscles tense, exerting all of her strength into trying to chop his sorry face!

Mortikai, using all of his strength, begins to bend the blade of the halberd. Ilena slowly lowers her foot onto his crotch. His face twists in anger. In one motion, he breaks the blade clear off the pole! Surprised beyond anything, Ilena's jaw drops along with the pole from her hand and she shuffles backward, reaching toward the small of her back. Mortikai was a raging bull now, on his feet and dashing toward her! The Dragon Mistress swings the Dragon Dagger and is shocked to see a bright spark as the blade intercepts with his Karaka. The speed of it all was astonishing. The recoil threw her arm back as Mortikai spears her, his entire body hitting her like a train! The furious warrior delivers strong blows to her face, maiming her appearance as she attempted to do to him. Struggling to protect her face from the blows, she slyly grabs one of the small throwing knives at her thigh and slices him across the cheek, making him withdraw from the closed quarters of her face.

Once at her feet, Ilena begins to slash to and fro, trying anything to kill Mortikai. He could see the sloppiness and how unfocused she was. Timing it just right, he grabs her hand and wrenches the blade from her hand. Mortikai uses his brute strength to restrain her arms and clutch her jaw, ready to break her neck with his bare hands.

"Wait!" Ilena forces out. "Look!" She points to the left of them. Mortikai looks aside to see a Massivus dragon roaring and beginning to pin Eva against the cliff, her wind spells having no effect.

"That's right! Spare me and Eva shall live, for now." Ilena cowardly bargains with him. Before loosening his grip, Mortikai hears a howl and sees one of the dragon's strong wings become engulfed in a sheet of ice!

Kikuyu bounds and is upon the beast, biting it everywhere it could. As the other dragons begin to join in to assist their brother, she uses her quick speed to defend herself and pull them away from Eva.

Mortikai tightens his grip and tries to retrain the squirming woman tighter. Soon he hears Eva scream and looks over to see that a Serpentine dragon had slithered to her. The fearful warrior could see her wobbling from the dragon's toxic breath. She dizzily collapses as the beast slithers closer.

"Mortikai, take care of Eva!" He looks back to see Kei running toward him. Her clothes and hair were a bit disheveled, but she had taken out every Dragonlord that didn't cower away, single-handedly. Mortikai releases his hold, pushing Ilena aside. He returns the Karaka to his belt and sprints to his cousin's

safety. Ilena stands smiling, and turns around to finish the ritual to see the Friotian beauty before her. Ilena eyes her up and down and picks up her Dragon Dagger. Kei stares at her, her face solemn, and grabs the tomahawk from her belt loop...

After sheathing his sword, Mortikai sprints toward the red Serpentine dragon as its claws reach out to grab Eva. He leaps, grabbing the dragon's cord-like body. It coils itself around Mortikai as the two of them go plunging over the cliff! The frantic warrior maneuvers himself back upright and digs deep into the tough dirt of the cliff's side, trying to obtain a grip from the weight of him and the dragon falling at high speed. Grabbing his sword, he stabs it deep into the dirt wall, stopping abruptly. The Serpentine slides off his body and bites onto his boot, hanging on for its life. His muscles began to burn as he held both of their weight along with his previous fatigue. Its teeth didn't break through the leather of the boot, but poison dripped from its salivating mouth. The fumes began to disperse thickly. Mortikai kicks it in the face sternly with his free boot. The dragon didn't falter at all from the strikes, thrashing its arms wildly. .

Switching all of his weight onto his right arm, Mortikai reaches down and grabs his Karaka. Calculating the angle correctly, he hurls it out toward the sea as it flies back, chopping the Serpentine's head clear off! He sighs as the burden was lifted from the excess weight. He wiggles his boot, dropping the heavy head also.

"That was too close." Mortikai reaches down to grab the Karaka. He begins to use it as a climbing tool and slowly, but surely, inches his way up the cliff.

Meanwhile, Ilena found Kei not to be much trouble in combat. Leaving her in pain on the ground, Ilena confidently approaches Eva, her hand gripping the Dragon Dagger with anticipation. Standing above the dazed princess, she crouches to one knee and grabs her jaw. Ilena raises the blade, ready to hack her across the chest, ready to draw blood, when she hears the flapping of a dragon behind her. She smiles in relief, identifying the rhythm of the flaps belonging to an Imperial dragon. She looks over her shoulder to see a young knight standing behind her. Before she could react, she finds a sword impaled through her chest. Coughing up a sudden rush of blood, she looks down to see the end of a sword through her breastbone.

"I am Orian Leone, Prince of Symbra! Your reign of terror ends here!" He commendably identifies himself. With the last of her strength, Ilena pulls herself from the blade and falls toward Eva's body. Orian kicks her aside before the Mistress of Dragons fell upon his sister. Ilena cuts her across the chest shouting "Kyrios xypno". At that moment, a large rumbling in the earth begins. Each symbol of the Hinderer's Circlet glows red along with the spilled blood of Eva. Orian stares in fear at his sister as she sits up and stands to her feet. Her eyes were glowing red before clutching her chest and letting out a scream of pain.

"Oh no!" Kei struggles to her feet, witnessing the effects of the evil deed that was completed. "Get back! Move away from the circlet!" She sprints toward Orian and pulls him away as he stared in awe at what his sister was becoming. Koalu lands with his dragon and stands back along with Kei and Orian.

"Who are you two?" She eyes the two knights.

"I am Koalu, a noble knight from the Symbra Kingdom. This is Orian, the prince of Symbra." Koalu introduces him and his partner.

“Where is Mortikai?” Orian asks straightforwardly.

“You know my husband?” Kei shares a confused look with the young man. “He fell off of the cliff with that dragon.” She points to where he fell, trying to save Eva. Koalu jumps on Gil's back as they swiftly take off, flying to the cliff. They descend as Koalu searches frantically. Gil roars as he spots Mortikai climbing. Koalu flies over to his location.

“Mortikai!” He catches the warrior's attention. The struggling warrior looks back, eyeing the dragon with distrust before looking up at Koalu. “Jump onto the dragon!” The knight shouts over the loud rumbling. Hesitating momentarily, Mortikai leaps onto the leathery back of the first friendly dragon he'd ever encountered. “We must make haste. You were a bit late. Now we have to worry about Geoterra. I pray to the heavens that we survive this ordeal.” Koalu briefs him, ascending the cliff.

He brings Mortikai to where Kei and Orian waited patiently, watching Eva slowly approach the Hinderer's Circlet. They leap off of Gil's back. Kei wraps her arms around Mortikai's neck, kissing him in relief. The semi-happy warrior shakes his young cousin's hand, knowing that he looked up to him. They all avert their attention toward Eva's last scream as she stops in the middle of Hinderer's Circlet. The area within the circle glows with a turquoise light as the beam discharges into the air. Eva's body is engulfed in the light and through the circle, raises Geoterra's massive head! His large feet step out of the ground, the claws digging deep into the ground. The dark yellow body of the King of Dragons emerges out, standing 30 feet! Geoterra's immense body crawls from his prison, his long tail slithering out behind him. The giant Imperial dragon blinks its eyes as the red glistens with the sunset. Smoke trails from its nostrils before he throws his head back and lets forth a blast of fire so hot, that it tinged the sky red bringing a heat wave with it as he did 500 years ago before. Lásia's greatest threat and Dreadful Evil had awakened...

Every single being on the planet knew what was to happen now. The Zangalan of the Shadow Marsh felt the evil of Geoterra in the air, every person of Symbra became engulfed in fear, the thieves of Fortla could see the red of the sky, the nymphs of Vela Wood finally saw the visions coming true, the Elder Slayers felt the dread of the thought-to-be killed threat, every sea creature, every insect, every animal, feared for their life that day.

“Free again,” Geoterra bellows with his deep voice. Mortikai's heart seemed to beat a hundred times a minute. He takes a deep breath trying to remain calm and keep composure. “Ilena, where are you?” He calls for her, searching for the one who needed to be thanked for his liberation. He notices her body facedown on the ground, motionless. “So, she was slain,” he concludes. “I must now fulfill my quest and kill every Slayer of the planet, including Trine and Kria!” He bellows, blowing another mass of flames into the sky in anger. Mortikai takes one more deep breath and steps forth to meet his destiny.

“I am Mortikai Leone! I am the Slayer destined to kill you this day!” He yells at the top of his lungs, his confidence calming him very little. Geoterra stares at him and scoffs.

“Run along little human! You are no match for me!” He takes a step forward as the body of Eva came into view on his chest. She hung freely, her arms and lower torso one with the dragon.

“You have my cousin and I *will* kill you, for all of Lásia's sake!” Mortikai retorts ferociously, his adrenaline

speeding through his blood. He clenches the hilt of his sword as the blade mysteriously glows with silver light. Completely letting his warrior instincts take over, he rushes forward; ready to fight the King of Dragons to the death!

Geoterra swipes his claws in front of him, the breeze from the swipe causing a gust. He gives a toothy smile, showing off his strength. Mortikai braces himself, sliding back a bit. Geoterra begins flapping his immense wings, blowing gales of wind so strong that the ground began to rip up! Kei, Orian, and Koalu mount Gil as he covers them with his wings and Kikuyu crouches behind him to keep from being blown away. Mortikai stood against this threat also. Finding the mockery disrespectful, Geoterra raises his claw and stomps onto Mortikai!

“Mortikai, no!” Kei screams, jumping off the dragon and sprinting toward him. Pressing her palms together and pulling them apart, a giant spike composed of ice forms. Bringing her hand above her head, as the spike follows, she hurls her hands as the ice javelin digs itself deep into Geoterra's ankle! He averts his attention to her as they all then notice a silver light from under the dragon's claw. It suddenly rises to see Mortikai holding the foot up with his sword. He stands tall for a moment as the blade suddenly stabs through! Geoterra roars loudly and raises his claw, shaking it angrily. Mortikai pushes his hand against the bottom of the callused foot and falls to the ground. Kei hugs him, afraid for his well-being.

“Kei, I'm going to need you to take cover. I can't lose you.” He calmly tells her, half focusing on her and Geoterra.

“I feel the same exact way! I can't lose *you* either!” She stares at him. “I want to help you. And if you need it, I *will* help!” Kei seriously reveals, walking away from Mortikai. He lets her go and continues his fight with the dragon. Gripping his Karaka, he hurls it at the beast's throat, barely cutting through its thick skin. Geoterra began to find the antics annoying and advances toward Mortikai, swiping at the Slayer with his claws, tearing through amounts of terrain. Mortikai ran backward, avoiding the natural blades of his enemy. The enormous dragon suddenly takes a step to the side and whirls in a complete circle, swinging its tail with vast force! Remembering what happened the last time he was hit with a dragon's tail, Mortikai times the oncoming appendage and leaps over it. Geoterra, seeing his blow wasn't successful, swings again. Mortikai smirks as an idea came to him. Bracing his feet, the clever warrior points his sword toward the oncoming tail. The blade implants deep into the dragon's flesh! Geoterra roars lightly in surprise.

“*There's no way I can possibly hurt him! Jodo, please hurry!*” Mortikai thinks as he's flung away!

Meanwhile, Jodo and Pryn search through the dark clouds of the Dark Range. Seeing the glowing crystals, they arrive at Trine's cave. Pryn's hooves click as he lands on the hard crystal floor of the dark, secluded cave. Able to sense the walls around him, Jodo dismounts the winged unicorn.

“I'll be back.” Jodo whispers to Pryn, rubbing his face. Turning around and searching through the dark, Jodo opens his palm and concentrates. A ball of fire ignites in his palm, lighting the dark cave. Following the path, he makes it to the wall with the glowing opening beneath it. Smiling with approval, he crushes the ball of fire. The young mage takes a deep breath and focuses deeply. Each molecule of his body quickly shifts into a liquefied state and he effortlessly slides through the gap. Looking around in awe at the crystal room before him, he spots the thin body of a man standing above him. In surprise, Jodo

regroups his molecules into one mass again.

“You must be Jodo, young one,” Trine smiles at the young protégé. “Mortikai had told me about you. It looks like my Awakening Spell worked wonders. You're handling your powers quite well.” The elder strokes his beard happily, marveling at his work.

“Thank you Great Trine,” Jodo bows lightly, showing respect for the living legend before him. “I've come for the Sword of Slayer. Mortikai sent me to retrieve it. He needs its power at this moment, his gravest hour is nigh!” The young messenger requests hastily, wasting no time.

“I understand. I can feel Geoterra's rage among us as we speak. Mortikai is luckily still alive and well but I don't know for how much longer. Only the Sword can save the Planet,” Trine declares, opening his bony hand as a large, double-handed sword appears. The hilt was composed of browned leather and contained two slots, one filled with a gold coin and the other empty. The sword's sturdy blade was composed of clear crystal. Jodo quickly presents the coin that was given to him and hands it to Trine. The Elder inserts his partner's coin into its place as the crystal blade illuminates. It flashes and glows unlike anything Jodo had seen before in his life. The luminescence generating inside the blade wasn't light, but raw energy. Jodo breaks his glance and bows deeply to Trine.

“Thank you Great One,” He takes the sword from him. “Pray for us all!” Jodo says turning and teleporting from the chamber. Landing on Prynn's back, the frightened unicorn neighs and begins to buck.

“Prynn, it's me! Calm down boy!” Jodo quiets his steed. The unicorn recognizes the sound of his voice and calms down. “Okay, its time for us to go faster than ever, Mortikai needs us!” The young mage marvels at the glowing sword as it lit the room. Prynn turns around and leaps from the cavern's opening. Neighing with excitement, Prynn takes off, flapping his newfound wings as fast as possible. The unicorn's perseverance helped them reach speeds close to Mach 1! Jodo felt the change in temperature as they were approaching the colder regions. Far in the distance, he could see the red of the sky and feel the impending danger.

Mortikai currently held his own against the King of Dragons. He felt Geoterra was simply toying with him. The dragon would sometimes toss him around, simply for his amusement, but would let him know if he got a little too rough.

“*Geoterra thinks I am just another weak human!*” The frustrated warrior concludes, blocking a swipe of the dragon's claws and sliding back. “*I need to find a way to get atop of him.*” Mortikai devises a plan. Geoterra found this “little game” growing boring, and he finally clutches the brave Slayer in his claws. Beginning to squeeze, he smiles as the agonizing scream was like music to his ears.

“And you thought you were ready for *me?*” Geoterra brings his face close to his prey. “I think you need

a little more practice.” The uninterested dragon tosses him aside.

The King of Dragons flaps his wings, his entire mass becoming airborne almost instantly in one beat. He had more important tasks, such as burning things and a certain Kingdom, on his mind.

Geoterra begins flying in the direction of Symbra, ready to make his move in taking over Lásia. Mortikai's eyes widen like saucers as he sees the evil beast escaping. Disregarding his current pain, the determined warrior jumps to his feet.

“Kikuyu!” He screams for the wolf at the top of his lungs, running past his friends, his only concern being to stop the dragon. In a dead sprint, he looks to his left as he hears Kikuyu's soft footsteps and heavy panting. Reaching over and grabbing her neck, he leaps upon her back. She dashes up the angled wall of the gully, just as Geoterra passes over. Racing with as much determination as Mortikai, she digs each powerful paw into the grass, climbing up with all her strength. Just as her paw hit the top of the hill, Kikuyu leaps high into the air, propelling through the air near Geoterra's hindquarters.

Mortikai stands straight up and leaps off of Kikuyu's back. He grabs onto the scales along the thickness of Geoterra's whipping tail and struggles to pull himself up. Before falling, Kikuyu blasts a beam of ice onto Geoterra's right wing. The entire wing is consumed in ice and the immense dragon's flying pattern is interrupted. Averting his attention from trying to knock the Slayer off, to regaining flight, Mortikai climbs along the back of the dragon. The changeable ups and downs of one-winged flight, causes the warrior to lose his balance. Unsheathing his sword, he stabs his sword down into the deep muscle of the tail. Geoterra roars in pain. The dragon flaps his frozen appendage, breaking bits of the ice off at a time. Geoterra frustratingly looks back and engulfs his frozen wing in fire, melting the ice. Mortikai feels the dragon pick up speed and scrambles up his back, stabbing his sword through his back with each step. Geoterra picks up speed, ascending high into the sky.

“*Think!*” Mortikai yells at himself, squinting from the wind. “*His spine is right beneath me. I'll cripple him!*” Mortikai grips his hilt as the blade glows in a silver light. Geoterra changes directions and nosedives toward the ground! Mortikai finds his mark and stabs his sword deep between two vertebrae in the dragon's spinal column. Gritting his teeth, the warrior unmercifully twists the sword, attempting to paralyze the dragon. Mortikai feels a shift in Geoterra's movements and the dragon loses control. Geoterra begins to fly back up, but dives into the ground, sliding on his underside, imprinting the terrain. Mortikai continues twisting his sword, hoping the dragon wouldn't recover at all. Geoterra snarls in detest and looks backward along his back. Opening his gaping mouth, he releases a stream of scorching fire! Reflexes' responding quickly, Mortikai wrenches his sword free and leaps aside, avoiding the fire. He tucks and rolls onto the grass and up onto his feet.

“Looks like you Slayers have been training over the years.” Geoterra comments as he tried to hide his pain, half-standing and half-lying down. Mortikai himself was panting deeply, trying to regain his stamina. Hearing footsteps, he looks behind him to see Koalu jogging over.

“I couldn't bear to sit back and watch.” Mortikai's old squire accompanies him. Koalu grabs the weapon at his hip. It resembled a nine-tails, having a metal hilt, nine long metal whips, with arced and hooked blades up and down every other whip.

“Oh, you two pests think you can take *me* down?!” Geoterra stands tall, his chest out in pride. Throwing

his head back, he releases a loud roar. After a few moments, the roar was responded to. The two knights look into the sky to see numerous dragons descending near them. Mortikai looks at Koalu and they nod, giving each other courage. The two warriors suddenly run, dodging each projectile of fire thrown at them. An Imperial dragon swipes at Mortikai's head from above. The wary Slayer ducks aside while swinging his sword in an arc, slashing the dragon's underbelly. With a roar of pain as its organs fall out, it falls to the ground. Before decapitating the dragon, Mortikai senses a threat behind him. A Serpentine dragon was slithering toward him, just as Ilena's had, ready to wrap him in its coils. The quick dragon snaps at Mortikai and he meets its poisonous bite with the blade of his sword. Mortikai yells as he is picked up and clawed at. The creature struggled to rip through his chain mail tunic. Mortikai seizes its right, claw and breaks its thin fingers! He lets go of his sword and clutches his Karaka, bringing a fatal swipe to its abdomen. The dragon shrieks, dropping the sword it held in its mouth. Mortikai retrieves his sword and backs away from the venom-spewing creature. He turns around to see more dragons approaching, taking a deep breath of hope, he swings his sword and charges!

Koalu stood surrounded by an Imperial, Serpentine, and Massivus. His nine tails dug deep into their hides. The knight cracks the whip at a Serpentine dragon. Each armored whip wraps around its narrow body, and nearly tears its body in half as he pulls the whip back. Spinning in the same motion, the whips grab hold of an Imperial's face, as it roars. The dragons begin to catch on to his tactic and become airborne. Koalu feels the heat of fear on his neck. They all begin to breathe their different varieties of fire at him. Koalu turns and sprints as fast as he could, dodging the orbs of Massivus fire or the sweeping streams of Imperial fire.

"Help!" He screams out as he is struck in the left shoulder by the scorching bombardment of fire. He sees Kikuyu sprinting toward him and she leaps into the air, blasting her own natural weapon of ice at them. Her beams of ice freeze their wings as she latches onto the Massivus dragon, her claws digging deep into its flesh. The glaciobo wildly gnaws at its neck, bringing it crashing down to the ground. She leaps from it to tussle with an Imperial. Koalu stood, heavily panting, trying to regain a second wind when he begins to smell an atrocious odor. Looking over his shoulder, a Serpentine strikes with its dripping jaws! It bites into his breastplate and uses its claws to rip it away. Before Koalu could reach for his whip, it spat a glob of venom onto his chest! He screams in agony, swinging his whip so hard it decapitated the beast. He falls onto his back, his teeth clenched in pain as the venom absorbed into his pores.

Kikuyu walks toward him, whimpering in sadness. She licks his face and barks, calling her master. Kei and Orian run toward them, rolling and leaping over the attacking dragons, Kei freezing a few of them in the process. She makes it to them and kneels as she sees his state. His skin had already begun to change purple as the skin inflamed. His breathing was forced now as his windpipe was being crushed by the swelling skin and muscle underneath.

"Orian—grow up to be—strong. I am—very proud of you." Koalu forces out.

As Mortikai began to grow weary from fighting each dragon back-to-back, Geoterra watches him.

"Most impressive. I see you definitely can take a beating. It looks like one of your lowly friends wasn't so lucky!" Geoterra mocks him disrespectfully. Upon hearing that, Mortikai looks back to see Kei and Orian near Koalu's downed body. He ceases combat with the current Imperial and rushes toward them, fearing the worst.

“No! Koalu!” He breaks through and kneels, grabbing his hand in his.

“—Mortikai,” The dying knight forces a smile. “It was an honor—fighting alongside of you.” Mortikai feels the tears coming to him. He looks up at Kei to see her eyes closed as she looked up at the sky and held her hands up

“She's trying to heal him.” Orian utters, staring at his dying teacher. Before the ritual could take effect, Koalu winces one last time, clenching his teeth and his muscles relax. They watch in sorrow as his head turns to the side as a mixture of blood and bile exits from his open mouth. Mortikai feels his right eye twitching, as his rage began to build. Kei sighed and bowed her head in a silent prayer. Orian stares solemnly at his dead trainer, glad to have known him for so long. Kikuyu throws her head back and howls a mournful cry.

“You pathetic humans!” Geoterra shatters the moment with laughter. They all turn to look at him as he breathes a torrent of fire in their direction. The wildfire burned random dragons in its path as it traveled toward his enemies. Kei steps forward between them all, building energy in her cupped hands. The Friotian princess extends her arms, creating a dome of thick ice around the four of them. Geoterra's flames engulf the ice dome as it slowly begins to melt. Mortikai looks at Kei to see her eyes glowing as blue as the ice she produced. Kikuyu also added to the construction of the dome. Orian and Mortikai soon could see their own breath as the temperature of the dome was dropped increasingly to keep them safe from the King of Dragons' flames.

Geoterra didn't cease his flames, taking their determination to live as disrespect. The dragon felt that he and his kind were at the top of the food chain. He felt that no other species had the right to act otherwise. Taking a few steps until the point where he actually stood above his adversaries, the ancient dragon puts forth the peak of his fire.

Kei feels herself beginning to falter. She was exerting so much energy to keep the dome intact.

“Okay guys!” She grabs their attention. “This is too much for me to hold. I'm going to release the dome and try to blast it into his face in the form of spikes,” The dome shakes as Geoterra attempts to smash it. “Get onto Kikuyu's back. Once I release the dome, she will carry you away.”

“What about you?!” Mortikai immediately disagrees with the plan.

“I will be fine. Ice is my specialty,” She simply tells her fiancé. He stares at her with a worried look on his face. She mouths the words, `Don't Worry'. “On three! One, two,” As Kei muttered three; she turns toward Geoterra's face, pivoting her left foot for support. The dome breaks and shatters outward like broken glass. Kikuyu takes off, running as fast as she could to keep the others from harm. Mortikai watches the whole time as Kei stood face-to-face with Geoterra. Both her hands were aimed at the fire, meeting each flame with its opposite. Without notice, Geoterra's large claw sweeps across toward her!

She instinctively flips backward, one hand holding off oncoming fire to meet her in mid-air, and the other hurling an ice spike directly into his eye! His flames cease as he roars in pain, the ice javelin impaled into his blood-red eye. Kei begins to dash away gracefully. As she sees Kikuyu stop, she whistles for her animal companion. Orian and Mortikai dismount her as the glaciobo sprints back for her master.

Meanwhile, Geoterra roars in agony, slashing up chunks of terrain. In a furious rage he searches the area around him for his attacker. He sees her running toward the ice wolf. Geoterra begins bounding toward her!

“Kei!” Mortikai yells, sprinting toward her. She could hear the footsteps alone, so there was no need for her to look back. Tears began to fill her eyes, worried about the outcome. Suddenly a familiar sound came to her ears. It was the sound of wooden beads rattling against each other and a following bell chime. Her eyes widened, not believing it. It soon becomes louder and louder. The unison of howls confirms her guess—the Friotian forces had come!

The numerous glaciobos and snow unicorns dash toward Geoterra, soldiers riding upon them. The northern soldiers hurl their spears at the massive dragon along with the natural ice used by their glaciobos. Geoterra turns around to see an entire army forcing their way upon him!

“You fools!” He stops running to shower them with flames. Most of them used the same technique Kei used. The Friotian princess mounts Kikuyu and is taken back to Mortikai. They embrace for a quick heart-felt moment.

“My people are here!” Kei exclaims as they turn to watch. The many men and women from Frio were dressed in their tribal war gear of loin cloths and deerskin clothes. White feather shawls covered their heads and tomahawks, pikes, and spears were held in their hands. They begin to kill the many approaching dragons and attack Geoterra himself, with Chief Onaka leading them.

“Well, let's go help. Attack!” Mortikai howls in excitement running into the midst of battle. The sounds of drums catch their attention while fighting also. Everyone looks to see the Zangalan tribe running on all fours to help battle.

Elder Trine sits in his chamber, watching the battle from a created orb. He smiles, impressed to see the many races of the planet fighting to save their home. He could see everything going on around the world. He sees the assisting Dragonlords approaching to help their master and the Symbrian Knights who will intercept their path. He sees Queen Panela of Symbra cross-stitching anxiously, waiting for some kind of news on the battle. Trine sees the Zangalan elder of the Shadow Marsh, praying with his equals to the Ancient Willow of Lásia. He feels his old companion, Kria's anticipation to win as she too, watches. The entire planet was fighting for their right to live.

Geoterra held his own against the numerous forces ganging up against him. The raging dragon suddenly takes flight and begins spraying fire over his enemies, causing numerous casualties. The combined force of Lásia's different races retreat to escape anymore lashing from the fire. The heat wave that his fire caused drew the forces back. The very degree of the heat was unbearable. Mortikai felt the pain of the heat as much as the next, but he understood he had a task to complete. After the forces pulled back for their safety, Mortikai was the only one still standing in front of the dragon, having no fear.

“You again.” Geoterra speaks to him directly. Mortikai sees his chest expanding greatly and knew exactly what was coming next.

“Mortikai catch!” The warrior hears a recognizable voice. He glances to his right to see Jodo mounted

upon a now winged Prynn. The wings suddenly began to fade into dust as they descended.

As the wings completely disperse, Prynn gallops toward Mortikai in full speed. The unicorn swiftly passes in front of Mortikai as Jodo tosses him the Sword of Slayer. The warrior tosses his current weapon aside to grip the legendary sword! Geoterra breathes the mass of flames from his frightening maw. Mortikai holds the tip of the glowing sword in front of him, trusting its powers. The fire dispels in all directions, obstructed by the power of the sword.

“What?!” Geoterra was taken aback. “The Sword of Slayer! I thought my disciples got rid of it!” He fearfully states. Flapping his wings, the anxious dragon ascends high into the air, glaring at Mortikai evilly. Trying desperately to not be dishonored, Geoterra opens his mouth again to stir up another batch of flames! Mortikai braces himself and clenches the hilt as the crystal blade glows brighter and brighter. Another torrent of fire swirls wildly toward the warrior. Mortikai shouts as a beam of pure white energy discharges from point of the blade. The pillar of energy completely breaks through the stream of fire, exploding in Geoterra's face and dropping him from the sky. The ground quakes as its heavy body lands. Struggling to his feet, he swipes at Mortikai. The warrior holds the sword up in defense, meeting Geoterra's large claws. Mortikai decides to add his offense, slashing the bottom of Geoterra's foot.

The King of Dragons roars in detest and ascends into the air to flee from the wielded sword that ended his very existence before.

“You aren't going anywhere.” Mortikai whispers, clutching the hilt of the sword to charge up another attack of light, oblivious to the fact that with each powerful attack, the power of the sword was fading away...

As Trine watched the odds turn in the battle, he continued to feel Kria's presence. Deciding to do something he hadn't done in centuries, he reached out to her mentally.

“The battle is taking a fine course, huh.” Trine humorously says to her.

“It's about time you decided to speak to me.” She calmly replies.

“It's good to know you are still alive.” He greets his old friend.

“The same to you. There's no other way Mortikai could have gotten the sword. The Sword of Slayer requires both of our coins to work.” Kria states.

“It seems like the battle is in the planet's favor,” Trine strokes his white beard.

“I wish it were that simple,” Kria breaks the mood. *“When Mortikai came to see me, I could see inside him that he was cursed. This peculiar curse is very random. The Dragonlords created it on accident*

centuries ago when they attempted to keep Geoterra's egg alive. The numerous dark rituals and hateful feelings cultivated it. It took them a few years to truly identify it. It seemed to "jump" from person to person. As soon as they mastered the pattern, they calculated when it would return to Geoterra. It just so happened to be passed to Eva and Mortikai, which is an extreme coincidence, but in a way is a blessing, because we are actually in touch with these two and were aware of the consequences of Geoterra's Resurrection." Kria optimistically leans.

"So what kind of threat does this curse propose?" Trine sighs.

"The curse affects three people. The three are connected in a triangle of life. If the first holder is killed, the second holder dies. If the second holder dies, the first holder dies. And if the third holder is killed, the first holder dies," She begins the complicated web. "In this instance, Geoterra is the first holder, Eva is the second, and Mortikai is the third." Kria concludes the explanation. The two elders fell silent, understanding what had to be done...

Feeling the raw energy of the blade pulsating in his palms, Mortikai swings the sword horizontally as a ray of white follows his swipe, hacking the fleeing dragon across the body, severing his left wing completely off! Steaming, red blood spews every which way from the lacerated opening as the dragon crashes face-first into the ground again. Mortikai breaks into a dead sprint toward Geoterra to finally end his life. The moment he notices the dragon lift his head, Mortikai slashes Geoterra's neck with another blast of raw energy from the sword. He stands before the beast, smirking at its agony.

"Blasted human!" Geoterra unexpectedly spits fire at his foe. Mortikai leaps aside a moment too late and shouts as his left shoulder is scorched. Down on one knee, the warrior glances over to see the blisters forming on his burned flesh. As Mortikai lets the pain feed his anger, clutching the hilt of the sword, Geoterra lunges at him. The wary Slayer leaps back, slashing the dragon's foot deeply. Geoterra shrieks in pain and Mortikai lets the pain of his shoulder feed his rage as he fed the sword the lingering remnants of energy. He ruthlessly slashes Geoterra's neck open and draws back, ready to stab him in the face, ending the threat forever, when a voice enters his mind...

"Mortikai! Do not forget the curse!" The Slayer ceased, recognizing the elderly voice of Kria. "If you kill Geoterra, Eva will be lost!" She refreshes his memory.

"Then how must I stop him?!" Mortikai shouts out.

"The curse works in a triangle. Eva and Geoterra are using one another to keep each other alive. You must die in order to set Eva free. I—I am sorry Mortikai. You will always be remembered for this act of courage. Good luck, young Slayer." Kria exits his mind. Mortikai ponders the thought and then holds his head high. He looks down at the blade of the sword to only see a small portion of energy remaining at

the base of the crystal blade. A slight breeze blows his long hair and the warrior takes a deep breath before pulling off his chain mail tunic and elastic shirt.

“Looks like I was a bit too boastful,” Mortikai begins to smile at the irony. “It seems today, you *and* I will die this day,” He talks loudly to Geoterra. Kei's eyes suddenly fill with tears as she breaks away from the company of her people. She rushes to Mortikai as he takes her in his arms.

“What do you mean?” The tears of disbelief begin to stream down her face.

“Only my death will kill this dragon and save my cousin. Eva means the world to me,” He feels his eyes filling with tears also. “Kei?” A pair of tears streak down his face from each eye. “I love you.” He holds his sobbing wife as she rubs her face against his hard chest. Mortikai inhales the last breath of fragrance from her hair and holds her chin in his fingers so that she looked up at him. They stare into each other's eyes and kiss one last time. It was a kiss that would last a lifetime. He then turns toward Geoterra.

“Flaws made by my people. Humph, it was inevitable. Another like me will rise.” He remarks, crippled to the point where pain came with each movement. Mortikai clenches his teeth along with the handle of the sword, generating the last of the energy. Praying that another like Geoterra would never come, Mortikai closes his eyes and impales himself through the chest...

He spits the internal blood from his mouth and stands his ground for a moment, wanting to see his enemy die. His spilled blood glows as Geoterra roars in agony. The area where Eva hung limply started to glow in a turquoise light. It flashes brightly and Mortikai begins to shudder. The brave warrior pulls the Sword of Slayer from his chest and lets it fall, as it transforms into stone before hitting the ground. Mortikai struggles to stand as Geoterra lets forth one last roar and falls in death along with his Slayer. Mortikai falls into Kei's arms as she catches his body and easing toward the ground also. She holds him in her arms, crying.

“Mortikai, you can't go, not yet,” She pleads, falling into silence for a moment. “Although our time together was short spent, I enjoyed every moment. I will always love you.” She lastly whispers, laying her head on his abdomen.

Eva's body appears beside Kei. The Symbrian princess sees the lifeless body of her cousin and blinks as tears roll down her face. She turns her back and lowers her head, preferring to cry alone. Orian and Chief Onaka walk toward them. Orian comforts his sister as the chief consoles his daughter. Jodo sits mounted upon Pryn, staring at his dead master. He shakes his head in sorrow, not at all shaken by the sight of death, when a soft blue light catches his eye. Looking down, he grabs the bottle that Trine granted him. It was glowing as the young man remembered what Mortikai told him.

“He told me I would know when to use this. And somehow—I feel now is the time.” Jodo stares down at the bottle and its beckoning glow. He dismounts Pryn and approaches Mortikai's body as the unicorn follows. Kei, her father, and Orian look up at him. Jodo bites the cork away from the clear bottle and squats near Mortikai's face.

“What are you doing?” Kei softly inquires, staring at him with red, swollen eyes. He ignores her and slips his hand under Mortikai's head. Sitting his head up, he pours the liquid into his mouth and rubs his throat, helping him to swallow. They all watch silently, anticipating the next action. Suddenly the edges

of his stab wound are bordered by a blue glow from the liquid. The blue light miraculously recreates remnants of flesh that grow and close his chest. The warrior's body glows faintly and a breath is heard as his chest inflates with life...

His eyelids flutter and slowly open as he sits up. Kei stares unbelievably at him. She blinks numerous times to make sure she wasn't hallucinating. Letting tears of joy fall, she embraces him and kisses him, her heart mending inside her chest. Orian smiles and pats him on the back, happy to see his cousin and mentor. Eva turns and smiles at him, happy to see him alive and well. Chief Onaka smiles at his happy daughter as she would mourn no more. They all help the revived warrior to his feet.

"What happened after—I died?" Mortikai curiously asks.

"That's not important," Kei changes the subject. "What's important is that you are alive." She reassures him. He nods, giving up, and forgets the thought of even wanting to know. Wrapping his arm around Kei's waist for support, he begins to walk away from the battlefield. Pryn timer greets his master by nuzzling his cheek.

"Hey Pryn timer, I'm okay boy," He reaches up and scratches his face, as the unicorn followed closely behind him. "I also saw those wings. How'd he get those?" Mortikai looks back at Jodo.

"Well, we were pressed for time and I used my magic. It had just happened to wear off when we arrived." He recalls happily. The so far quiet Eva steps forth and everyone turns their attention to her.

"I thank you all for the feats you have done to rescue me as well as preserve this planet." The tired princess glances at them all. As they all walk to meet the Zangalan troops, many of the Friotian warriors shout and aim their arrows at the sky. They glance up to see the Imperial dragon that belonged to Koalu.

"Wait!" Mortikai shouts, waving his arms toward the Friotian warriors to catch their attention..

"Don't shoot!" Orian pleads. "Tell them to stop!" He beseeches to Kei's father. Chief Onaka raises his right hand and lowers it as his people's bows hesitantly follow the motion. Orian quickly runs over to Koalu's dead body and snatches the whistle from around his neck. He blows it and Gil averts his attention to the source of the whistle. It lands near his owner's body and sniffs his limp carcass. The white dragon nudges his body and quickly realizes his friend was dead. Orian sees the dragon's sorrow and reaches forward, rubbing its head. It looks up at the young man understandingly. The two stare at each other, having a conversation through body language alone. Orian walks to the side of Gil and mounts him as the dragon grabs Koalu's corpse in his mouth. Mortikai leaves the crowd and limps over to his young cousin with Eva following.

"You headed back to Symbra?" He asks, rubbing the friendly dragon's face.

"Yes. I'm going to keep this dragon and make sure Koalu gets the proper funeral." He maturely plans.

"Good. You two should be heading back now," Mortikai looks at the both of them. He smiles at Orian, glad to see the young man he was growing to be. Looking at Eva, he was relieved to see his journey wasn't in vain. Mortikai opens his arms, hugging Eva. "I'm glad you're safe. Aunt Panela will be so

happy to see you,” He glances over at Orian. “And you were brave out here. You killed Ilena and saved your sister. Make sure to get the title of Grand Warrior for me, okay?” Orian nods and shakes his hand.

“What are you going to do, Mortikai?” Orian asks, frowning curiously.

“For the time being, I'm going to go back to Frio to be married,” He looks over to see Kei talking with her father and the Zangalan. “I met her on my way here and we fell in love. So that's all I have in queue right now.” The warrior turns back toward his young cousin.

“You will come back to visit the castle someday, won't you?” Eva speaks softly to him.

“Of course, Eva. I can't stay away from you two forever,” He takes her hand, helping her onto Gil's back. “Well, you two go on home. Your mother has probably quilted new curtains for the entire castle by now, waiting for you two.” The three of them laugh at his joke. Orian and Eva wave at their brave cousin as the Imperial dragon flaps its wings, taking the two airborne, home.

Mortikai turns around to see the Friotian troops conversing with the Zangalan. He smiles, happy to see the unison of races. A lone Jodo suddenly catches his eye. He stood, outcast, as usual. Mortikai walks across the grass to his young friend.

“Are you alright Jodo?”

“Yes I'm fine. I'm just deciding where I should go next as my wandering days start today.” The young mage seriously answers. Mortikai stares at the troubled youth. Jodo was always trying to seem unemotional and mature. All he wanted was to not feel like a child and take care of himself. But he couldn't live with himself if he just let the boy go on his own.

“Jodo, do you want to continue to accompany us?” Jodo looks up as Mortikai spoke to him. “After Kei and I are married, you can live with us.” Mortikai offers to him.

“Nah, I'd only get in the way.” He makes an excuse. Mortikai lightly laughs.

“Listen, I *want* you to come with us. You've been like a little brother and a son to me these past two days. And I would gladly find it an honor to be able to call you one.” Mortikai refers to the “son” part, staring him genuinely in the eye. Jodo didn't know how to respond. He had never been cared about like this. Mortikai was the only one to ever treat him like a person. Swallowing his pride and the waiting for the red of his cheeks to disappear, Jodo nods, accepting the offer. Mortikai embraces him deeply, rustling his hair. He releases after a few moments. The young mage closes his eyes and in his right hand appears Mortikai's sword. He hands it to him and the warrior sheathes it. They both walk toward the crowd to accompany Chief Onaka and Kei. The Chief was conversing with one of the Zangalan generals. After gratitude was shown and items were exchanged, both tribes gathered their dead and wounded and went their separate ways, proud to have fought for their planet and leaving the place behind.

The entire Friotian fleet arrives to a now green Frio in a matter of fifteen minutes. They all dismount their steeds and most of them carry the dead to a morgue while some enter the main hut. The remaining villagers cheer as Kei, Chief Onaka, and Mortikai enter the room along with a few of the other warriors

who bravely fought Geoterra. Some of the young ladies ran to tend to some of their wounds. The wounded, along with Mortikai and Kei, were sat down and worked on immediately. The two lovers smile at each other as the helpers mend and bandage their battle wounds. Mortikai warmly stares into her eyes. He could feel the same love returning back. The tired warrior reaches forward and grabs her hand in his.

As soon as all the young helpers were finished healing their warriors, Chief Onaka rises from his seat.

“Are you ready for the wedding ceremony, you two?” He smiles kindly at his daughter and future son-in-law, whom he saw every quality a man should have to be able to take his daughter's hand. Compassion, protection, sacrifice, and moral, were the things Mortikai possessed and shown. Every time he sees his daughter smile, he is surprised that the foreigner was able to capture his daughter's closed heart.

“Yes, Chief Onaka. I've fought so many dragons, their king, and even died for this day to come.” Mortikai nods his head, glancing over at Kei with a full smile showing. Onaka smiles and raises his arms, speaking to the crowd in their native tongue. Everyone cheers and begin to rearrange the things in the room. Some of the ladies grab Kei by the arms, escorting her out of the main hut. Three men, including Toki, walk toward Mortikai.

“Welcome back Mortikai,” Toki greets him, shaking his hand. The other men pat him on the back, giving him many thanks and praises for the battle he had with Geoterra.

“I have heard the story of your battle with Geoterra. It will be a story to be passed for generations. I wish I could have come, but the Chief needed me here to defend the women and children just in case things didn't turn out right,” They all walk toward another hut.

“Well, I'm glad you were here. There were some casualties, as there is with any battle. Where are you three taking me?” Mortikai looks around.

“We are taking you to be fitted for a wedding suit.” The four of them walk through the village into the residential area, leaving the main hut as it rapidly began to change as everyone helped. The three men take Mortikai into a smaller hut.

“Wait here.” One of the men tells him as they go into the backroom. They return with a measuring tape. Mortikai stands and lets them record his measurements. Toki examines the tablet where the measurements were written.

“These numbers are an almost exact match. Only the pants length is two more inches than your height. We have shoes that can make you taller.” Toki nods satisfyingly and walks into the back to get the wedding attire. Mortikai waits anxiously, waiting for the biggest milestone in his life to begin. He was feeling tired because he *had* just finished taking on dragons.

“*I'll just wait until after the ceremony.*” He shakes away any hint of sleepiness. Toki returns with the clothes he was to wear.

“We also prepared a bath for you. The water is hot,” He hangs his clothes up and leaves into the

backroom to get dressed with the others. Mortikai pulls off the ripped elastic tights, sits his weapons aside, and walks into the bathroom. There was a large bath in the middle of the candle-lit room. He became sleepy just by looking at the steam emitting from the hot water. Mortikai pulls off his old, grubby underwear and slips into the steaming water. His muscles immediately relax and the tired warrior lays his head back, fighting to stay awake.

"I should have waited until after the ceremony to do this. I'm ready to fall asleep." Mortikai drowsily thinks. He reaches over and grabs the bar of soap from the nearby rack and begins to clean himself, hoping that the movement would prevent him from falling asleep.

"Kei is going to be so beautiful when we go to the altar. I can't wait to see her," He daydreams while washing his long hair with a honey-smelling shampoo. *"I want to take her to Symbra after we're married. I need to see Aunt Panela."* The thoughtful warrior washes his hair deeply.

After thoroughly cleaning himself, Mortikai stands and dries himself with one of the long, folded drying towels sitting in a basket. Before leaving, a foggy mirror catches his eye. He walks toward it and swipes his hand across it, clearing a visible reflection with his touch. He stares at himself. He was definitely a different man than he was before receiving this mission. Mortikai smiles at himself and looks down at the small table to see a comb. He combs it through his wet hair and makes a single braid down his back. With his appearance in tip-top condition, Mortikai walks into the main room. Toki and the others still hadn't returned. He overlooks this and drops his towel and steps into the black slacks.

"Toki was right; these are a bit too long." He looks at the pant legs. He slips the traditional tan, hip length, matrimonial shirt on. It had a v-neck, showing the separation of his chiseled pectorals, with a white border on the v and bottom of the sleeves. Mortikai sits on the small couch and grabs the shoes that were near him. The black shoes happen to fit him also. He puts them on his feet and walks around a bit, getting used to their feel. Mortikai felt comfortable dressed in the attire. He knocks on the door of the backroom and Toki and the others come out. They were dressed in loincloths, high moccasins, and small headdresses with white feathers. Mortikai raises an eyebrow, thinking it was a bit chilly to be half naked.

"I'm ready." He smiles.

"You make my outfit look nice," Toki jokes, as they all walk into the den.

"You were married before, Toki?" Mortikai inquires, looking down at the clothes he wore.

"No. I was saving that outfit for a certain woman I wanted to marry." The young man hesitantly answers, barely looking him in the eyes. His brothers' expressions change to solemn. Mortikai nods and begins to leave and Toki calls out to him.

"Mortikai come stand with us," They all stood in a half-circle. Mortikai hesitantly joins them in the middle of the circle as they beckon him and close around him. Toki and his brothers hold hands and bow their heads, praying in a language Mortikai once again, couldn't understand. After finishing, they all smile. "Now it's time to meet your bride." They leave for the ceremony.

Toki and his brothers hurry along while Mortikai takes his time. He looks around, admiring the serene

nature of the village. The snow was all gone, due to a certain heat wave. He breathes in the crisp, late spring-feeling air. Approaching the main hut where the ceremony was being held, he could hear the people of the village conversing inside. For the first time about this entire idea of marriage, Mortikai felt nervous. He takes a few deep breaths and sees Chief Onaka approaching also. The Chief was dressed in the traditional war attire. The two return smiles and Onaka offers his hand. They shake forcefully in respect.

“You truly love my daughter, don't you?”

“Yes. I wouldn't attempt such a big step if I didn't.” Mortikai nervously answers. Onaka nods.

“Well, I'm glad a man like you has captured my daughter's heart. I always thought she would marry a Friotian man or just become a lone chieftess after I die. You have proven yourself worthy, Mortikai,” Chief Onaka genuinely smiles at him. “What are your plans for after the ceremony?”

“I have thought about it and I want to bring her back to Symbra with me. I want to live among the knights and my aunt. I want to be among my people again since I've been a recluse for so long. I also plan to come here and visit often, also.” Mortikai explains his plan. Onaka nods once again, satisfied with the man who was to take his daughter's hand in marriage.

“It has promise,” He compliments his decision. “Kei will be beautiful today. This will be the happiest day of her life.” Chief Onaka turns as they walk into the ceremonial hut together.

As soon as the two of them were seen, the musicians sitting at the drums lined around the walls of the hut begin to beat in a slow, rhythmic beat. The drums were then joined by the shaking of deer hoof rattles. Ahead of him stood the altar and the minister who was to marry him and Kei. On the minister's left, stood Toki and his brothers, and on the right, stood three beautiful women dressed in long, white gowns, whom were Kei's bridesmaids. Mortikai walks down the aisle toward the altar. He notices the Friotian people smiling at him; they felt just as happy as he did. Mortikai continues to the altar and stands in front of the minister. His face was chiseled with creases of time, telling his age. Mortikai was surprised when he saw his stone hard face smile.

Suddenly the beating of the drums cease. Mortikai turns to toward the hut's doors and smiles, waiting to see her. The musicians then play Friotian love flutes. The sweet sound was immediately soothing to the warrior's ears. The doors are opened and two young girls walk in side by side, throwing periwinkle-colored forget-me-nots along the tan-skinned mats of the floor. His eyes suddenly widen as he sees Chief Onaka enter, holding the arm of a woman dressed in a long wedding gown composed of white fur. Her black hair was up, pinned together in curls. She had long white gloves covering her forearms and a white shawl concealing her face. Mortikai smiles, ready to receive his bride.

As they make it to the altar. He turns to face her. The minister opens a small book and begins to read in the Friotian language. Although Mortikai couldn't understand, he didn't care. He stared endlessly into the bright white of the shawl, anxious to see her face. He loved Kei so much. She was beautiful, a great warrior, and a caring person. She needed to see the world, and he would be the man to show it to her. Halfway through the reading, Chief Onaka opens a small pouch near his waist, revealing two silver wedding bands. He hands one to his daughter and one to Mortikai. Following the gestures of the minister, Mortikai puts his ring on Kei and she slips his on. The minister then continues reading.

The minister stops reading after a long wait and closes the book.

“What next?” Mortikai whispers, looking around uneasily.

“You kiss me.” She says from behind the shawl as she pulls it over her head, revealing her beautified face. Mortikai’s heartbeat feels like it stops for a moment as he marvels at her beauty. He leans in and kisses her as everyone cheers. The musicians play a happy tune as they turn around, their smiles beaming. The congregation spills out into the aisle to shower them with gifts. Mortikai received a bow and quiver of arrows, a bowie knife, a pair of good moccasins, and a fair share of money.

Kei received numerous necklaces crafted from jade, onyx, and diamond and rings to match. She takes her husband’s hand and leads him out of the hut. The bridesmaids and groomsmen collect their gifts for them.

“Where are we going?” Mortikai asks, as his new bride led him through the dark town.

“You will see.” She quietly answers, looking back at him teasingly. Mortikai recognizes the hut they stop at. The newlyweds enter the candlelit hut and smile at each other. Kei hugs him happily.

“I can’t believe it either.” Mortikai seems to read her mind. She looks him in the eyes and smiles.

“Now we are supposed to remove each other’s clothing—and connect our spirits.” She hungrily looks at him, already reaching down and pulling his shirt over his head. Mortikai turns her around and removes the shawl’s band from around her forehead. He unzips her dress and lets it fall to the ground as she steps out of it. Kei turns around enticingly, dressed in white-skinned underwear, and unzips his pants. Grabbing the waist of the pants, she kneels, pulling them down as her eyes widen at the surprise behind them. Mortikai steps out of the pants and pulls his wife back up to face height. Holding her face ever so closely to his own, he removes each pin from her hair. Their eyes search each millimeter of each other’s face. Extracting the last pin, her long hair falls alluringly over her shoulders. The two of them step out of their shoes and stare at each other’s beautiful bodies again. Kei takes his hands and leads him into her bedroom. There was a queen-sized bed with a white fur comforter over cream silk sheets. Mortikai sits down as Kei raises one finger and leaves the room. He sees darkness engulfing the rooms as she blew out the candles. She enters completely nude. The sexual tension in the room was thick as a blizzard and as they lie down together, Mortikai blows out the last candle, relieved to finally have his bride in the finest way possible.

The next morning, Mortikai stares up at the ceiling. He felt quite content after the night before. Kei lie next to him, her arm over his wide chest. Mortikai expands his sense of hearing and hears the village people doing their normal morning routines. He could hear Kikuyu’s slow, rhythmic breathing outside the hut’s door. The tired warrior returns his senses to normal and looks down at his wife.

“Who would have ever thought that I’d be married?” Mortikai thinks to himself as he watches her body deeply rise and fall with each breath. *“I feel all of these feelings I never thought a warrior could feel. She is the most beautiful thing in the world to me.”* Mortikai kisses her head as she shifts and turns toward the other side of the bed. Mortikai silently slips out of bed and walks into the main room. He stretches and looks around the sunlit room. Finding a clear area of the room, Mortikai begins stretching

thoroughly. He elongates each muscle fiber, relaxing himself. After fifteen minutes, he stops to meditate. While sitting lotus style, he senses another standing in the room with him and turns around to see his wife. Mortikai smiles at his petite wife, wrapped in the silk sheet from their nest of love—and she returns it.

“Goodbye daddy.” Kei leans forward and kisses her father on the cheek. She and Mortikai stood with all their gifts in convenient traveling bags. Jodo stands next to Prynn, rubbing his face. The entire village waits on the outskirts of the town, seeing Kei and Mortikai off. It was nice for most of them to see Kei, the feisty tomboy who used to fight all the boys, trying to prove her keep among them, married and leaving the village. Chief Onaka shakes Mortikai's hand again and nods to him. The warrior turns to his wife and lifts her up, by the waist, and sits her on Prynn's back. She swings her leg around and moves forward as Mortikai climbs on behind her.

“Thank you all for everything!” Mortikai shouts to the crowd. “Don't worry, Kei is safe with me!” He jokes as they all laugh and clap. Jodo climbs upon Kikuyu's back as Mortikai waves one last time.

“Yah!” he shouts as Prynn darts away, with Kikuyu and Jodo not too far behind, ready to begin their new life together.

Epilogue

The newlyweds awaken from their camp on the outskirts of the Shadow Marsh. It had been a long trek through the thick mud of the Marsh the night before. The group barely made it out of the dark swamp the night before after traveling for an entire day after leaving Frio toward Symbra. Mortikai stopped by the Zangalan Pit to visit their Elder and receive directions again before leaving.

The first rays of the sun begin to stretch across the Forsab Plains as the sun was peeking over the horizon. Kei, lying on Mortikai's lap, opens her eyes and blinks, taking in the bright light of the morning. Sighing deeply, she sleepily sits up to see Mortikai already awake. He had opened his eyes from a half-sleeping state. Kei pulls the hair away from her face and stands to her feet. The young woman stretches toward the sky, yawning loudly. Kei looks around to see Kikuyu lying not too far away from them. She walks over and lies down with the tired glaciobo, scratching the thick fur around her neck. Mortikai smiles and looks around to notice Jodo was gone!

“Jodo!” Mortikai exclaims, jumping to his feet. He looks around frantically. Kei stands to her feet slowly, wondering what was happening.

“What's wrong?” She places her hands on his shoulders, attempting to comfort him.

“Look around, Jodo's not here!” Mortikai yells uncontrollably, his voice a mix of worry and anger. Kei takes a step back and glances around for a moment, her eyes searching through the shadowy woods that lead into the Shadow Marsh behind them and the vast fields of green before them, noticing Prynn was missing also.

In the midst of Mortikai and Kei's stupefaction, Jodo was gliding across the morning sky mounted upon Prynn. The young mage utilized his gifts of magic once again to transform Prynn into a winged unicorn. The two of them were flying near the area of the Dark Range. Jodo squints his eyes from the whipping wind, spotting the place where he, Mortikai, and Prynn rested after their long trek through the Shadow Marsh.

“Down there Prynn.” Jodo points his finger to guide the unicorn. Prynn neighs in confirmation, diving toward the ground. The unicorn performs his favorite airborne somersault before landing. Jodo jumps off the stallion's back and runs over to one of the many trees that yielded the sweet cherimoyas. Using his acrobatic skills, he leaps high and grabs one of the branches. Jodo swings his body to and fro, gaining momentum, and swings around the branch until he had his footing. He comfortably sits on his rear and picks a cherimoya. He brings the heart-shaped fruit to his ear, listening for any sign of beetles, like Mortikai had taught him. After a few moments, the fruit was silent and he drops it to the ground. Jodo grabs several others, some having noise in their centers and other being undisturbed. After choosing eight ripe cherimoyas, he leaps out of the tree. Jodo picks them all up and frowns, knowing it would be too difficult to bring them all back at once at their sizes. The young mage slyly smiles and concentrates. Slowly, the cherimoyas begin to shrink to the size of cherries.

“These gifts are great!” Jodo smiles at his work. He delicately places them in his pockets and mounts Prynn again. “Let's go, boy!” Jodo shouts in excitement. Prynn gallops for a moment, gaining speed, and is airborne in one quick flap of his wings. He arcs around and flies quickly back to where they left Mortikai and Kei.

After ten minutes of flying, Jodo sees Mortikai and Kei walking around the grass. He and Prynn land softly on the grass, the sound of Prynn's heavy hooves catching Mortikai's attention. He watches Jodo and a winged Prynn trotting toward them and the warrior lets his emotion show on his face.

“Where the hell have you been?!” Mortikai yells, walking toward them. Jodo dismounts the unicorn and looks up at Mortikai.

“I was out getting breakfast for us.” Jodo calmly responds as if nothing was wrong.

“Without letting us know and on *my* unicorn?! You don't just leave like that!” Mortikai scolds him, his first time being a serious parent type. Jodo stares at him, a frown of his own forming on his face.

“Wait a minute!” He demands all of Mortikai's attention. “If I remember right, a certain someone told me

to keep Prynn while he was ready to fight a dragon. And I thought the last command I ever received was to obtain a sword and look after the very unicorn I was riding! So, in other words, you aren't my master anymore." Jodo glares at him in the eyes. Mortikai returns the stare and slowly smiles, his expression softening, as he realizes his words were countered completely. Jodo reaches into his pockets to reveal the cherimoyas in their small traveling state he put them in. The fruits suddenly grow back to their original size. Mortikai smiles and nods in satisfaction.

"You checked them, right?" Mortikai takes the two cherimoyas handed to him. Jodo nods in agreement and hands two to Kei. She looks at it peculiarly.

"What are these?" She feels its leathery, shingled skin.

"It's a cherimoya," Mortikai bites into the sweet fruit "They grow around the other side of the Marsh. We were so tired last night I forgot all about them." He adds, chewing loudly as the white juice ran down his face. Kei smiles and shakes her head at her husband, thinking he was so silly. She takes a small bite and moans in delight. She then follows suit and eats it greedily like her husband.

Jodo takes the remaining four toward Prynn. He hands one to the hungry steed as Prynn grabs it in his teeth and chews it. Kikuyu trots over to Jodo and receives a cherimoya also. She takes it to her own area, eating it in solitude. Jodo decides to take the same approach and eats alone in silence.

After the five of them were finished eating their light breakfast, Mortikai decided it was time for them to continue on toward the castle. Mortikai and Kei mount Prynn, his wings already fully dissipated. Jodo climbs upon Kikuyu's back, with the newlyweds' gifts attached to her. They all take off across the Forsab Plains toward Symbra. Kei marvels at her surroundings, as she had known nothing but the cold, barren lands of Frio. The shining sun, the roaming unicorns and grildas, the low-flying birds, the warm air, it all astonished her. Jodo smiles also as they approach the large castle. To the west, he sees the ruins of Fortla in the distance and remembers his old home. Shaking his head, he refuses nostalgia. Fortla was no longer his home. Mortikai's anticipation grew with each step they came closer to the castle.

The group makes it to the outskirts of the castle. The knights and squires were beginning to leave the castle for their morning training on the fields. A lot of the squires turn their attention toward the approaching strangers. The knights soon avert their attention to the outsiders and begin to step forward. A certain knight's eyes widen as she recognized the forthcoming Slayer.

"Mortikai!" Atria leaves her group of squires, sprinting toward him. The smiling Slayer dismounts his unicorn to meet her. Atria leaps into his arms, hugging Mortikai around the neck. They embrace for a moment before he lets her down.

"It's good to see you again, Atria." He smiles at her.

"Good to see *me*? We all thought you were dead!" She laughs, looking past him to see Jodo and Kei dismounting Prynn and Kikuyu. Kei steps forward, looking as friendly as possible.

"Atria," Mortikai takes Kei's hand. "This is my wife, Kei." He introduces his new mate. Atria stares in awe and then softens her expression.

“Wife?!” She smiles amazed. “You were just out fighting Geoterra. I guess you picked up a woman along with Lásia's appreciation,” she laughs lightly in sarcasm. “Hi, my name is Atria. Mortikai and I were partners, a long time ago.” She shakes Kei's hand.

“Yes. It is a pleasure to meet you.” Kei tries to hold her smile.

“Well, I have a class to teach. Goodbye.” Atria falsely smiles, turning on her heels and walking away with her head high in resentment. The squires run past her and all marvel at getting the chance to meet the slayer of Geoterra. Many of the boys and girls looked up at him asking numerous questions at once.

“How big was the dragon?”

“How'd you do it?”

“Was his fire hotter than a volcano?” and other dragon-related questions.

“Hey, one at a time!” Mortikai laughs.

After answering as many questions as he had time for, he stops. Mortikai could see the prideful knights awaiting their squires to return and begin their day's teaching.

“Alright guys. Run along and start your training. Someday a few of you will be able to graduate to the Slayer status and be able to find out all about dragons for yourselves.” He sends them back after shaking their hands. Kei looks over at him with her eyebrows raised.

“Seems like you are a famous person here.” She acknowledges, watching the children sprint across the field, explaining how exciting it was to meet him in person. Mortikai shrugs his shoulders and continues on as they follow. They all walk through the tall gates of the Symbra Kingdom. The streets were lively as usual in the morning. Mortikai beams with happiness, happy to be among his people again. People casually glance to see the odd group entering their town. One woman does a double-take and stops her daily bucket filling as she recognized the long gone warrior.

“Look!” She shouts. “It's Lásia's savior!” The short, stout woman hobbles toward him as her small daughter followed. Everyone opens the shutters of their terrace apartments and call out to them. They all make great cheer for Mortikai and the others, throwing flowers and rice from their windows. Mortikai smiles bashfully, finally receiving the one thing he always wanted—acceptance. He shakes the middle-aged woman's hand as the townspeople rush in to greet them. Kei notices the young girl pulling on Mortikai's pant leg and reaches down to pick her up. The girl was about three feet tall and had blonde pigtails.

“Hi, Mortikai. My name is Ti and my mommy says that you are the one that killed the big dragon.” The small girl says in cherubic tone of voice. Mortikai smiles and kisses her on the cheek. She blushes as he takes her from Kei and hands her back to her mother. The group makes it to the castle's entrance after being bombarded with thanks and fame of the now dispersed crowd.

Two guards stood at the door, wielding swords. Mortikai steps forward and sighs, hoping not to get into the same hassle he had the last time he approached the gates.

“Good day, sirs. I am Mortikai Leone and I urgently need to speak to Queen Panela.” He requests in a formal manner.

“Certainly,” The first guard complies, opening the large double doors. Mortikai stood baffled for a moment, surprised by how he was being treated. He takes his wife's hand and escorts everyone in. Kikuyu follows closely behind her master. Jodo jumps off of Pryn's back as the unicorn gallops across the vast green of the courtyard to graze.

The castle's lobby was the same as it was before. Their feet tap against the cherry wood finished floors as Mortikai leads them around the stone pillar in the middle of the room. Kei stares all around her, marveling at the beautiful craftwork of her husband's people. Mortikai stops in front of the grave where his deceased uncle was displayed.

“This is—my Uncle Ophius,” He hesitates, presenting him. “By letting him die—I started all this mess.” Mortikai continues to blame himself. Kei takes her eyes from the dead man to her husband's eyes, taking his hand in hers.

“Come on. Show us the rest of the castle.” She requests with a smile. Mortikai returns the smile and nods. He looks over at Jodo to see his usual unemotional face. Mortikai smiles at him and the young mage returns it. He turns around and leads them up the narrow, stone staircase toward the Royal Chambers. In a matter of minutes, they make it to the small room before entering the beautiful hall. A new guard was also posted at the double doors. Mortikai steps forth and the guard looks into his face.

“Akitus?!” Mortikai exclaims, surprised to see the former Head Knight standing post. Akitus cuts his eyes at his rival.

“What is your business here?” He cites his line. Mortikai chokes back a laugh and attempts to make his job easier.

“I am here to see Queen Panela. May I get through to her?” He asks, being polite, though it certainly wasn't needed.

“I can permit *you* to enter,” He struggles to say. “But who are these two? And dangerous animals are not allowed in the castle.” Akitus refers to Kei, Jodo, and Kikuyu. He eyes Kei's slender body before making eye contact with her. He gives Jodo a belittling look before glancing at Kikuyu and back to Mortikai.

“This is Kei, my wife,” Mortikai takes her hand in his as Akitus's expression was taken aback. “This is Kikuyu, her tame glaciobo. And this young man is Jodo,” He reaches back, grabbing his shoulder and shaking him a bit. “—my son,” Mortikai hesitates, not sure what to call him. He then looks back at Akitus and lets his face express his true feelings. “This is my family and don't ever look at them like that again.” Mortikai steps into his face, showing his anger. “Now step aside.” He fiercely demands, exploiting his power. Akitus cuts his eyes, and steps aside, letting them pass. Mortikai opens the oak double doors himself, to reveal the banquet hall. Kei and Jodo's eyes light up as they see the numerous lights, long dinner table, and elegant aura about the room. Mortikai steps in last, closing the doors behind him. He glances around the hall again, remembering when he first set foot inside a few days ago.

He had the same feeling as before. Looking up toward Queen Panela's room, he notices Jaxon standing near the door.

“Jaxon!” Mortikai calls out to his old partner. The concentrated knight looks over the banister to notice him.

“Mortikai!” He bellows in a deep voice. “What are you doing here?” The knight starts down the staircase to meet him. The two meet at the foot of the stairs, forcefully shaking each other's hands.

“This is Kei, my wife from Frio and Jodo, my new son, and we've come to live here in Symbra.” He introduces them with pride.

“Whoa! Looks like you went and saved the world and brought home a new life! Well, congratulations man!” He pats his good friend on the back. “Good day, ma'am. I'm Jaxon, a good friend of Mortikai's,” He reaches his massive hand out to her small petite one. Jaxon shakes her small hand carefully. “Hey, how are you? I'm Jaxon,” He shakes Jodo's hand a little harder, careful not to hurt him either. “Are you going to become a strong knight too?” He smiles at him. Jodo apathetically shrugs his shoulders. Jaxon looks down at Kikuyu and reaches his hand out for her to lick. The glaciobo ignores his hand, staring at him with curious eyes.

“That's Kikuyu,” Mortikai explains.

“Yes. She's a beautiful glaciobo.” The strong man acknowledges, admiring her clean fur.

“You—know of the northern glaciobos?” Kei curiously inquires, not thinking many knew of her kind and cultures.

“Yes. I've done a lot of traveling in my time. I like these wolves. I wanted a pup as a child while I visited Frio with my parents. The good ol' Chief Onaka wouldn't permit it though. He was telling me of how they were noble creatures that could only survive in the climates of Frio; I guess not if this one is doing just fine.” He laughs.

“You knew my father?” Kei beams in delight.

“I met him. He was a strong warrior. I was about ten years old when we went,” Jaxon cuts the long story short. He turns back toward Mortikai. “It's good to have you back, Mortikai.”

“Thanks. A nomadic life just isn't the life for us. We deserve something a little better at least. Plus, I want to be here so I can protect the kingdom and prevent anything, like what happened two days ago, from happening again.” He smiles; glad it was all over now.

“Well, Her Majesty, Princess Eva, and Prince Orian are in Her Majesty's room. I'm sure they all would be delighted to see you again. The prince explained the battle to just about anyone who would listen,” Jaxon begins to lead them up the staircase toward the Queen's room. “I'm sure he would have told the story to the farm animals if given the chance!” The two of them laugh aloud.

“I see you have Akitus's old job and he got demoted.” Mortikai brings up the subject.

“Yeah, the fool acted as if he didn't want to celebrate the death of Geoterra's and Eva's returning to the castle. It seemed as if just the fact that *you* were the one who saved the world, changed the entire situation. Well, Her Majesty furiously chewed him out, belittling him and his skills in every way compared to yours, and gave me his job. Atria and I helped to stop an oncoming brigade of Dragonlords approaching the battle to help out Geoterra. So, that's why she moved me up.” Jaxon smiles at the mention of his promotion.

“I guess some grudges never die.” Mortikai adds, shaking his head in pity. They stop in front of the door leading to Queen Panela's bedroom. Jaxon stands up straight and swings the door open swiftly. The Head Knight enters and stands at attention to the side of the threshold.

“Queen Panela, I present to you the noble Mortikai Leone, Savior of Lásia, his wife, Lady Kei, and Jodo.” He royally presents them. Queen Panela stands from her seat and briskly walks across the room in her cream pantsuit, and embraces her nephew deeply.

“Oh Mortikai, everyone among this land owes their life to you. I humbly thank you for killing Geoterra and bringing Eva back.” She thanks him, bowing gracefully to him in full respect. Mortikai smiles shyly, looking over at his wife as she nods to him, proud of his tasks also. Queen Panela switches her attention to Kei.

“And who might this lovely lady be?” She asks, wanting to hear her voice.

“I am Lady Kei Inuk of Frio. I nursed Mortikai back to health so he would be able to take on Geoterra. We were married before the final battle. It is an honor to meet you Your Majesty.” She splendidly identifies herself, bowing gracefully to the Queen.

“I've heard many times, the story of how good of a fighter you are,” Queen Panela looks back to wink at her son. “I also hear you are a master of the tribal arts,” Kei nods humbly. “Well that's wonderful. The noble Leone men of this family have always married women of fighting background. Good job, Mortikai,” She winks at her nephew. Queen Panela turns her attention to Jodo. “You're very quiet. Where are you from, young one?” Jodo hesitantly looks around the room.

“I'm from Fortla.” He quickly responds. The Queen looks at him peculiarly.

“Why do you seem so tense?”

“I just don't like big crowds or a lot of people staring at me.” He honestly tells her.

“I like your honesty,” She nods, places her hand on his shoulder. “I hear you too, are skilled in the arcane arts. I also hear you were the one who brought Mortikai back to life. Maybe it is *you* who we all owe our lives to. Thank you,” Queen Panela invites them all to sit down. “We will have Koalu's funeral tomorrow. I am glad he died nobly, as all knights should,” Queen Panela reaches over and takes a drink of tea. “I was shocked to find out he had a dragon in captivity. Although it *is* against the law, I bended the rule and let Orian keep the beast,” She shows her resentment toward all dragons. “Maybe we can start a revolution.”

“That dragon is great! He flies so high and is the nicest animal you could ever meet. As long as I have this whistle, he can go wherever he wants to. Eva doesn't like him though.” Orian eyes his sister, teasingly.

“I don't care how *nice* the beast may seem,” She breaks her silence, usually sitting quiet. “I've seen and encountered enough dragons to see that they are *all* the same!” Her voice reveals animosity. Everyone stares at her in awe. Eva returns their glares and slowly calms down.

Soon after, they all sit in each other's company, the Queen hearing the story of the battle from the fighters' points of view. They all laughed and joked. Kikuyu slept, curled into a ball near Eva. Mortikai and Eva continued to return smiles at each other, still having that connection. It was the only communication they really needed. As they talked, Queen Panela appointed Mortikai as Head Knight again, and he decided to have Jaxon as his partner, sharing the power with him. Mortikai smiled inside, feeling accepted and finally back where he belonged.

In the blistering cold of the north, protected and warmed behind walls of vast ice, an egg of Geoterra's clutch shakes momentarily. It suddenly wobbles and sits motionless again. After moments of silence, the crown of the egg breaks and a head rises from the egg. It shrieks as the solidified fluids flow down the sides of the egg as slush, changing the surrounding white snow into a pale peach color. The creature breaks through the remnants of the shell and uses its new muscles to stand. A baby Imperial dragon was born. Its entire body was of a white color with a pair of red lines on each side of its jaws. It opened its glowing red eyes and growls. The newborn dragon walks across the cold snow and sits near the glowing hearth, finding warmth from its crackling essence.

Near him, another egg cracks open and a pale yellow Imperial crawls out. The white dragon, born minutes before, carefully watches the movement of its sibling. As it moved in closer toward the fire, the dragon shrieks furiously and attacks its sibling in a frenzied rage, violently pouncing on the newborn and clamping its young, but deadly, jaws around its neck, killing it instantly. The colorless dragon eats the remains of its sibling and sat near the fire, waiting as it ate the others that were born one by one—enjoying their taste. A new threat to *all* of Lásia's kind seemed to have been born that night...

