



Dice Tower Theatre presents Dawn of Dragons Prologue and Season 1 Script  
By Mike Atchley

## Part 1

*The prologue was originally a blog post. I then read it as a audiobook for fun. Colten, who plays Skotmir told me I should read audiobooks for a gig and fueled the fire for this show to start.*

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The sun slowly travelled in a thin beam across the far wall of the blacksmith shop. Bursting through a gap in the dry and blackened oak doors. The heaving of the great bellows pumped the coals of the forge with air. Benedict remarked how they changed from a deep cherry to a yellow much like that beam on the whitewashed wall.

“There boy! You’ve stoked the fire good an hot now. Keep it going and I’ll get the steel.” The booming voice of Erebus Shieldheart rang out in that room like the ring of the anvil in the dull smoky air. They rolled the bar in the inferno of the forge heat dancing across their arms as they worked near the fire. Benedict looked back at the crafting table where a silver Dragon Turtle sat. He remarked at the detail of the sculpture and silverwork, Mithril was rare but even more so was the heat required to bend it to the form required.

Its red eyes from two deep garnets seemed to stare back at him. He couldn’t shake that uneasy feeling around it. Like it called to him. A ember singed his arm making him wince and return his gaze back to the steel in his hand he was turning in the fire. Soon Erebus nodded in approval of the yellow white glow and called for him to bring it to the anvil.

Great blows were driven by Erebus and the great forgehammer he wielded in his massive hand. Benedict marvelled at his adoptive father’s arms. They were scarred from the years before Benedict, and strong from driving that hammer for as many as he could remember on top of that. He saw the glow of the steel in his kind, deep blue eyes surrounded by lines that told a story of hardship that never escaped the lips hidden behind his long moustache.

Erebus eventually stopped and motioned Benedict to lift the steel so he could inspect the rough shape of the sword. Benedict struggled to lift the blade of the greatsword thinking to himself how strong Zorin’s father must be to actually wield it. Erebus smiled slightly as he hooked the crook of the hammer under the other end to brace it. Benedict felt himself relax slightly.

“Good. This is good. Send her back back in the fire Benedict.”

For hours this cycle continued. Sweat had stopped pouring and kept a constant flow. All things in the room moved in rhythm with the pace of the blacksmith and his young apprentice. The door to the shop opened and a woman with dark hair kept back in a neat bun stepped in the bright daylight pouring onto the floor.

She swung a hip to brace the door as her hands were occupied. She carefully carried a tray whose contents were covered with a draped white cloth. A young girl a few years younger than Benedict skipped into the room, careful to keep distance from the two workers, but more importantly that fiery metal they held and its mother that birthed it, the forge. Her innocent brown eyes looked upon that fire with wonder, awe and ultimately respect.

“Lora, what have ye brought us love?” Erebus smiled and lowering the steel he picked up a towel. As he began to wipe off his hands he nodded with pride for Benedict to step away from the bellows for a much needed break. They had done well today.

The woman pulled back the soft hand woven cloth and the smell hit them before words could be said or eyes could see. The sweet smell of the fresh bread mixed with the smoked fish making Benedict’s pasty dry mouth begin to water. When his eyes fell to the pitcher of cool water though he could imagine how that first drink was going to feel. That became his priority.

As he began to pour a glass Cordelia his young cousin wrapped her arms around him in a big hug to the side, barely missing his precarious elbow steadying the glass as he poured. Lora kissed Erebus on his black sooted cheek. She laughed when she saw the brief clean spot she left and Erebus smiled at the small soot she brushed from a corner of her scarlet lips.

He thought of the years they had been together, how she was still so beautiful. Her raven black hair was showing some gray now and her eyes had similar lines. But her brown eyes themselves still shone with that fire he had always seen. She knew more than Erebus, he had thought on more than one occasion and to be fair she had proven it on many more than that.

He glanced at their children who were sitting now. Benedict had a fist full of broken bread with a decent portion of the smoked trout hastily shoved in one side. He greedily was eating it while Cordelia was talking excitedly about meeting up with her friend Sophie later. They are such good kids. He paused as the fact Benedict was his adopted son washed over him briefly.

“His father would be proud, Lora. He’s gonna be a great blacksmith.” He beamed with a whisper in her ear. Her kept hair felt like silk across his cheek and smelled of the lilies in the front planters she was tending earlier.

“He’s a good boy.” and she looked into his eyes with purpose as she wore a wry grin.

“As is Zane.”

He rolled his eyes slightly and chuckled. “Yes. I suppose.” he said as he turned away. He reached for a bit of bread and fish before Benedict could completely eliminate it to himself. He thought of Zane, the older brother of Benedict. He was such a free spirit, was the kindest words that came to him. The boy was undisciplined, unfocused. Nothing like his brother. He lowered his eyes as he remembered. He was like the sworn sister of Erebus, the mother of both boys, Elona.

Zorin walked down the dirty alleyway with his hands in pockets, deep in thought. Or at least that was the plan. He wasn't focusing on his eyesight where the ground passed lazily pebble by pebble. He was listening. He heard the window above creak to a close and a cat's steps on the gutter by the rooftop. He heard the wind slightly pick up and could feel the dry arid draft against his cheek pull a little moisture as it went by. He could smell the rotting trash and stale beer behind the Tavern as he approached the rear entry to the kitchen.

There was one thing he didn't notice though.

"Psst! Zorin!" a familiar hiss rang out from the stack of barrels. In response Zorin looked around before darting behind them.

"You ready?" The face was gleaming with mischievous excitement. In the dark shadow there Zorin could make out the familiar face of his best friend. His blonde hair hung at the shoulders, unkempt and free much like his devil may care attitude. Zorin admired the boy's courage and will. Zorin being the son of the local justice made him wary about taking risks but when he was with Zane he felt free.

The boys fantasized about moving to Port Balifor one day and becoming pirates. To sail the seas with no one to answer to but themselves, completely free of the day to day of their small town of Alan-ak-Khan. The town was small with a focus around basic trade for the travelling merchants and nomads in the local dry high plains desertlike area.

The only tavern was the Howling Mountain Inn and the boys loved to sneak in and hear the stories being told. After all this was more exciting than anything else in this town they both thought.

Zorin looked at Zane and nervously nodded with a smile.

They snuck around the barrel stack to the shadow immediately to the left of the door. Zane tested the handle gently. It was locked. He looked at Zorin and nodded. Zorin took a deep breath and produced the lockpick Zane had given him as a learning tool. "How are we gonna open buried treasure if the chest is locked? Don't wanna break the chest and have gold falling all about right?"

Seemed legitimate to Zorin as the picking up of that mess made his head swim. Zorin felt and listened to the lock. He could feel a grit of sand that had blown into the tumbler at some point. At least since the last time they were there. Brushing it to the size he slowly pressed and turned successfully disengaging the lock and freeing the door. Zane eagerly pushed the door open slightly and peered in. The kitchen was unoccupied, except for the large cauldron of rich stew slowly cooking on the fire. The smell was savory, and if it wasn't molten he would stuff it in his pocket. He smiled to himself slightly at the thought of even trying.

Zorin outside the door could see his friends fingerless glove pressing against the door with his head inside at the shoulders. Zorin saw that horrible scar up his forearm. Zane had no trouble talking about it, and was pretty proud of it honestly. "Saved Benedict from the fire." he had said. The fire that had taken Benedict and Zane's parents.

Benedict and Zane were raised by Erebus and Lorahana Shieldheart along with their cousin Cordelia. Zorin knew they had come here 5 or so years ago and word spread fast of the new legendary blacksmith.

Zanes smile peeked back from the doorway "let's go."

They snuck into the kitchen ducking behind the baker's pantry with stacks of flour from the mill to the south. The windmill logo with the angel wings always stuck to Zane as a neat image. Zane bounded up the stack until he could reach the rafters. Zorin quickly followed. As they crossed the beams Zane looked back at his best friend.

Shortly after arriving in Alan-ak-khan when they were barely 6 or 7 years old was when Zorin and Zane met. He remembers the mopey kid watching them unpack until he could sneak away and ask him his name. "Ariakan" the kid said.

Zane remembered laughing saying, "Way too big. How bout 'Zorin'? Its got a 'Z' in it like mine! I'm Zane." They both started laughing before running off to play, playing in the dreams of children with no cares of the world around them.

A hand grabbed Zane's leg as he drifted off the rafter, snapping him to reality. Zane corrected and looked back. Zorin was silently chuckling at the almost mishap. Zane mouthed out a thank you before looking down the 12 foot drop to the table below. They had made it from the kitchen to the front of the store and the dining room.

They worked their way to the large bookcase rows in the back where they could descend to the floor to find their prize. They noticed only 2 tables were occupied. One was Ellioeve Hawkligh. A local elven ranger who periodically came into town. Sometimes would stop by to see Erebus and Lora but never for long. Zane then noted the Dwarves sitting at the other table. They were Hill Dwarf miners and well known ones too.

One was the Chieftain Ricaver Bearcharger recognizable for his exceptional ugliness. His crooked nose perched below two sets of bushy eyebrows. His bald head reflected a bit of the sunlight that came in from the dusty nearby window. His usual council of Whitacin and Olacul were listening intently to his speech.

"I dunna care if its bad luck. The mine stays open! We've found worse than on old hallway anyhow" he bellowed.

“Chief, its not the discovery itself its the fear of what could be in there. The boys said it seemed to call to them in the darkness. Bad signs chief. Bad signs.” Whitacin’s white braided bead whipped slightly from his chin as he spoke in an almost pleading tone. Olacul stared into his mug hoping there would be an answer. Zane always though he was the thoughtful one. He never spoke much but would smile at the boys when they passed in the street.

Zane looked at Zorin who was snatching a bit of stale cake from a shelf. He grabbed a piece for himself. The boys knowing that if they stayed too long could mean trouble began their ascent back to the rafters and out of the Howling Mountain Inn. As Zane bit into the cake the spiced currants popped in his mouth. The brushed icing melted against his tongue but nothing could turn his curiosity from the discovery in the old mine.

Sophie was wiping down the small table used for lunch a few moments earlier. She had taken her plate and silverware to the bucket of soft flowery smelling suds and was purposefully wiping it clean. The house was so silent. She took a deep breath in as she looked at the front door. Waiting for something. Or maybe someone. She looked back and began to dry the dish with a dry white towel. She smiled remembering the towel as a gift from Lorahana Shieldheart. She was a talented weaver and seamstress afterall.

Her best friend was Cordelia and it wasn’t a secret that Cordelia’s cousin Zane and Sophie shared feelings about each other. They were both a little reckless and enjoyed each other’s spontaneity. Zane’s little brother Benedict would always encourage them to not do anything on the edge but with Sophie’s sister and Guardian off earning money and not at the house currently it was hard to walk the straight and narrow.

She wondered about her sister Kartilaan. She was a good 6 years older than Sophie meaning she was about 18 now. She was a talented Swordmaster with a longsword and when she was here taught Sophie as much as she could learn.

“Men are not to be trusted further than the end of your sword, Sophie.” She remembered her words of wisdom. She also remembers holding that sword at Zane’s chest and how he smiled back at her. She saw no malice, and something inside disarmed her. Months later he was her first kiss, and she was his.

She smiled as stood up and put the dish back in the cupboard neatly. She would go find them soon, her chores were almost done. She piled up the pan she had used to fry a little salted meat and scrambled eggs and double checked it was clean before putting it away under the tall dark wood cupboard. She thought of Zorin and wondered if his day was better than previous days. She could see the marks on his cheeks and when confronted would look away and change the subject hastily. Her sister had those marks when she would come back from a job sometimes.

A shudder ran up her back when she thought of his father Ariakas. Tall, dark eyed and long black hair that hit his broad muscular shoulders. He was the local justice for the town. Deep

booming voice that commanded respect and allegiance. Unwavering allegiance. He stayed in his house when he wasn't travelling. Today he wasn't in town due to some meeting Zorin mentioned. Hopefully that means Zorin gets a break she thought.

She cared about him like a brother. In fact these children Sophie, Cordelia, Benedict, Zane and Zorin were more of a family together than they were separately. Snapping back she pulled her blonde hair back from her face hastily with a quick bit of purple cord and took one last look at the empty house before running out to join Cordelia as they had planned.

The two girls were at the stables talking to a tall chestnut horse named buttercup as they brushed the cockleburs out of his thick mane. They were laughing at a joke when Zane and Zorin appeared laughing.

Sophie smiled, "There you are, whats so funny?"

Zane wickedly smiled as he grabbed her hand. "Milady my First mate and I were just saying how we will sail out of Balifor upon the fortnight!"

"Zorin tossed him a grin, "I thought I was the Captain!" he jested as he mocked a gut punch on his friend. Sophie and Cordelia laughed.

Zane apologized and began to dream again talking of the waves and their freedom again. Sophie smiled, it sounded great. Zorin held onto it in his heart as truth though knowing it may not be, but he had to. Cordelia loved his stories and loved her cousins very much. They were her oldest friends and Zane for good or bad was the Oldest therefore the defacto leader. Though he never seemed to want it.

Suddenly as Zane was talking about pirates and treasure he saw Benedict turn around the corner.

"Hey Benedict!" Zane smiled at his brother. "You ready for some fun or what" Benedict was intrigued but was wary. Zane rarely had ideas of fun that were legal or at the very least questionable.

"There's something in the old mine that the dwarves have found. An old hallway or something." Benedict protested. Zane poured on the charm. Cordelia soon joined as did Sophie. Zorin smiled at Benedict and slightly pleading said, "Come on. It's not everyday something like this comes up. Besides today my Father is gone and some fun sure sounds great."

Benedict groaned knowing he had lost the battle. Begrudgingly he followed the group as they walked north out of town towards the mouth of the old mine.

## Part 2

The children stood silent at the mouth of the mine. The hot dust blew across the dirt road, whipping up in small clouds that stung the eyes and cheek. The arid smell of dry cracked leather came from the various tools in the cart. Hastily placed there by the dwarves a few days ago it seemed. They would be back, but only after the miners held their council and deemed it "safe". Dwarves were not known for living such long lives by making hasty decisions was the common thought.

Benedict was nervously fidgeting with his hands while his eyes darted behind them looking for followers only to find nothing but the winding trail back to the village of Alan-ak-Khan. He saw his friends.

Tall Sophie with her long blonde hair blowing in the wind away from her beautiful and strong face. His cousin Cordelia who was more like a sister really, her white dress was a bit dirt stained at the bottom from the trail they had passed. It didn't seem to bother her though. He did note her normal joyful banter had ceased her dark hair tossing in the wind as she looked at the gaping maw of the mine.

He saw Zorin who was taking inventory of his various picks and a small knife he had on his side. Zorin would glance at the mouth of the cave. Zorin could almost sense Benedict's apprehension to which he looked back and smiled with his dark eyes reassuringly. Benedict instinctively looked to his older brother Zane secretly hoping he would find something and call the whole thing off.

Zane stood at the front chewing the end of a small piece of grass while squinting at the cave. He listened intently, focusing his sight into the darkness for any unseen lurker, he smelled past the earthy sweet grass in his mouth, past the dust making sure his senses didn't betray him.

He turned to Zorin and nodded in approval. Benedict's heart sank.

The children made their way into the cave. Cordelia reached up and took down a beaten and dented tin lantern and checked it for oil. The vapor burned her freckled nose slightly and made her eyes water. She struck the flint starter as the wick burned to life. She smiled. The blue flame sputtered to a bright yellow as she adjusted the length. Illuminating and framing her face she held it out to Benedict who held a hand up and smiled.

Benedict was afraid of breaking his word or command she chuckled. Not of the dark.

She had memories of them listening to Erebus tell stories of great knights and horrible orcs. About brutal barbarians and ogres. And her favorite, subject Dragons. She loved the tales of Dragons especially she loved to dream about those brave knights of old that rode them into battle. Gleaming like precious metals in the sun against the rainbow hues of the evil dragons. Driving them back to ultimately stop the evil dragon queen.



She looked up from the flame to see her friends motioning her to the front with Zane and Zorin to scout the freshly lit cavernous hallway.

Dwarves rarely did anything small. Whether it was in the craftsmanship or in the size itself. This huge chamber was an indicator of this. Huge rock beams 10' around climbed 30 ft into the air bracing the ceiling at the top. The skillfully hewn reliefs of runes and a bearded face were carved into several of them. Surrounded by an ancient angular design.

Noone knew how long the dwarves were working this mine, but it was obvious they didn't plan to stop anytime soon.

Walking into the chamber Cordelia saw a pocket in the wall with the rune for "light" in it. Placing the lantern in the pocket set off a chain reaction with the rock network of crystal naturally in the walls. The chamber magnified that light and cast it evenly throughout the chamber.

Sophie shielded her eyes as the dark wall she was investigating blinded her slightly with its radiance. Squinting she felt the wall and soon found where the wall had collapsed slightly revealing another hallway behind it.

"Hey I think I found something! Over here!" her voice bouncing off the cool stones in perfect time as it faded into the darkness. Her friends made their way over to her. Peering inside Zorin then looked back at Zane.

"This has got to be it." They nodded. Cordelia found another lantern nearby as did Sophie. After repeating the earlier ritual of lighting them, the children made their way into the relatively narrow hallway. This was more ancient. They could see etchings on the wall of a huge tower in the middle of an ancient city. The city was beautiful, exotic animals roamed the streets and several holy men appeared to be praying to the constellations.

"This must have been before the cataclysm. Before the gods left." Benedict remarked.

His voice was slightly mournful, secretly wishing for those golden times when the gods answered their followers. Before they left that fateful night over 300 years ago. He hoped, inside at least Paladine the valiant warrior would make him a holy knight. A paladin of truth, law and all that was good. But knights were all gone, scattered to the winds. The knighthood barely could run the small nation of Solamnia let alone police the world's troubles anymore. At least according to Erebus.

Zorin and Zane began their work on the ancient lock. The rough iron squeaked until a loud clack set the tumbler in place. Zorin smiled at his friend who nodded approvingly. Slowly the door groaned open. Ancient stale air rolled out of the dark opening. Cordelia covered her mouth trying not to gag at a slightly musty and rotten sweet smell in that initial rush of air.

"What was that smell?" Zane looked back with a grin. He fanned his hand behind his behind as he darted into the darkness with a snicker. Sophie covered her face as she began to laugh. Cordelia laughed herself quietly. Everything was a joke to him. Why was he the oldest? She looked at Benedict who looked slightly disgusted and maybe a little bit embarrassed. Zorin shook his head and motioned everyone to follow him.

The Hall was much the same as before just without the murals. Tattered threads of what could have been banners clung to the walls though. The once brilliant hues now faded to a off white and tan mottled design in places. Possibly a the horn and eye of a dragon's face was seen in one as well. The rest lost to time.

Coming to a room on the left they entered cautiously. In the center of the room was a bench with 3 ancient scrolls. The crumbling paper seemed to be held together by something other than its construction however and a deep blue glow slightly emanated from them. Cordelia approached the bench. The blue light casting a shine on her face. She knew this was magic. Maybe something more powerful than the small tricks her mother had shown her. Something better than simply breaking bread or wiping up some spilled broth with no hands.

The 3 scrolls had 3 different symbols A tree, A shield, And a torch. That torch called to her overpowering any interest in the other two for the moment. She reached for it. Her hand touched the paper and to her surprise it held its form perfectly, not a single crack in the parchment. The other two scrolls fell into dust with an ancient sigh. Almost from relief of its long awaited duty. The dust passing off the table and into the cracks of the floor to rest.

Opening the scroll she saw lettering she was unfamiliar with. Angular letters highlighted with squared dotted marks in a language foreign to her. Sighing she knew it would take some study to decipher the script. She tucked it in her belt for now. The children smiled at the treasure they found though. Zane clasped her shoulder nodding happily with a wide grin. "That will be great to find out what it says. I can't wait, i know you can figure it out, Cordelia."

She smiled, a little embarrassed at the praise. They continued down the hall. The next room had a table flanked on either side by two sets of ancient armor. Benedict and Sophie approached it. Sophie saw the dusty armor's fine steel and construction though the leather bindings were corroded and brittle she thought the suits would still be fine to still use. Benedict noted the Kingfisher, rose crown and sword carved into the breastplate. These were from the Solamnic Knights! He looked on the table and saw a small silver amulet and an ancient crown.

The amulet was of a Bison's head. He remembered that was the symbol for knighthood.

A groaning came from the darkness behind him. 2 man sized shapes shambled into the lantern's red glow. The decayed faces of 2 ghouls lurched into the light. Thier blue tinged flesh fell like tattered rags from their bones randomly. Their yellow eyes were clouded and pupilless and they clawed at the air slowly with rotten and taloned hands. They came directly at Benedict. The other children horrified stepped away to the side from the shambling creatures.

Benedict reached for that symbol of Kiri-Jolith and clutching the cold and ancient silver to his chest he began to chant a prayer to Paladine, Kiri-jolith and Habbakuk. Just as he had heard in those stories of old. Eyes closed he concentrated, stars appeared from his eyes being pulled so tight. He felt woozy and all went black.

He felt a hand on his shoulder and realized Zane had him draped across his leg. "He's ok!" Zane exclaimed and a sigh of relief was felt by all in the room.

Benedict rose up "how long have i been out?"

"Not long" zane replied "You went to the table and the next thing we saw you passed out."

"You didn't see the ghouls?"

"No..."

Everyone looked at each other uneasily and looked at the two statuesque knights.

Noticing their response Benedict looked at them puzzled. "What?"

Sophie looked at him. "These aren't just suits of armor Benedict." She motioned at them.

"There are actually knights inside them." Benedict was appalled. Dead? Inside? Why he wondered. They were at perfect attention guarding that table. He remembered the crown.

Zane was approaching the table and noted that crown. "We could go anywhere with just one of the gems alone i think." He smiled greedily reaching for it. The twisted pattern on the crown revealed many serpentine and dragon heads twisted together. 5 gemstones worked their way around the crown itself, Ruby, Emerald, Sapphire, Diamond and Jet. Zane picked it up and the dragons seemed to come to life twisting. Turning. He placed it on his head.

"What are you doing?" Benedict said. Zane saw his little brother's greedy face lunge for the crown. He dodged to the side pushing him to the ground. He looked at his friends. Those friends that now wanted his crown. He saw thier greedy, beady little eyes soulless. Their black mouths pulled back in cynical grins dark lips curled back from inky blue black fangs.

"NO!" Zane pulled the crown off and it clanged to the ground lifeless again. His friends looked at him in awe. Benedict was steadyng Zane with his hands, looking into his eyes.

"Are you ok, Zane?" he asked honestly concerned. "You became very angry. All of a sudden before throwing this down to the floor."

Zane nodded. "No one. Should put that on. We should go" As the children left, Zane reached down and picked up the crown. Shrugging he looped it into his belt, taking the treasure with him. After all it may be worth something to somebody he thought.

As they returned to the great hall a sense of dread became apparent. Zane picked up the pace, Sophie could smell something and she joined him and soon all the children were bolting to the entrance. Their fears were realized, in the dusky distance Alan-ak-khan was on fire.

## Part 3

The screams echoed from deeper within the town as the children scrambled to hide behind the old mine cart. It sat near the edge of the road peeking down the dark dusky alleyway illuminated with a distant dull red glow. Smoke was the air, the snapping of timber and a smell of oak mixed with iron hung heavy, the metallic taste brought horrible thoughts to their minds. Cordelia was whimpering about getting home while Zane froze in thought, Worse it was memory. Where would they go from here?

Benedict put his hand on Zane's shoulder. "Follow me" he said to his older brother. Everyone looked surprised and they gazed wide eyed at Zane's reaction. No one had ever dared to command Zane, he was the de facto leader after all. Zane smiled and glanced back at the group. He placed a hand on Sophie's shoulder and they both smiled. "Time to go" he said to the others. Then he nodded his head towards his brother, his long dirty blonde hair bouncing from his cheek "Follow Benedict, he knows the way."

As they darted down the alley they heard 2 deep growling voices laughing from around the corner. Ducking behind a pile of wet smelling rubbish outside the tailor's back door they soon saw two hulking forms turn the corner.

They had deep set dark eyes and green skin that looked like thick pond scum. 2 tusks protruded from their lower jaw over their upper lips and as one spoke the other curled one lip back nodding in approval. The children had never seen such monsters before.

Zane held a finger up to his lips as his eyes grew wide in recognition. Orcs. These were just like the Orcs that helped the bandits raid their home so many years ago. He remembered his mother reaching towards him with one hand. Her chin length blonde hair pasted to her cheek in small patches with sweat and blood. Her gold and silver armor glinting in the fire raging. She saw him as she swung her great glaive in an arc behind her, through an orc much like those before them. "Run!" she mouthed a silent scream as she turned to disappear in the fiery battle before her.

He never saw her again.

A battle cry roared out from the adjacent doorway as a figure in dull battle worn silver armor charged the 2 orcs. His greatsword cleaving through one before his shoulder drove the other into the wall behind them. The grind of metal against brick made Zane's skin crawl. He pressed himself to the shadows peering through the gap between the wall and the overturned barrels they hid behind.

"Die Scum!" the Orc roared from his bloodied maw as he drove the crude cleaver like axe down at the warrior. It froze in midair held by a single hand. His face now in the firelight he powerful

hand of Erebus Shieldheart. "Not... yet!" He retorted spinning the blade back towards its owners gut, using the orcs own force unwittingly to drive its own demise.

The orc fell to the ground in a heap.

"Father!" cordelia sensing the end of the danger jumped from behind the pile before anyone could stop her. Erebus smiled before the the door behind Cordelias small running legs burst open driven by an Orc frothing at the mouth as he reached for her. Her eyes turned to horror as she screamed.

The orc shrieked as he reached for his shoulder turning to look in the dark alley behind him and past the children. Stumbling backwards another feathered shaft ran through his throat with a gurgle. Zane felt a third whisk by as it found home in the orc's dark heart.

Cordelia jumped into her father's waiting arms. He looked behind the children.

"Elliovieve, good to see you old friend!"

From the shadows came a slender elven ranger, the dark earthen hues of her leather armor seemed to dampen the light around her graceful movement. Her long flame red hair flowing behind her, she pulled her hood back as she stepped out of the shadows into the smokey light of the alley. She smiled at Erebus and then looked at Zorin. She winked at him as she extended her hand to him motioning for all the children to follow her.

"Erebus. Where is Lora?"

Erebus nodded, "Lora is at the shop gathering the supplies and will meet us to the south of town by the old tree." He put cordelia down. "I need you to get the children there. You know where we must go."

Elliovieve nodded. Erebus turned to Benedict and put his hand on his shoulder. Benedict was in awe. His foster father, was wearing intricately carved plate armor. He was able to make out the same Crown, Kingfisher, sword and rose that the knights in the old mine were wearing. Erebus stood before him with the same kindness in his eyes he had always known, but now he saw him as also a defender of the people. A true knight of solamnia.

"They are all we have." Erebus said over his shoulder. Before looking at Zorin, Zane and Sophie smiling in grim understanding. "They are everything. But you know that."

"I know the vow Erebus." Ellioveve chuckled. "But ... Stop, you need to go. Get Lora and lets leave this place."

He nodded, smiled at the children and darted down the alley into the darkness.

The children huddled closer to the elf's cloak, the smell of wet wool along with elderflowers and honey seemed to cut through the smoke and decay smell of the night. The wet air began to sprinkle, probably from the smoke Sophie thought to herself as her eyes fluttered slightly looking to the dark sky.

The rooftops glowed, the air hung low and the distant shouts seemed to dim as they walked. Realization settling in. Where was her sister now? Would she find her? Sophie shook her head. "Keep your head in the game" she whispered to herself, a small chill shaking the words from her lips slightly.

They stopped and Elliveve looked concerned. Her eyes darted back and forth before she ushered the children off the road and down the small field to the stables. They could hear the horses frantically crying out at the building was catching fire. Cordelia saw Buttercup tied up and braying terrified. Elliveve placed a hand on her muzzle to calm her for release from her halter but she still was wide eyed and tense.

Until a small hand touched her cheek. Buttercup froze. Her ears went forward from laying across her back. Her eyes relaxed as she saw her little friend cordelia smile at her with that known kindness. Elliveve was able to undo the knot turning her over to cordelia who led her to her tack calmly and set about preparing her for a ride.

The sound of ellivieve's blade striking rope and wood cutting a horse free startled her. "Shhhhh its ok girl. I'm with you. We will leave together. Its ok I'm here." Cordelia said soothingly.

As the other 5 horses set out into the darkness their severed bods dancing at their neck, buttercup calmly nuzzled Cordelia as Sophie gently placed the well crafted bridle in her mouth and over her alert and calm ears.

The children were nearing the old tree and clearing to the south of the blacksmith's shop when they could see the bonfires dotting the area. "Stick close children, this can't be good." Elliveve said in a hushed tone. They led buttercup to a small boulder looking down to the tree's bare area in the field. The rain stung their eyes and hung their clothes tight to the body. Sophie unrolled a few of the woolen saddle blankets and threw one over her shoulders. Seeing this the other children each grabbed one for comfort.

They saw a figure enter the glow of the fire led by another in dark armor. The armor of Erebus was glinting in the firelight. The dark man drove an elbow to the nape of erebus's neck dropping him to his knees. A banshee's cry sung through the night as the children saw fire erupting in bursts from the palms of a figures hands.

The figure was running towards erebus throwing these bolts of fire striking the multiple Orcs careening through the denser grasses. One by one they fell. Was it 5 was it 8? Zorin looked on in horror straining who was wielding such arcane power. Soon she entered the firelight firing a

bolt at the dark figure and another at a target behind the great tree. The bolts struck home sending the dark targets reeling to the ground.

Cordelia saw her mother. A determination glinted across her eyes in the fire light as she ran to Erebus. Warily he grabbed the long sword as his feet. Facing the tree.

"This is fine work." the unmistakable voice of Zorin's father rang out. Zorin's face went white as his hands began to shake. From the shadows his tall form stepped. His long black hair casting blue highlights as light waltzed across it. Benedict noted the Red scales of his armor. A 5 headed dragon emblazoned across the chest. He was a follower of the Dark Queen he grimaced. He looked back to see tears welling in Zorin's eyes.

"Ariakas. Why have you done this?" Lora said between clenched teeth as she steadied her wounded husband. Ariakas smiled cruelly as he waved another figure from the shadows. He was powerfully built the dark armor he wore was capped with a horrifying dragon visage above a draped shroud. In his hand was a dark mace. The spikes seemed to writhe like snakes as he turned it over in his pale scarred hands.

Erebus and Lora looked at each other. Erebus seemed to plead with her in that moment before she smiled knowingly at him. Lifting the cuff of her white blouse revealed the sword shaped tattoo Cordelia always admired when her mother cradled her in those cold nights.

Lora reached down and closing her eyes mumbled some arcane words before touching that tattoo on her wrist. Erupting from her hand was sword of pure flame. She dropped into a offensive pose, her back to Erebus's. Zane saw that Erebus held a wounded side blood caking his gloved fingers. The smell of the fires was acrid and burned their dry throats, it wasn't just wood burning he noted with fear.

Orcs came from the shadows as Lora dove at them with her flame blade. They seemed to fall before her as she danced between them without her even touching them. She gently spun from one to the next effortlessly blocking any attack and countering with her blade or an arcane blast of blue energy.

Erebus charged the dark man holding the mace. The man parried and drove the handle into Erebus's gut. Lora was startled and looked back. In that moment time slowed for Cordelia.

She saw Erebus drop to a knee his face grimaced in pain. Her mother reeled on her heel to see her husband, as a great axe struck her in the back driving her down disappearing in the grass.

"No!" the voice next to her erupted as she felt Zane leap the fence in front of them. Elliovieve hand barely missing the chance to restrain the grief stricken child. Erebus looked up in horror as he saw Zane rushing toward them. Zane reached down and grabbed a fallen sword from an Orc's body and charged towards the Dark man. Stepping from Erebus the man growled "Come child and let me show you the darkness of Takhisis!"

Ariakas stepped forward to kick Erebus prone with a boot. Ellivieve cloaked the children under her cape in the darkness, they had to go. Sophie looked with horror as Zane swung futilely at the man only to be swatted to the side like a sack of flour. Zane was crumpled on the ground unmoving.

Erebus howled with anger as he forced himself to stand. "You killed my son" as he swung a gauntled hand into Ariakas's gut. 2 arrows sunk into the knights armor from the shadows. He yelled out of anger, the pain dulled in his grief. Ariakas drove a knee into his wounded side. As erebus dropped his head he growled from his teeth "and my Lora" Ariakas saw only the glint of the razor sharp steel as Erbus quickly grazed across his cheek from his ear to his nose. The warm flow of blood he felt before any pain. Erebus smiled at him with bloodied teeth. "My honor. Is my life." as he lunged at Ariakas he felt the blade pass between his ribs.

He could feel every deviation in the steel and knew what felled him was his own making. Benedict saw it too, the glint of the silver dragon turtles red eyes seemed to look back at him. His uncle's themselves seemed to fade, the forge's fire now forever lost to them.

Hot tears erupted down his face as ellivieve helped him onto the back of Buttercup's back with the other children. She swung herself around them and at a full gallop they rode away from the town into the darkness.

Hours later, Zorin looked around in the night rain. The new smell of the salt sea was a welcome change to the smoke and death. Cordelia had fallen asleep exhausted from horror and grief held by Benedict. Benedict glanced at him but looked away. Sophie just stared blankly into the distance where the coast's cliffs stood high above the crashing surf. As they rode along the coastline they were approaching a windmill. As they passed they saw an old man his grey muttonchops wet in the rain as they saw the fire glow of alan ak khan in the distance.

He waved at them and Ellivieve waved back. He turned to the young blonde girl next to him and motioned her inside.

"Bless you, be safe." he said as he painfully turned on his heel. To walk back inside the mill.

Zorin asked "Where are we going to go?"

Elliveive said gently "Port Balifor."

Sophie burst into wracking sobs of memory. Ellivieve wrapped an arm around her. "We will start again in Port Balifor."





# S1E1

For ten years I've had nightmares of that night.

I saw our home destroyed

I watched the closest woman I had to a mother die.

I couldn't save the one who rescued me.

My greatest teacher was lost as well.

I can still hear Zorin ask

Dawn of Dragons season 1 episode 1

<Sounds of the screams of them escaping. Sad music.>

"Prepare to port!" The bosun's cry was heard followed by the familiar and much anticipated pipe. A boy about 20 looked back from the rolling sea. His dark brown eyes fell to the 20 ft wooden arm he currently straddled. The deck heaved 40 feet below his bare feet as he gently swayed with the tide, the once great square sail pulled up where he had tied it off 20 minutes ago draped below him. He breathed with purpose into his nose, and smiled.

That smell of the dockside fishery was actually a welcome sign. It always reminded him of copper and cucumbers when it was pleasant. Today was one of those days. He could hear the busy dock with workers and laughing sailors taking to the streets ready to spend their coin.

He felt the brown beard around his chin. "3 months." He could confirm it had been 3 months since he smelled and heard Port Balifor. He grinned as he crawled his way to the web like network of ropes used as a ladder. "Lads here's your pay. Thanks for all the help." the stout purser passed out a small bag of coins that jingled to each of them in turn. His blue eyes shone from behind the ruddy face and dark orange beard. A smile broke through. "Welcome home Zorin."

>>>>

She walked down the street with purpose. Her long blonde hair was pulled back from her soft cheeks. Eyes Blue like a deep ocean and lips that seemed to draw you closer pulled back with a smirk as she shook her head slightly. She knew there were eyes on her. She just didn't care, nor did she ever care for the affections men provided. The dark scales of her armor cast a red hue at the edges, held back at the waist by a braided auburn belt. From which swung a

sheathed longsword capped on either end with simple brasswork. It was sword of purpose. Not a fancy wall hanger it was her paycheck.

Her boots fell on the ground strong as she walked. The strength she possessed could be seen when her arms alone rippled as she walked.

The smell of sweet meadowflowers mixed with oiled steel and leather as she passed by. She had returned from collecting payment for what she politely called a "hunt". She was happy, as this was another one she was able to subdue without death. She prided herself in returning stolen goods or bringing in wrongdoers without bloodshed. She wasn't a butcher after all. Be certain though she made a living off what she was good at. That sword was as keen as her persuasive voice and her arm as strong as her startling good looks.

Strong, beautiful and absolutely dangerous. She turned to the door of the shop where a hammer rang against the steel in the next room. "Good." she smiled.

Opening the door a wave of heat washed over her, with the smell of burning coals and hot steel. She saw the young man in the dark leather apron hammering a glowing bar. His dark hair fell like raven's feathers around his face in a very traditional cut. His face was clean shaven and glistened with sweat about his strong chin. She smiled at her chosen brother.

"Benedict." He looked up and smiled gently. He put the bar back in the glowing fire and walked to her with a grin. "Sophie." He threw his arms around her. "When did you get back?"

"Just now. Thought I'd stop by before going to the house."

"Thanks. Great to see you. Tonight Cordelia is performing at the Pig and Turtle. Will you join us?"

"Of course!" she thought of their little sister. She was amazing with both her flute and voice. This should not be missed.

"Great, I'll see you at home." He patted her pauldroned shoulder and returned to the forge. Sophie smiled. As she left she felt a pang of regret gnaw at her heart. She remembered his brother, the only boy she ever loved. "I miss you." She whispered to herself as she left. If she would have not been in her thoughts she might have noticed the hammer paused for a moment, as Benedict remembered too.

>>>>

"4 cups of flour to 1 cup of sugar, a sprinkle of rose water and cinnamon beat 6 quail eggs."

The kitchen was alive with the sounds of pans and smells of fresh baked bread. A woman in a dirty apron was reading from an old scrap of parchment, carefully moving each item as she confirmed the ingredients. She paused and pulled her long red hair back from her face revealing her slender jaw, high cheekbones and her pointed ears. There was a decorated lacy cuff of purest silver around her left ear. It was shaped like a horse's head from the intricate twisting of the knotwork.

Sitting across the oaken countertop sat her younger friend. Long black hair stood in contrast to her white blouse and corset. She was lost in thought as she commanded a small flame to dance over her knuckles. The heat wasn't enough to harm it was just..

"Cordelia!" Ellioveve barked jarring the young girl from her concentration causing the flame to vanish.

"Why-I uh"

Elloveve chuckled. "Are You going to help me or what? It's for your employer after all" Cordelia laughed "I'm sorry I was just thinking."

"About what?"

Cordelia was embarrassed. She wasn't sure how to respond, she hesitated but elloveve could read it.

"about what child? Come. You can tell me."

"It's just. Tonight is the first time playing this new song. And it's great you and everyone will be there but...". She paused and summoned some strength from deep within. "I wish father and mother were here."

Elloveve smiled "oh Cordelia". She wiped her hands on a cloth and walked to her, wrapping her arms around the young girl. "I do too kiddo. I do too". They sighed and returned to the kitchen. Cordelia picked up the mixing bowl and spoon as she began adding the ingredients. She smiled suddenly "I'm not sure why Avar likes these cookies so much." She chuckled "I think they are a little fancy for a dockside tavern"

Elloveve looked at her with a smirk "well even a dockside tavern is entitled to a little luxury now and then I think."

She laughed thinking of the jovial little man. He was shorter than most at about 5 ft even. Known for bold silks with gold and bronze accessories the owner of the Pig and Turtle inn was a kind and fair man. He wasn't a pushover though as Ellioveve had seen him leap onto a table in order to dress down a drunken Minotaur sailor who was being aggressively rude with one of the bar maids.

Avar loved the ladies that worked for him but his true vice was sensual luxuries like soft silks, bold perfumes, gentle music and delicate pastries. Some would whisper he was actually a half-dwarf given his stature and love of the finer things.

The door burst open and in walked Zorin. His deep purple tunic had been fastened over his white deck shirt carrying his canvas bag of belongings over one shoulder with a small ivory statuette in his other hand. "Yay!" Cordelia dropped the spoon into the bowl and ran to him

rapping him up in a big hug. He chuckled "woah there kiddo! I missed you too. But look. I made this as we made the journey to the south lands. One of the mates had a piece of a narwhal's horn. I beat him in a game of dice for it." He smiled proudly, but after seeing the look of disapproval on Elloveve's face quickly continued

"So anyway as I was running the rigging and really the journey was very calm this time, there were many hours of sitting on the yardarm or on the larboard side we had a few benches set into the deck. I'd sit there and whittle on this little guy." He proudly turned the small white dragon over in his hand. The head was pulled back to where its chin laid against its bowed throat forming a strong S shape. Its lips were pulled back showing the rows of sharp teeth, and the hands and feet were one piece together, with the tail coiled in the original horn's shape to form the base upon which it sat when he placed it on the counter. No matter the fact Zorin thought it was crude in some areas, Cordelia was entranced.

"Oh I love it!" She said as crouched eye level matching its own gaze.

"Good!" He smiled "because its yours." She threw her arms around him, "oh thank you!"

"Of course!" Zorin said chuckling turning to Elloveve. "And something for..." Elloveve snickered "you know how I"

"How you hate gifts." Quickly recognizing how she hated to be interrupted as well Zorin reached into his belt and pulled out the Pouch of his earnings a shameful apologetic smile across his worried face. Elloveve laughed as she brushed his hand holding the gold aside giving him a hug. "Welcome home you dirty pirate." They all laughed.

>>>>

A few hours later Elloveve was finishing packing the small ladyfingers cookies on a shiny silver baking pan she had placed a lace napkin on to make it look more, special. Benedict, Zorin, and Sophie were all getting caught up.

Sophie had returned with a nice bit of money enough to probably bring in a roast for the week. Zorin had paid the rent up to date and Benedict had brought in some fresh apples and dried smoked fish from the docks on his way home. Cordelia was absent as she had left to go discuss with Avar the night's events he had planned and how her music would make this "A Night to remember!"

She chuckled. Port L' For really was a decent place for them. She missed her trees but she periodically could leave and find an afternoon hunting in the forest a few miles out of town. She had her own memories after all and needed time with herself to keep those demons at bay.

Benedict looked so much like his father Lucilius, strong and proud. She smiled as she thought how Cordelia was looking just like Lorahana. Zorin was shaping up to be a great man, but humble. Unlike his father Lord Pallus. She looked at Sophie. Sophie smiled at her friends and

nodded as they told their tales but Sophie's eyes would look out the window and look across the port of L'For into the red orange dusk beginning to settle on the town.

Elloveve sighed. She knew that look. Elloveve recognized that look in herself as she had once loved and lost as well. But that was...Many years ago. Quickly brushing the his memory aside she noted the time.

"All right are we all ready to go?"

"Yes!" Everyone excited rose up to go out into the bustling street where the street merchants had begun to pack up for the day or to head to also join bustling nightlife of the city.

Elloveve chuckled again as she glanced protectively at the tray of treats in her hands Avars excitement playing in her mind. "Everyone must come! This will be a night to remember!"

## S1E2

Dawn of Dragons season 1 episode 2

The sounds of merriment were deafening outside the small oak room. The bloodwood table was smooth to the touch, a deep coat of lindseed oil mixed with peppermint rubbed into her finger gently as she stroked it. She looked at herself in the mirror. A smile crept across her face. "It feels like a full house..." She looked back at the small dish of peach colored powder and the small horsehair brush in her hand. Smiling she dabbed at it quickly and briskly applied it to her cheeks, bringing out the soft contours of her cheekbones under her bold eyes.

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in!"

A joyful face peeked in at the door handle's height, it was Avar the Tavern's owner. "My don't you look splendid! We are almost ready to receive you my shining star though everyone will be blinded by your beauty! Only your sweet music will save us from being lost forever!" he twirled and clasped his hands together barely able to contain his excitement. "Are you excited?"

"Yes!"

"Well this my dear is a magnificent evening! The ale is bold, the wine is sweet, the cookies and pastries are all lavish and not one person is in a foul mood! Ah yes! I almost forgot. " he reached in his pocket. "This is for you. You look like a queen, AND you need to be paid as a queen." he handed her a small bag of gold tied with a small golden dragon for a broach.

"Oh Avar, thank you."

"My dear I should thank you. Since you've come to work for me my place is so wonderful and cheery. What we all need in these rough times." He became a bit somber. "I know it won't last forever. But this establishment will enjoy you while you are here."

She smiled and put her hand gently on his shoulder. "Avar. I have no intention on leaving I..."

"Hush child" he said brushing under his eye briefly giving her a reassuring smile. "You are young and Port L'For is not the place to build a life. We are survivors here you and I. You are too much of a star. I want you back in the sky from which you fell." He paused thinking of something far away as he took her hands in his. With a smile and a squeeze he said.

"Wherever that is, promise me you will find it." She smiled knowing her little friends big giving heart wouldn't let her leave until she agreed.

"Alright, I promise."

He nodded as she rose to leave a big grin on his face as he reached into his pocket producing a small vial of yellow liquid. He took off the crystal topper and dropped a few drops in the palm of his hand. As he gently slapped his rosey powdered cheeks with it, the smell of Pine and honey came to her nose pleasantly. He smiled at her and offered his hand with a bow.

Mustering up his pride and joviality he proclaimed to her.

“Cordelia Shieldheart, muse of Port L’For please come with me! For tonight is a..”

“A night to remember!” Cordelia and Avar laughed as they left the dressing room hand in hand.

>>>>>>>

The smell of sweet spiced wine, frothy ale and even a slight tinge of pungent pipe smoke filled the air. The ladyfingers cookies had been taken almost as fast as they had sent them down on the long table used for the potluck of dishes brought in for the celebration.

Tonight was the first night of the annual 3 day festival in Port L’For marking the beginning of the trade season with the north. Half of the year the waters only allowed trade with what the sailors called “the southlands”. Though separated by continents and cultures the kingdoms of Veridian and Trull actively traded year round with the kingdom of Kur where Port L’For resided.

Preferring to use Khur as middle ground for trade, as they were neutral in most wars that sprouted up from time to time. The elves of Veridian and the orcs and men of Trull were always looking for the fine smithed goods of the Dwarves, whether golden vases with gemstones encrusting the surface making the light dance in a room or the dwarven steel sword that rarely needed to be sharpened. In return the people of Kur had to look to them for food and fineries the harsh desert couldn’t provide..

But only during the warmer months did the majority of the heavy merchant ships make those trips north. After the ice had broke, the sea had calmed and so did the creatures beneath its dark waves. This was when the furs, oils and gems of the north could be traded. The artisans of all countries looked forward to this time as many of their goods depended on this for thier own trade.

The tavern was bursting at the seams, shoulder to shoulder people stood waiting in anticipation for a seat to open. A short man with bushy eyebrows looked and spied an empty seat at a table with 3 other people. He moved through the crowd towards it. He reached for the chair.

“Taken friend.” the young raven haired man spoke to him. The little man sighed and walked away almost bumping into a tall woman with golden hair in a reddish suit of scale mail carrying 4 mugs in her hands.

“Excuse me!”



The woman shouted at the little man as he darted into the crowd. With a sigh she continued to her

“That bar was packed. No way the barmaids can get to us right now. We are on our own.” Sophie sat down the mugs and began passing them out.. “There we are Elloveve. Wine for you and I, ale for you Zorin and...”

“Milk?” Benedict said questioningly

Sophie smiled “Yes, only the finest year of course.”

He smiled and took it from her with both hands offering a gentle nod of appreciation.

“Thank you Sophie.” Elloveve said elbowing Zorin in the ribs. “\*cough/sputter\* uh-er indeed! Thank you!” Sophie chuckled with Zorin.

“Oi! Watch where you’re goin!” Benedict noticed the minotaur protest as 2 thugs pushed past to sit at a dimly lit table back in the dark corner of the bar. They had dark cloaks and hoods covering themselves, looked to be made of rough wool. They roughly shoved a terrified man into a seat and sat to either side of him. His wide eyes seemed to dark back and forth from behind the dirty, unwashed face. His thin scraggly beard framed the gaunt and wiry features of the man as he trembled. He was dressed in dark black armor that hung loose from his body barely finding anything to hold onto. Benedict could feel his hair stand on end.

He started to turn a hand back to the table without taking his eyes off them. “Hey Zorin do you see...”

\*entrance music\*

Avar stepped out onto the oakstage. Towering over the crowd he rapped a cane topped with a lion’s head on planking echoing through the room. The crowd grew silent.

“Ladies and Gentlemen of Port L’For! Tonight we celebrate together the new season, and together may the Stone judge us to be worthy of great riches!” The crowd erupted in cheers.

He looked at the crowd and smiled. Stretching out his arms embracing the cheers and soaking the energy in.

Benedict was staring at the dark men. They were motionless, the terrified man looking like he was about to cry.

“My friends, she is no stranger nor is she a stranger to you. Without further adieu please welcome the Muse of Port L’For, Cordelia!”

The crowd cheered for the local favorite. Benedict noticed the smaller of the 2 cloaked men turn towards the stage sharply. After a moment his shrouded head turned side to side scanning the area.

3 other musicians had taken the stage flanking Cordelia they each nodded and smiled before the tavern went deathly quiet. They could hear her breath as she raised the ivory flute to her lips, a small carved dragon dangling from her wrist.

\*cordelia's song\*

The bar erupted with cheers as Cordelia bowed her head. The other musicians smiled and applauded her as well.

They launched into an upbeat melody and the room began dancing. Zorin leapt up and slammed his empty mug on the table. With his usual flair he offered his hand to Sophie. She laughed and waved him away. "Well fine then!" he grinned and then bowing began to join a few sailors in a rowdy hornpipe dance. Sophie and Elloveve cheered.

Benedict was staring at the dark men. One roughly grabbed the terrified man and jerked him out of his seat roughly. The other nodded as they made their way out of the bar.

He tried to get the attention of his friends, but he found it hopeless. Benedict, though someone who followed a moral code of honor, wasn't a stranger to the occasional bar brawl, and had a few scars marring the 20 year old's young face. Action being imperative he rose up and followed them outside into the street.

>>>>

The market square was 100 feet on all 4 sides with a fountain of grey stone in the center of the smooth river rock cobblestones. The fountain was depicting a Lion and a Bear facing east and west respectively. People were still making their way to the Pig and Turtle. It was the biggest tavern and was known for the best entertainment. Other shops lined the open square, and people strolled through making their way to various destinations.

"Stop fighting it and just tell us. When?!"

Benedict saw at the end of the building he had just walked from there were the 2 men, one gripping the collar of the small man and roughly interrogating him.

"You there!" Benedict started to jog to the men his hand resting on the brass pommel of the broadsword at his hip.

They jolted looking at him obviously startled. The Small man broke free of the grip and ran down the dark alley chased by the larger man. The 3rd man, the smaller of the cloaked figures stood up straight and shook his head looking very annoyed. He turned and ran across the market. Benedict recognised the tactic and knew him to be the one with the answers. Sprinting through the street the man leapt over a small cart and pulled a stack of apple crates down to separate his pursuer. Benedict dodged around them deftly and continued to sprint the broadsword clanking at his side. He noticed the man was not hindered by a sword.

The man dodged into a clothing shop and as Benedict neared the entrance he quickly unhooked his sword belt where it clanged to the steps just outside the door.

**"Move!"** he shouted at the terrified shop keep who dodged backwards into a pile of soft linens for sale. The dark man spun around just in time to catch a fist across his right cheek and a shoulder into his chest pressing him to the wall. Benedict could smell trail dust and the musk of a man that had been on horseback for a long time.

**"Wait! You don't understand!"** the voice sputtered out of breath from behind a dark veil his blue eyes determined.

**"Who are you? Why are you here?"** Benedict gritted his teeth.

**"What were you doing... With that man?"**

The shrouded man grabbed benedicts arm his dark sleeve falling back. Benedict's eyes grew wide.

**"Listen. We've travelled a long way to warn this town and don't have time to explain. Something horrible is about to happen and that man had the details as to when."**

Benedict was staring at the man's arm. Trembling. **"It can't be..."**

**"What?"**

Benedict nodded with a tremble still not letting down his guard.

**"Where did you get that scar?"**

**"That has nothi..."**

**"WHERE?!"**

**"I..."** The man sighed and looked around judging his options. Realizing the best one lay in front of him he took off the dark veil, revealing a short few weeks old soft blonde beard and pulling his

hood back the sandy blonde locks fell across his cheeks. "I saved my brother from a fire many years ago."

Tears welled in Benedicts eyes. "Zane? Is it? Is it really you?..."

The man's eyes welled up. Years of solitary pain and hope boiling to the surface anog with his tears.

"Benedict?"

The long lost brothers embraced in that shop

"I thought we lost you..."

"I did too honestly, and its a story I promise to tell you soon but we need to..."

Screams erupted from the square as flashing fire illuminated the terrified shop keep's face.

"We need to go!"

Bolting out the door Benedict grabbed his sword from the ground the red glow of erupting fire casting eerily familiar upon the dark leather scabbard. Looking up from the damp cobblestone he saw them. He saw the dragons.

## S1E3

Fire was erupting into the tavern from stage right billowing like tendrils of amber along the ceiling like writhing snakes. The age old varnish taking The coarse acrid smoke from burning bloodwood, tar and oak beginning to fill the hall.

“Cordelia!” Sophie yelled at the woman on stage. “Jump!” Cordelia was shocked. She looked back at Avar. The small man blew her a kiss and waved mouthing out goodbye with a smile on his face, tears welling in his eyes before he dove into the stairwell to the backstage. Nimble dodging the burning debris falling from above blocking the way for larger people than he.

“Now! we don’t have time!” Elloveve yelled. Snapping back Cordelia nodded, her eyes narrowed slightly as she jumped off the stage into Sophie’s arms. Zorin was shoving a few panicked stragglers out the door

“Move!”

“I uh what’s happening”

“The world is ending what does it matter move or you will too!” With a final shove he pushed them out of the way as a fiery beam crashed to the floor where he once stood. “Holy mother of... HEY OVER HERE!” he waved at Elloveve and his sisters. They pointed at the exit adjacent to him along the smooth stonebrick wall.

The bitter smell of the smoke burned the throat and the greasy texture hung close to the body and Zorin made his way to the exit. Coughing a hand grabbed his and pulled him free of the smokey room into the night air.

The air cooled his lungs immediately but then his ears filled with the screams. The roar from above sounded like a 100 lions and the huge wings that blotted out the night sky beat heavily in his ears as it passed overhead to land by the fountain. Astride his back was an Orc clad in black scaled armor. He yelled guttural commands at the Dragon. The dragon was everything Zorin had seen in a nightmare. Its twin horns pointed forward and down its skeletal snout. Green smoking acid dripped from its maw as it drooled looking at the people running from it in the square.

“Get down behind the barrels!” Sophie still had his arm and was roughly joining Cordelia and Elloveve behind the large casks on the side of the Pig and Turtle.

“Where’s Benedict?”

“I... I don’t know.” fear overcame Elloveve as she realized she didn’t know where the young man had gone. That realization was echoed as each of them looked at each other in turn.

Elloveve looked around, she was too level with the ground she needed a better vantage point.

“Zorin. You know how to get to Veridian from here, yes?” Zorin nodded puzzled.

“I’m going to see if I can see Benedict from above.” She pointed to the long roof behind them. “If we get separated go to Veridian, the first port on the coast is Akeshbah-lol...”

“First Port? Is that the..”

"Yes." she smiled happily, he recognized the port city. "That's the common name for it. First Port. From there we sail West to Belz."

She took a deep breath seeing their puzzled face. "It is time for us to move on. We can find more answers in the Ivory Library." Cordelia's eyes grew wide.

She had heard stories of the Ivory Library and the vast knowledge contained on its endless shelves. Supposedly every bit of history, science, technology and magic was documented here and guarded by the legendary Stone Monks. The stone monks were not cruel or righteous. They were avid guardians of the cosmic balance.

Elloveve looked at Sophie and smiled before darting to a stack of crates bounding effortlessly up the rough cut wooden planks to the roof. Never disturbing a single one as if she were a birds feather on a gentle breeze.

more roars rang out above followed by one from the Black dragon in the square. The deafening thunder from those leathery wings kicked up dust and embers from the street causing sophie to shield her eyes from the gusts.

Another dragon, this one with deep blue scales and a yellow smooth underbelly landed with a lurch as it whipped its tail into a street cart filled with vegetables. This was followed by a much larger crimson scaled wyrm with a dark black beard of horns and scales around its chin. Two horn shot up and back from its skull as it whipped its head to the side to roar at some scurrying terrified people.

Cordelia was frozen. She was horrified and entranced at the same time. Here in the flesh were dragons. Those great dragons of legend her father told her about so many years ago.

The red dragon took an uneasy step towards the stack of barrels they hid behind. Zorin ducked low with the other two and motioned a single finger in front of his lips to indicate absolute silence.

"GRRRRRR"

The dragon's head swept by the barrels with a single yellow eye of curiosity. The black slit of an iris dilated slightly

"Fury! Let us discuss the plan for this GREAT city." a deep shout came from his back. The dragon swung its head back to the dragons in the square. It was Zorin's turn to be shocked. He wide eyed craned his neck over the barrels with Sophie and Cordelia.

"Is that.."

"None other.."

Zorin saw the huge man drop from the back of the red dragon with a crown of dragons on his black haired head. He held a huge sword in his hand. His heart was pounding deep in his stomach. There was a silver dragon turtle pommel with 2 red eyes glowing in power.

"Hello... Father." he spat restrained behind clenched angry teeth.

Lord Pallus strode to the center of the 3 dragons. The Orc rider nimbly slid off her mount to join him. The dark chains shook like chimes as he walked. The 3rd rider was shrouded. The pale hands clutched the haft of a large studded mace. Their eyes shone out like two orange red glowing embers from behind the dark veil. They too dismounted and joined the other two riders for the conference.

"With this Kur is ours along with Bloodwood and most of Veridian."

"Most.. rotten elves still hold access to the dark reaches." the orc snarled.

"No matter we are victorious. They will soon fall."

"They hold fast though we must..."

"Silence!" The pale figure hissed the dark shroud of his face falling away to show a single sunken cheek. "This is defeatist prattle!" he turned to Lord Pallus. "What now my lord?"

"We will raze the town for supplies and setup a garrison. Then we make our assault on Veridian." he grew very cold as he thought deeply. "Our underground allies must be freed. They will be key to my ascension!"

The orc leader laughed and pulled a horn from her belt sounding it. From the shadows orc armies began to appear and flow as a single chaotic mass into the square and shops from Cordelia's right.

"Zorin?"

"Hmm." He was still intent on his father, the source of 10 years of hate from that night and a loveless relationship before then. The night he lost his best friend.

"Zorin!"

"What?!" oh uh?"

"Move!" Sophie stood and shoved zorin out of the way as a huge cleaver like blade crushed the barrel they were behind. Zorin rolled and stood on his feet his rapier deftly in his hand. He moved to cordelia who was cupping a small bolt of fire in her hands that slowly began to grow. Sophie swatted the great axe to the side as she drove a shoulder to the Orc knocking him backwards. Her eyes closed and she mumbled some arcane words before throwing it at the Orc









## S1E4 - The stream of time

Young Sophie - Sabrina

Kartilaan - Laura Atchley

Zane - Storm

Sophie - Sarah Jenkins

Zorin - Cody

Cordelia - Joleen

Benedict - Brian

Maldros - Mike

Ogre - Ben

Silas - Bianchi

**Narrator note - Trigger warning - enslavement and torture**

Her hands broke the crystal like surface of the cold forest stream. The smell of the meadow flowers mixed with aspen and birch sweetly. She smiled thinking of her friend's stories of the how the forest calmed her and set her spirit free. She blinked a tear away gently, knowing Elloveve was gone her spirit free hopefully in her beloved forest.

She took a deep breath bringing the icy water to splash gently about her face. She imagined the battle being washed away as well in her mind. She drew breath and counted. She remembered.

\*whack\* the hard branch Kartilaan used to train with struck her across the thigh dropping young sophie to her knees.

"OW!" she said through clenched teeth angrily.

"Now count Sophie. Count until you are calm." Kartilaan being 17 towered over her. Her raven black hair cascaded about her shoulders. Icy blue eyes stared at her with no emotion, the eyes of a killer, the eyes of her sister.

"1..2..3..4..5.." sophie panted for air between breaths shortly her anger holding her in its grip.

"Slower... you must breathe to fight. Every breath should give you more power."

6...7...8.....9.....10"

She could feel the air in her lungs and the power it brought. Her blood slowed feeling rich and full. She stood up and her sister smiled wryly. "Good."

"Sophie." Zane's voice snapped her back to reality.

“What?” Sophie was short in her response sounding agitated

“It’s just... I wanted to tell you.”

“What that you’ve been alive this whole time? That you’re sorry you abandoned us... that you abandoned me?!”

“No... Its. “ Zane drew in a deep breath. “I want to tell you. About what happened.”

Sophie glared at him. “Fine. I’ll listen.” She sat hard on a fallen log crossing her arms. Truth be told she very much loved this familiar ghost of a man before her. His eyes and voice were all the same she remembered for the last 10 years. The boy she thought dead, that they all thought dead had returned. Now here they were, in the same place again. Was she still that same little girl he knew? What of him, was he still who she remembered or was it like eloveves cookies where they may have been better in memory than in reality.

So now after escaping the town and camping last night in the dark forest he wants to talk. Inside she was screaming for answers, but as Kartilann had said “We win because we wait.”

Zane was staring off into the distance where the forest opened up into a glade. The birds soft chirping and the cries of the occasional hawk were soft on the ears as the breeze was to the touch.

“I woke on the back of a horse bouncing with my hands tied. The smell of the horse; and the dried sweat and blood caked to my face was enough to make me sick. And by where I was at and the sight of that horses leg I already had.

We had been riding way out to the west from the town i gathered. Despite my nose’s damage I began smelling something else. Muggy. Like old dishwater. I could hear voices mumbling to each other. I... I don’t remember much else.

I was given to an old dwarf named silas. Silas was rough and hateful. He’d smack you for breathing out of turn let alone for stepping out of line. He showed us smaller ones how to go deeper in those mines than the “tall folk” as he called everyone else could.

We would slide these wooden trays in front of us and we scurried on our bellies in the dark. Gods Sophie it was so dark. Blindly groping at the walls for ore to bring back to the smelter. Ore to make iron and iron to make steel. Steel to make weapons. Weapons for his army.

Over time we grew accustomed to it a bit.

Not like the elves or dwarves can see in the dark but we could almost sense shapes in the dark. Feel the dark. Feel how close the walls were to us as we drug our tray in that endless dark.

Anyways I did this for a long time until one day”

(sounds of the mines)

“hey you there! Boy get up and fetch my mug.”

“I looked up to see a large ogre towering over me. My eyes were still adjusting to the light in the mine shaft junction where we brought back our collections.

“Boy?”

To be honest I couldn't hear him very well. Being in those tunnels really makes you distant. Like you aren't part of this world. I just kinda stared at him.”

“I said BOY! Fetch!”

I remember him hitting me across the cheek so hard stars danced across my squinting eyes.

“Zane” was all i could mumble.

“What did you say to me?”

“Zane.” It felt so good to say I forgot about the pain. I hadn't heard my own name in so long. I knew I could die, but I didn't care. This big lunk of an ogre would say my name or i would die trying.

“My name is Zane”

“You.” he grabbed me with one hand and threw me against the wall. I felt every jagged rock edge dig into my back while the wind flew out of my lungs.

He cursed as he walked to me drawing a cracked leather blackjack from his belt. I sputtered on the ground unable to move. Then I saw him.

“Back down sledge.”

The ogre stopped immediately and from behind him appeared a tall man in black tattered tight fitting clothing. A greatclub was strapped to his back though looking at the muscled arms hidden beneath the dark leather bracers and blue black cotton sheds he didn't need it. His Chest was protected by a dark set of charcoal chainmail with leather segments sporadically placed. It was his face.

Zane paused for a moment thinking. The smell of the trees was lost to him and the running brook at his feet no longer captivated him.

(pause then Zane Gasp)

Suddenly Zane snapped back and cupped his face in his hands taking a deep breath of air. He shuddered slightly. Sophie put her hand on his shoulder, "It's ok. Its ok" he looked at her and smiled.

It was his eyes. They were blood red. He had no face, well none we ever knew. See there was the same black gauze covering the helmet he wore, the black horns the only thing protruding out curving down towards the front of the face like an angry bull.

Sledge backed up looking both disappointed and scared at the same time.

"Hmmm. we will keep an eye on this one."

"Why wait, Maldros?" I saw Silas hobble over glaring at me. "He's no good here." he walked over to me.

"Maybe your pits would be a more suitable place for someone as irresponsible, lazy and generally worthless."

He jabbed me with the crooked stick he carried to drive the point of each word.

Maldros sneered at me from behind that mask.

"Yes.. Why wait indeed."

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"Hey!" Zorin's voice shook Zane back to reality. He came up to them in a light jog "are you two ready to hit the road?" Sophie stood up and checked her swords fit briefly.

"Yeah, I think we are." Zane said briefly. Zorin nodded and walked back to where Cordelia was packing their small collection of shared supplies in a small backpack.

"Zane." Sophie began softly. "I can only imagine what you've been through. I hope you understand if I'm..."

She paused. Truth be told she never stopped loving him, nor did she think she could. Little did she know he felt the same for her.

"It's ok." he smiled. "I don't think we should jump back in to where we were." He offered her a hug with a crooked smile she knew all too well. If she had any doubts this was really him they were dispelled in that moment.

"Where we were? What ...when we were 10?" Sophie sighed. "Lets just start here. We don't need to talk about then." she smiled and pulled back looking into his eyes. "Lets begin here and now. Will you stay with us now?"

“Forever” zane said with a smile. “I never want to leave any of you again.”

Sophie laughed happily “Then come. Lets go.”

“Friends?” Zane said sheepishly

Sophie laughed “...For now Zane Shieldheart. For now.”

Cordelia smiled at Benedict . “Its good to hear her laugh again.”

“Sure is” Benedict smiled at their happiness. It was like a dream come true. They were all back together again.

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They travelled for 4 days in the forest and meadows trying to stay off the roads themselves in case sympathizers from Pallus’s army might appear. On day 3 they rounded a hillside and could see a small encampment of dark armored soldiers tucked back in a glade as well with a red dragon feeding on some freshly slaughtered cattle. She was slightly smaller than Fury and here beard of black horns wasn’t nearly as full, Zane noted.

“Scouting party.” he said to Zorin in a hushed tone. Zorin nodded in acknowledgement. Cordelias face showed her curiosity. Zane smiled remembering his cousin’s fascination with dragons.

A few hours later once they were a safe distance away he broke the numbing silence.

“Hey Cordelia.”

“Yeah Zane?”

“Did you see the beard on the dragon?” She nodded “Its not as full as the one Pallus was riding. That means she’s younger, not as powerful.”

He thought about what he said and corrected “But still way too dangerous though. Not even the mighty Benedict could take her down.” Benedict shot him a warning eye that made Zane laugh.

“Thanks Zane. Real Cute.”

“There she is gang. First port.”

They came out of the trees overlooking a rocky cliffside to the sprawling green valley below. The mid afternoon sun to their back and right made the trees cast a cool shadow across themselves. To their left they could see the port city on the edge of the expansive sea.

Zorin clapped a grinning Zane on his back, who was in thought chewing a small blade of grass. Smiling in return he pointed at the docks and they snickered at some private joke.

Benedict was in awe.

"Its so green. No wonder they call this land Veridian."

They all stood silent. The birds softly called from the trees. Drifting they heard her voice on the breeze, and could smell the elderflowers and honey that accompanied Elloveve's graceful elven footsteps.

"She would have so loved to have seen this."

"I think she has." Benedict said. Then he smiled placing a hand on Cordelia's shoulder. "In fact, I think she's here with us now."

Sophie closed her eyes and smiled too.



## S1E5 - To find a passage

-Zane - Storm

-Sophie - Sarah Jenkins

-Zorin - Cody

-Cordelia - Joleen

-Benedict - Brian

-Captain- Daniel

Bartender - Fate of Isen - Brad

Minotaur 1- Ben Corley

Minotaur 2 - Lesley Beckmann

Player 2 - Sam weigel

Player 3 - piper

“Belz.” The man stroked his leathery face with one hand, brushing the edge of the thick salt and pepper muttonchops framing his cheekbones. Above them the icy blue eyes peered into Zorin’s heart searching for some reason to deny his request, he was sure of it. His other hand cupped the burgundy bowl of a long stemmed pipe. Zorin never saw the man light it, and he noted there was no thick smoke that seemed to swirl and stick greasily to the skin as he expected. This ship’s captain absently chewed on the end of the prop and stared coldly back at Zorin.

“Why are you and your family going to the new country?” He squinted an eye “To seek your fame?” He paused. “Sir we are leaving because...”

“Shut yer gob boy.” The old captain leaned in and in a strong forced tone that reminded Zorin of a crashing tide on a rocky shore continued. “I can hear the winding of a tale like a fishing reel. Best to not lie to me.” His breath was hot and Zorin’s face went flush. He sat back his voice softening slightly. “Your hands don’t look like your fancy clothes.” Zorin looked at the purple velvet tunic he was wearing. He had saved months and months of his own money to buy the soft garment last year.

The family said it was his money to save and spend as he saw fit. Of course a few games of cards didn’t hurt to expedite those savings. Or some dice.

He looked at his hands. The palms were calloused though the nails were manicured. The plain Silver ring on the right hand was dulled from years of work with his hands. The ring itself benedict had made him from an old spoon.

“What else can you offer besides the gold?” Zorin stared at the pouch of their gold on the table. Remembering...

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“Room 12?” Cordelia was walking in the front down a oily oak hallway. Benedict called back “I think it should be that last one.” The door was a varnished black, Zorin knew this was to keep

the sea from rotting the wood itself. The smell was musty and the humidity gave it a thick almost greasy feel. Cordelia gripped the cold forged iron and squeezed the thumb latch.

Entering the room they saw the one bed and the faded carpet on the floor. Zorin pushed in and flopped on the bed “ahh, this will do.” He kipped up almost immediately laughing. “Just kidding

Zane and I have work to do.” Zane looked puzzled. “we do?”

“Yup. See we need to get to Belz. and we only have 20 pieces between us all.”

“Ah. Gotcha.”

“Wait.” Benedict broke into the conversation. “No.”

“For the umpteenth time Benedict its not wrong when it’s an agreed to game.”

“You could lose what little we have.”

“Not now.” Zorin looked at Zane.

“Oh no.”

An all too familiar grin cracked the recently morose and distant Zane. Sophie smiled. “No Nonono.” Zane ignored his brother “4 legged kings?”

“No,” Zorin smiled wickedly. “empty sleeves.” Zane nodded still smiling and held his hand out to his best friend to shake heartily both chuckling.

“Oh no this is bad. Nonono” Benedict was beside himself distraught. He knew inside those two could do anything including ending up in the local lockup empty handed. Cordelia’s hand clasped her cousins gently. “You have to trust them”

“But they could lose everything then where will we be?”

Cordelia didn’t know how to answer but she looked at Sophie listening to Zorin and Zane plot out how they were going to profit tonight. They were chuckling excitedly and Sophie’s strong shoulders were relaxed as if she had sat down a large knapsack of heavy goods. Her stoic and cold features softened and Cordelia saw her smiling. A smile long since missed. She smiled too and turning back to Benedict took his hand with both of hers.

“We will be right here, Benedict. Together.”

>>>>

The tavern was floored with dark stained Oak slabs cut together seamlessly. Years of scrubbing with coarse stones gave it a smooth matte quality much like the decks of the ships in the harbor Sophie imagined. “Blue cedar” Benedict remarked in admiration of the bar as he ran his hand on the surface. The bar itself was made of a single long plank of the wood. It is A tree common to the Veridian forest and known for its natural resistance to rot. The plank was oiled and polished to a high sheen illuminating the natural grey blue hues of the ancient wood. The leather bound arm rest was soft to her touch as she leaned on it.

Cordelia sat at the bar next to her eating some green vegetables with a tart smelling sauce. Rosemary. She loved that smell, it took her back to Thier old kitchen in Port L’for.

"There you go m'lady. A local mead from Akesh-bah-lol." The barkeep sat down a plain pewter goblet with a honey yellow liquid swirling gently in it. He smiled gently at her, his elven eyes and high cheekbones graceful in the soft light from the iron braziers hanging from chains. Through out the large room.

"You will find the currants sweeter than any other" he leaned in, drawing his golden eyes to soft slits "as are many things in this fair city."

"Really?" She too softened her voice. "yes." He leaned in further. She whispered in his ear gently "just not you right? I find you rather..." she wrinkled her nose as she shook her hands as if freeing them something wet and unpleasant. His eyes flew open his face growing flush "Madam I never would have insinuated that I would ever". Cordelia laughed. "It's quite alright." Sophie smiled at her friends. "It's a good night to celebrate. I thank you for the good laugh and this wine is... quite delicious."

Red faced the bartender bowed to her before moving to the other end of the bar where he saw other patrons to tend to.

The game was going well Zorin thought to himself. The 5 other players at the round darkwood table placed 3 cards facedown in front of themselves. They each took turns drawing face up cards and either adding them to thier hidden hand or placed them in the center with coins to pay the pot. These cards could be taken as an alternative to drawing cards on a players turn. Once 6 cards had been drawn the hands are all revealed with a winner takes all for the best hand.

Zane was at a table of Minotaurs behind the player directly across from him. Boisterous and loud they all were regaling each other with stories in a common bonding ritual called "the boast". This was good but risky. Zane was giving signals to Zorin by what he saw from the hidden cards from that side of the table. The risk was not getting caught. It was the Minotaurs accelerated consumption of ale and Zane being ½ thier size that had him concerned.

"Hey are you going to fish or draw?"

"Oh today is a drawing day." Zorin coolly replied staring the player to his immediate left. He could tell the card depicting 4 stars around a crown that the dark haired halfling 3 seats to the right laid down was the card he wanted. Her black and honey curly hair graced a dark brown scalp that was shaved around the sides and back, leaving the top in a dozen thick spiked and beaded tufts that bounced when she had raised the pot 2 silver. Not that he needed it but that the man to his left most likely needed it more given the slight inhale when she dropped it in the pot.

The man was furious. His wiry goatee seemed to twist like an auburn lightning bolt from his pointed chin. Now it trembled ever so slightly his golden eyes flashing a warning to which Zorin smiled purposefully discarding a lion reared back with 2 paws ready to attack. Taking a small silver coin shaped like a square

He gently tossed that as well into the center of the table where the core of the wood was a light beige easily used as their pot for the game. "The lion and 1 silver raised. Your turn good sir"

The man drew a card from the deck he was calling a fishing hole. Mumbling he immediately placed the same card in the pot. An axe leaned against the stump on a felled tree. Good he's not playing axes likely Zorin thought. He looked to Zane as the half-elf woman began her turn. Zane's hand was a balled fist on the left thigh still. Someone had the Stone. He had hoped by laying down the Lion, another of the major cards it would lure them out the take it. None yet he thought.

He also was noticing Zane beginning to sway a little. "A pox on Pallus!" One of the Minotaurs began. "He's destroyed our fair cities and enslaved many to his dark army. I hope he chokes on his pride and drowns in his own blood." Zane laughed. "He's nothing! I should know." Zorin's heart sank into his shoes. "What is he doing?" He wondered panicked.

"Would you now?" The Minotaur retorted his muzzle slightly sneering. "I fought for him 5 years ago until I lost this." Holding up a stump of an arm ending in a brass 3 pronged fork. "Cast me out to die I reckon. I walked back to first port and have been here since."

"I was in Bloodwood". The Minotaur squinted his eyes. he lowered the black horns on the sides of his head, crossed his massive arms and leaned back. "Bloodwood?" He snarled. "The mines must have been terrible with you there."

Zane laughed. "I'd be lying if I said I didn't do my part to make things a little harder for old doom and gloom there not just in the mines." The Minotaur laughed and clapped him on the back. "Salute little man." The smaller horned female Minotaur with the deep blue eyes tapped her mug on her ornate bronze breastplate. Her muscled body wasn't any less impressive than the others Zorin had noted. The other two raising their mugs in salute to their new found friend.

Zorin smiled.

"Oi! Fuzzy face!" Zorin looked at the halfling standing on the chair and glowering toward him her dark brown eyes burned like hot coals. "ante up!" she plopped back down with a grunt. "it's 2 to you while you were off daydreamin". she shook her hands and rolled her eyes. Zorin sighed tossing 2 silver coins into the center pile.

The game lasted deep into the night. Benedict looked up from his mug and saw Zorin approach a bit sheepish. "So there's good news and bad news."

"What's the bad news..."

"I only made a profit of 4 gold after the bar tab, a certain halfling and I will never be friends and your brother is currently vomiting in a bucket."

Benedict was stunned. " This was a colossal waste of time. We can never get to Bellz on this." While Zorin was being dressed down by Benedict for his irresponsibility Sophie worriedly looked at Zane bent over a bucket at the table.

There were two smaller Minotaurs laughing and clanking mugs with a stoic female and a 4th the largest male she assumed was the leader. he had 3 warrior braids ending in a large silver clasp and his scarred face showed the story of many battles. She noted with a smile he had his grey and black furred arm around Zane's shoulders gently patting him with one massive hand. His other was a trident resting on the table.

"Zorin, who are they?" Sophie interrupted. Benedict froze as Zorin smiled his crooked grin.

He chuckled "well that's the good news. Seems Zane made good friends with the first mate and some of main crew of a ship called the sun god. They sail to Bellz tomorrow and said I just need to talk to the captain about passage and he may be able to work a deal"

Benedict laughed and shook his head, Cordelia smiled and looked at her cousin, the hero of the night head first in a foul and sour smelling bucket.

>>>>>

"What'll it be son?" The captain smiled already knowing the answer. "Zane and I can help on deck and I'm skilled at the lines and ships boat duties. Benedict is a talented iron worker and Sophie can lend her sword if need be."

The captain nodded and thought before continuing. "And the raven haired girl?"

"Cordelia is a..." he paused the superstitious crew wouldn't take kindly to a wizard he was sure. She'd be branded a witch and cast overboard as soon as they found out. "Healer. A talented and skilled practitioner of the healing Magic's of the world. Of which I don't fully understand."

"That's what I wanted to hear. You ALL pull your way to Bellz and we'll be happy to have you as crew. Let's get started, we weigh in an hour."

The captain took a long draw from the pipe in thought as he turned to look out the small window to his right.

It opened to the harbor and more specifically the dark mahogany colored hull of the sun god gently bobbing at rest.

## S1E6 - The unlikely conversation

Zane - Storm

Sophie - Sarah Jenkins

Zorin - Cody

Cordelia - Joleen

Benedict - Brian

Captain- Daniel

Bartender - Bianchi

Minotaur 1- Ben Corley

Minotaur 2 - Lesley Beckmann

The waves rocked the bow like a whales deep heartbeat. Benedict smiled looking out across the white crested waves as they cut a swath through the cerulean and azure ocean. The smell of kelp and sand days behind was replaced with a familiar charcoal and iron as he bent the 3 inch o ring into place on the anchor. Jolith. The pewter and onyx haired Minotaur looked on with interest as his skillfully drove the hammer in steady blows driving it to it proper form.

“There’s a grace in what you do, Benedict.” He said gripping one hand on his notched saber.

“Thank you”. The words seemed to push the 7 foot giant into a state of peace. The scars on his face softened and the veins on his muzzle relaxed a bit.

“ the thanks is ours Jolith.” Benedict firmly pilled the glowing iron from the coals to place around the horn of the anvil. “My family is grateful for the passage to Bellz”

Jolith nodded. He raised a hand to a female Minotaur who nodded back. She was on the other side of the wide deck next to the beige clad Zane. His dark cloak being left below in the sun, and looking across the waves to the west.

“Kiri. Do you think we all have a place here in this world?”

“ of course.” she stood straight and her eyes smiled. “We all have our place. The water is life.” She grinned putting her hand on his shoulder. “ but battle.” She smiled. “Battle too is life my friend.” She paused” is it not the same for you? To meet an enemy is one thing but to clash steel together in combat.” She took in a deep breath and gripped the axe at her side. “ that is when you know a man.”

He looked at her. “ just a man? What about you?” She laughed “ what of me my friend? Is it because I am female or a minotaur that you question?” Her eyes softened. “Man, Minotaur, Orc, even the halfling. Do we not all revere the sea? The sea is a battle upon itself, the oldest of battles am I right” Zane nodded. She smiled and drew closer, he could see the bay colored fur around her muzzle brush gently in the salty warm air. “Zane, The storm on the sea isn’t good or bad. We just know, that with it we travel, but against it will bring tragedy.”

He looked confused. She smiled again. "Not all is as it seems mr shieldheart. Nor is its intention as clear as we wish it to be. Ride your waves. Don't just fight them when they seem to oppose you. \*laugh\* This! This will keep you from drowning! "

Zane smiled. Clapping her sinued and taught cannonball like shoulder in a broad smile he looked to the rigging above. Full sails whipped above him in the noonday sun providing some shade.

Zorin looked to the rigging as well standing to the rear and port end of the ship his arms aching from restocking the 6 foot long harpoons by the ballista. Each was fletched with a triad of stiff leather fins, tarred with a dark pitch that once cool and dry could withstand the water spray or impact. Last night the bindings must have broke loose in the afternoon squall, sending the steel tipped bolts, sprawling. there wasn't that much cleanup he noted this was the last of it.

He looked to the ships armament the ballista. 2 8' crossbow erected at the rear or aft defense with 2 more fore or front on either side of the bow. All 4 corners. Were set. "Excellent" he hoped it wouldn't come to it but he had used these to repel boarders or even once a huge sea serpent threatened to capsize The Mako. The last ship he served on. The truth was that was the inspiration behind Cordelia's ivory dragon he Carved until 4 weeks ago he had no idea what a dragon really looked like, he had a memory of a painting mixed with the reptilian face of that 80' serpent. That was what he had assumed they looked like.

The skeletal visage of the black dragon. The blue with its swept thin horns. He paused "Fury" he thought of the huge red dragon his father had partnered with. "A partner? Hahaha. " He still nervously pondered. Was he jealous? Jealous fury had access to that respect he dreamed about? That he hoped his father still retained a level of humanity beneath it all? He shook his head. "Only partner he has is in death itself."

As he felt the taught fibers of the thick hempen cable of the ballistas bowstring he noted the panels of yew with a core of ash making up the arms. An 8 spoked hand crank could be used by one person in a pinch but would take a lot of strength. He looked out across the waves. "Elloveve".he thought of her on the rooftop firing arrow after arrow as he an Cordelia ran from the Orcs rushing the courtyard. He saw Fury facing her, and her proud defiant face. He thought of himself younger, asking her. "Well, \*nervous chuckle\* where are we going to go now?"

BLAM, the deck of the ship rocked heavily enough to jar loose a barrel rolling across the deck. Shouts began to come from the crew. BLAM this time it was much harder and definitely came from underneath. Zorin ran to the port side seeing a huge dark shape much like an egg but a size similar to the ship itself pass under the hull. The deck groaned and heaved starboard The captain appeared from the rear door to his quarters and ran up the stairs to Zorin. Sophie followed from the mainmast.

“What do you see lad?” Fear raked Zorin as he realized with much certainty. “Whale?” Sophie said as much as questioned next to him. “Good guess but no,... that was a Dragon Turtle.” The captain stamped and clapped his hands. “Bah! Of all the rotten luck. Those things are greedy and if they sense the gold on that little necklace of yours even they won’t stop until it gets it for its rotten nest in the deep.” He looked to Jolith and pointed above. Jolith turned to Zane. “Full sails brother.” Zane nodded and ran across the slick deck to the mainmast. He was skilled at climbing bounding up the iron rings to the first an largest sails. These were already dropping from the 2 shirtless deep toned sailors straddling the long arm. the wind was filling them the mast groaning under the strain. He spun to keep going his foot gripping the first iron rung and then the next hands reaching for the rungs above to the next sail. BLAM,

The shock hit the ship full force rocking everything starboard. “Stand back!” Benedict had long since extigushed the coals of the forge but his heart fell when the door flew open spilling the remnants of warm black ash to the deck. No fire followed “thank you knightlord for your mercy”.

He looked up and saw his brother 40 feet in the air from the swaying deck. He was untying the upper sails freeing them. They flared below him as they took flight. Zane swung back to the mainmast with a cats grace descending quickly.

Cordelia ran up to Benedict “it’s a huge dragon turtle! She was both terrified and excited at the same time. Benedict’s heart dropped as he remembered the red eyes of the swords pommel, the pommel of the sword that killed his adopted father Erebus.

BLAM they sprawled to keep their footing. He looked to Zane, He had barely reached the lowest sails when he saw him lose his grip and plummet 20 feet to the hard deck with a thump.

“Zane!” His brothers form was still on the deck as he ran to his side.

rAWR! The huge maw of the dragon turtle came up and over the top of the deck, the swell of rotten fish and hot steam overwhelmed him. It drew in a deep breath but it roared in pain as a 6 foot pole stuck out of the nape of its thick leathery neck at the base of the jagged shell. Benedict was horrified, frozen in place alone in the center of the deck mere feet from the appetite of this enormous monster. While standing in front and protecting his brother he weighed his options. “Zane oh boy.”

He looked back at Cordelia. Her eyes were enormous “talk to him.” He was dumbfounded. “What?” He swore she had just mouthed out for him to talk to it. He turned as the huge maw dropped down to his level on the deck. it’s huge dark blue eyes peering into his souls being. Its lips pulled back revealing the rows of jagged teeth when “wait! What do you want?”

The dragon turtles dark green face turned “HELP ME”

Time stopped.



Zorin froze behind the ballista. Cordelias face was contorted with a confused smile. Sophie buried her face in her hands. Captain dropped the pipe from the corner of his mouth.

“What... are you doing?” Benedict kicked zane before he ruined one of the most amazing and precarious conversations of their lives.

“How can we help you?”

“The hurt.” It motioned at the harpoon in its neck. “Please help.” It lowered itself onto the deck when Benedict cautiously approached it, past the giant maw now relaxed, past the blue eye looking at him pleading. He gripped the 2 inch thick pole and pulled sharply and quickly successfully freeing it from its neck with a groan.

“ ahhhh thank you my friend.” Zorin looked at Sophie sheepishly shrugging feeling a great bit of guilt.

“Why are you here”. Benedict questioned

“Elves. Sea elves stole something from me and I thought you might be with them.”

“We know of no sea elves”

“Thank you my friend. Please if you hear of a onyx conch shell please come back to this spot and tell me.”

Benedict nodded. The huge beast slid off the deck into the water returning the ship to right itself on the sea.

>>>>>>

The dinner table was eerily silent that night. No one could truly understand what had just taken place and it was easier to ignore He insanity. They stared blankly into the shallow wooden bowls cradling a few stewed potatoes, and a chunk of fatty salted pork. Using a stale roll to mop up the starchy brine, they then chased it with bitter flat ale. Or water if you were in Benedict's place.

The stale air was moist and dank in the mess below deck. The myriad of smells from the cooking, a thyme and lemon scent was welcome amongst the strong musk and salt their bodies smelt of after the day. Adding to it was the captains pipe smoke.

“We have 6 days until we make it to Bellz. Provided the wind stays favorable you will be ready to start your new lives.” The captain nodded at Zorin. “Thanks again lad.”

“Thank you, captain Triscuit.” Zorin smiled and went back to his potatoes. Noting they tasted sweeter for some reason. 3 days and they land in the great and rich country of Bellz. Cordelia knew the most about the clerics known as the librarians of the Ivory Library. She said there would be a price to use and research the knowledge they protected. “It's said if you need to know something, They know that very thing. There's little that is not known by the librarians.” She had paused on the deck of the ship he remembered. Clutching the ivory statue he had made her. He noticed the face fading a bit worn where her thumb caressed it. Worriedly. “I will

approach them and request entrance as I'm the only one versed in the arcane ways." She turned to him " We will get our answers."

He chewed slowly as he looked from the table to the corner of the room where Sophie sat with a limp Zane cradled in her arms. He chuckled inside. They both claimed to not be hungry and it was the first time since the first embrace over a month ago that they were really seen together.

"I'm dying Sophie."

Sophie was mopping his cut and bruised brow with a cool herbal mint smelling rag. "Zane..."

"really I feel like everything is growing cold and dark...".

She smiled and shook her head gently "just... Shut up".

## S1E7 - The Ivory Library

Zorin - Cody

Cordelia - Joleen

Benedict - Brian

Librarian 1 - @ninthworldjournal

Librarian 2 - Cheyenne Bramwell

Narrator 1 - Piper

Narrator 2 - JD Rose

Cordelia walked between the rows of tomes. Each binding varied from canvas dyed burgundy with simple silver corners to dark tobacco leather a sunburst of oiled colors leading to bronze and pewter rounded caps showing a lion and a bear on the front.

She lost herself in the blue cover drifting on a memory not too long ago when they entered the great port city on Bemil in the nation of Bells. A giant statue greeted them from smoothed granite, depicting a Knight standing straight a sword in his hands pointing downward. He was to the left of the ship's bow. She smiled " Port. It was the port side" She pictured zorin's smile in approval of her memory of that particular lesson.

"The knight watches over Bemil." Zorin read the large plaque at the statue's feet. "Benedict, your knight lord watches the platinum city. That has to be good right?"

"Absolutely" Benedict ignoring the sarcasm bowed his head in reverence to the holy statue.

"And you my friend." zorin laughed as he shook his head.

"This." Cordelia smiled as she saw the book was a recounting of the time during the Bloodwood and veridian wars 30 years ago. She was given access to the rows of tomes soon after arriving in the Ivory Library 120 miles to the north west of bemil. They had come on foot traveling just over a refreshing uneventful week on the well travelled road.

She ran her hand down the deep tones of the books ornate spine remembering the tall bald man in the white robes. "Welcome Cordelia Shepherd of the flames." He stood slightly smiling in the onyx and quartz hall beyond the dark oaken doors between the milky white towers outside. Tell us of what do you seek?"

"Lord Pallus." His eyes glinted as he nodded. "All in the past is written. Though the one known as Pallus wrote his tale over many years, not many have dared to help record it.."

The librarians sought one thing. Knowledge. And the knowledge collected was traded for other knowledge. She nodded "I can speak of of his attack on Ooellanahkhan". They began to whisper. One woman with fresh spun gold for hair pulled back her hood revealing one pale sightless eye paired with a dark brown one next to it. It flared defiantly. "No one survived that how is it... "

"I did." They burst into discussion amongst themselves. The tall man though stood silent, almost smiling and nodding in acknowledgment.

Zorin looked at her questioningly. If they needed information and that was the only price why not let him discuss his whole life? "Isn't that worth so much more?" He mumbled to himself, but she almost hearing the plea looked determined staring him in the eye. Shaking her head slightly indicating silence.

"Very well. You do know the ritual known as the telling is often fatal?"

She nodded. She felt Zorin tense up. The rest of her friends would never let her get this far. Zorin knowing even could jeopardize things. Though she had left the risk out they had to trust her. She would look for What they needed, and hopefully get it back to them before she entered the test.

The tall man bowed. "Enter Cordelia. You have been accepted as a librarian. Tomorrow your true test begins. Use this time wisely. Research what you need to face reliving your tale for it to be recorded."

He smiled and waved her by into the next room. She began walking towards the double doors opening before her showing rows and rows of books winding the central tower fading in the tall expanse until they were only a blur. Sunlight slipped in at regular intervals casting into large prisms that focused the light into the central crystals setting them afire with a white light, bathing the entire room. "Wait? But what do I do?" She turned to see the guards holding Zorin back a thin iridescent force field erected between them blocking him from entering. She smiled "go back to the others. Tell them I will be testing tomorrow to join this order as a librarian. For now I guess I will need to study."

He nodded and left the room. She watched him go before returning to the task at hand.

>>>>>

She closed the book. It spoke of only one passage of note, "3 warriors Pallus, Ash Delarosa and Maldros the Dark had been mercenaries for hire during this time. Great. It tells me he wasn't always the pompous justice we knew him as. But I don't know these other two. What of the dark Cleric?" Slightly discouraged at the fact it was the only verse in the pile of recent tomes she could find anything on him.

She sighed and moved the unlit brass candlestick to the right of the table to make room for a large book with the 6 pointed star familiar to herself and the old country. If all else recent didn't help maybe the recounting of the worlds dawn would. At least to liven up her bored brain a bit.

The tome was dusty but the leather creaked as it opened for her curious hands. Trembling. She took a deep breath and began...

When the world was new, The elements themselves comprised of four: Earth Air Fire and Water.

These 4 built the ground to stand on and the sky above. Overtime elements worked together and created mixed para-elements between them. Magma, lightning, mud and steam.

They were happy but they needed help with this great new world. From creation itself they found a clay that they were able to work with. They formed gods to help them control their new world and bring life to it. These were the lion, the bear, the stone, the thorn, and the skull.

Each of these new deities was to harness control of nature's personality. The lion was proud, just and good. The bear was good but yet follows no rules finding what is needed for the good of all. The stone was solid in it's duty regardless of good or evil intention. The thorn aims to try and find its own power no matter who gets in the way. And finally the skull represents the chaotic free will of those dark entities required for balance.

For many moons they worked to build their world together. The 8 elements collected what was left of the clay of creation and made both the plants and animals. Soon they brought their children in to help, bringing their own special balance of gifts to the individual creations.

The stone helped these masters build their forms. Like the Anvil at a forge. The Bear helped the fire, heat and harden the clay, while the Thorn gave it desire. The Lion gave it courage while the Skull made sure it paid its toll with mortality.

Soon the Fey and many other creatures were born to help populate the land.

The Elements pondered about the last bit of clay they held, and how best to build creatures to help keep the balance and protect the land they all built together. They were opposed again.

Soon younger para-elements began bickering with each other. Lightning struck out at the Mud in anger, the hot steam tried to cool the magma all to no avail. The elements retreated to think.

The first borns, as that is what we call the deities who were born to the elements first and above all else, thought as well. The bear and the lion thought they could make beings too. After all they had watched the elements closely and were sure they could repeat those same holy actions with the intention to help. The thorn and the skull said they too would help make these creatures, as they were also part of the balance.

The Stone said it would not be any part of it. This changed everything. The great forge was crucial to what they knew of the process.

So the remaining first borns had to improvise without the anvil as they had seen before. They fought over what elements to include, and what form should be that they would take. they wanted to honor their makers so the form took the shape of wings represent the air, fire within the belly itself, while water and earth combined together to make a fluid form that can fly. It looked fierce and frightening as much as graceful and thus came the first dragons.

Their forms were like great opalescent reptiles with shimmering metallic and rainbow hues glinting off their scales. A rainbow of colors not owning one over another.

The master elements were furious. They looked at the clay and there was only enough for one more creature. They turned to the faithful stone and offered it to them. They looked over the gift and judged. They too would make a dragon but not like their siblings.

They would make a stone, not a serpent. They would use water for a blanket not the air as a tool to fly. They had no need for wings, they handed the extra clay back and made a Dragon Turtle.

The elements nodded in approval.

The elements went on to use the clay to make “the people” as they came to be called. The people when placed in their regions adapted and took on forms to assist in the lands they were sworn to protect and serve. The first born as before, placed their gifts into each one of them.

Those in the mountains seeking treasures in the earth became the Dwarves.

Those in the swamps slowly became the Orcs immune to the harsh poisons

Those in the plains became humans

Those in the forest became the elves dancing with the fey

Those in the desert became the halflings, hiding in the smallest of shade

Those in the oceans became the merfolk.

And those in the tundra became The Lost Ones

The elements and the first born looked and were happy at what they created.

Cordelia closed the book in thought. Taking in a deep breath she pulled out the next tome. This one was a brown leather with a gold leaf on the edges.

It creaked and fell to the first page.

**"The Great Sunder as told by Aechelus VII Chief Historian of the Ivory Library"**

The personalities of the deities had grown much over time and became the entities we, the civilized West have come to know as such. The Knight using the might of righteous war to drive peace while the Prince applied the selfish war for his own aims. The Maiden in her flighty youthful imperfections was still good at heart, while the Hag was the first, therefore the foremost power of the elements themselves. The Judge used the gavel and the scales to ensure fair justice regardless of right or wrong while the ferryman waits for us all on his river of death.

We were their children, as were the dragons.

While all 6 of the holy pantheon stood a question came up. Some say it was the Ferryman whispering something to the Maiden that she turned away revulsed while he snickered at her reaction into his dark musty sleeve.

Whatever it was it has been lost to time. What is more important is the outcome.

The Gods shouted at each other and began splitting away from each other the knight and maiden on one side and the Prince and Ferryman on the other of their great hall. The judge watched on looking for balance. The Hag worried about her children stepped back as well.

The gods called to their children the dragons to take their side to assist in the judgement. But to their surprise the dragons split perfectly even, to each of their parents.

The children of The knight were judged half to be strong bastions of valor and good. The other half were found guilty of enslaving the people of the desert (and possibly some halflings we suppose.) As the gavel struck the dragons split into Gold and Blue. Blue as a mockery to the color's indication of honor.

The Children of the Maiden were judged as well. The evil ones had enslaved a dark race of elves corrupting them both races becoming in love with the art of poisoning. She drew tears as

she banished both of them underground. Their scales becoming green to remind them of the forest they now left. She gave the good dragons a hue of brightest silver like the moon.

The Ferryman's children had corrupted the swamps with acid and poison much to his delight. But there were the other half that had tried to not corrupt the land and instead tended it to grow and over grow protecting itself. The Ferryman made them bright copper knowing when it tarnished in death it would show a sickly green. His loyal dragons becoming jet black.

Finally the Prince stepped forward positive his dragons were all on his side. When the gavel struck he found they had already been waging a war in the northlands and some dragons had been experimenting on the Lost People. The people had split into smaller dragons in some cases, snow white in color but smaller than all the others. And for other had grown in size immensely becoming ogres and giants. Proud of their ingenuity he laughed joyously until he saw that exactly half were in fact not guilty, choosing to stay in their homes in the sand. Furious he made the corruptors Red to show his favor. The others turned into brass as he wanted them to be weaker than the steel of war.

Cordelia sat back and thought with a smile. There was the answer. They needed the good dragons to join them in the fight against the hordes of Pallus. Her smile faded as she remembered noone had seen one in hundreds of years.

She stood up determination spreading across her young face. "we will find you. We will I know it."

## S1E8 - The Test

Zane - Storm

Sophie - Sarah Jenkins

Zorin - Cody

Cordelia - Joleen

Benedict - Brian

Librarian 1 -

Librarian 2 -

Librarian 3 -

Elloveve - Jessica Atchley

Erebus - Jesse Phillips

Lorahana - Laura Jerdak-Phillips

She stood in the center of a stone disc. A 6 pointed star of blue and red energy pulsed as it rotated slowly hovering about her ankles. She could smell the tall hedge of the labyrinth before her, the entrance was directly behind the 3 librarians leading this ceremony. The tall man from

yesterday, known as Rue nodded and the crowd grew silent. “Cordelia today your story will become part of our library. But first We must free it from your mind.” The woman with the blonde hair and blind eye stepped forward. “We only record the truth. Any story passing by our lips is tainted with some untruth. Our lips betray us, and before we know it we have lies. Lies are no good to the library.”

The 3rd librarian stepped forward and pulled back their hood revealing blue black hair and chiseled angular features of the elves. “Your memories are shielded in layers of emotion. Encapsulating it. It protects the rest of your sanity from being infected by the the most horrible of memories. Sometimes these filters can alter the truth. These trials are designed to peel back the layers and record the memory as it plays itself.”

She took in a deep breath, mentally steeling herself. She had told Benedict of the good dragons. That they had to find them he had agreed but no one had seen them for centuries. Now for that nugget of wisdom she faced her price. Reliving her darkest night.

“You May enter the labyrinth Cordelia but be warned what you face is very much real, to not treat it as such would be foolish.” They stepped back and waved her to the opening in the high hedges.

As soon as she stepped into the threshold the silence was deafening. The canopy of growth barely let slivers of light in that danced across the back of her arm. The lemony scent of the leaves in the cool moist air was welcome. She turned.

The hedge was closed. She was alone.

>>>>

“Another left.” Cordelia sighed she had been walking for what felt like an hour but had yet to stumble upon anything other than the occasional twig in the meticulously clean dirt floor.

She saw a man, a red cape over his broad and armored shoulders. His familiar raven hair was short cropped crowning the handsome face of her cousin. “Benedict?”

He smiled “they sent me to assist you Cordelia apparently it’s to test us both.”

She hesitated, this wasn’t the way she had heard about. One memory to pay. She reached out and felt his arm. It was real. He was real. He laughed. “I’m wondering about this puzzle. What do you make of it?”

“Ok well let me look at it.”

He nodded and pointed to the wall where what appeared to be a stone doorway the door shut tight but emblazoned were the words “if I drink I die but if I eat I’m fine”



"I can't think of anything that fits that. Maybe a type of cactus?"

"Fire."

"What?"

She smiled "its fire. Water puts it out but it needs fuel to burn"

Her hands produced a small flame which she blew gently to the wall. It ignited the words ablaze as the door swung open.

They walked down a short hall to another door. This one was midnight blue with deep burgundy colors.

"You cannot see me, hear me, or touch me. I lie behind the stars and alter what is real, I am what you really fear. Close your eyes and I come near."

They paused. Cordelia closed her eyes. "The dark". Benedict was looking at her. "That's it right?" She smiled somewhat uncomfortably as she repeated "the dark" and she sniffed out the candles to either side of the doorway.

The door swung open.

The door opened to a long hallway. The moist air stuck to the skin, a musty smell of stagnant water and old moss was prominent from the wet stones. Blue green flames ignited the iron caged torches along the wall alternating right to left every 12 paces. In the distance she heard chirping. Much like a bird but more guttural and deeper. Benedict tensed up as his eyes narrowed. The sounds grew louder and seemed to be around the right turn at the end of the corridor.

He looked at her concerned "do you hear that?"

"Yes. What do you suppose it is?"

He clenched his hand around the hilt of his great sword slowly drawing it from the sheath. "I'll scout ahead". He sped up his pace to slight jog peering around the corner.

He looked back at her. "Come this will be easy there aren't that many!"

He bellowed a battle cry as he threw the gleaming silver sword over one shoulder and charged around the corner. The chirping became shrieks mixed with the ringing steel.

Cordelia's heart dropped. She ran to the corner and her eyes were shocked. 10 4 foot tall reptilian bodies lay on the ground clad in dark leather armor and gripping small javelins. Their reddish orange scales blending with the blood on the floor their mouths agape in death. Benedict cleaved through another who stood defiant against him. She saw it was protecting something.

Behind where the kobold had stood moments prior was an unarmored female guarding 2 terrified children. Benedict raised the sword high with a roar.

**"No!"**

He spun on her "we are free of them don't you see? The evil in thier wretched little bodies is gone, I have purified them!" Her terror turned to anger. He laughed and walked to her. "This is as much my test as it is yours remember? If you stand in my way of completing my test I will forced to defeat you as well." Her eyes flared. Little cousin This wasn't her cousin. This couldn't be the kind hearted Benedict. She looked down and saw the sword tattoo on her wrist. That same tattoo her mother had.

She touched it and erupting in her hand was a sword of pure orange flame.

Benedict roared and lunged at her. She sidestepped the large sword and brought the flame across his back in one stroke. He exploded into a shower of green sparks, disappearing into the floor.

She stood there in silence. The sword disappeared back into her hand.

**"Cordelia"**

She looked up wondering where the familiar voice came from and saw the kobold smile as she hugged her children.

**"Cordelia"**

The scene around her melted away.

She saw a 3rd sign before her but nothing else but an endless void surrounding it. "I can bring tears to your eyes; resurrect the dead, make you smile, and reverse time. I form in an instant but I last a life time." This one was easier and harder as she realized the answer. **"Memory"**. The sign faded from her voice and in the darkness she felt the ground once again beneath her feet.

She stood in a red brick kitchen with a long oiled cedar table in the center. the room was filled with merriment and laughter. All seemed slower than normal, peaceful like underwater gently swaying in the tide. Sophie had her arms around Zane they were next to a smiling kind faced Benedict laughing at one of Zorins stories.

**"Cordelia"**

She saw elloveve at the stove stirring a large pot. She paused to shout something at Zorin. Before shaking her head with a smile. Cordelia walked towards her lost friend, before she felt a

hand on her shoulder. She saw her mother's smile as she gently moved past her to kiss Elloveve cheek gently in greeting.

"...mama?" Tears welled in her eyes.

She felt a squeeze from a large powerful arm. She saw the icy blue eyes of Erebus Shieldheart. "Father?" He smiled and gave her a warm hug. She lost herself in his broad chest and she felt his shirt become damp with her tears.

"I love you papa. I wanted so much to tell you that." he nodded. One more time. She saw his own tears as he mouthed out a silent "I will always love you." She heard Elloveve call to Zane to help set the table. He grumbled and looked at Sophie pleadingly before she laughed pushing him to his station. Erebus shook his head with a smile.

Her mother's lips kissed her cheek. She turned and saw her smiling before her. Lorahana silently motioned at her heart with a smile "we are so proud of you" she mouthed out silently. Cordelia's heart broke in a thousand pieces. This was all she ever wanted. Them to all be together. All of them.

"I wished for this everyday mama. Everyday."

Lorahana nodded. Erebus looked at Lora with saddened eyes. Cordelia wiped her eyes. She took in a deep breath, a peace settling over her. She knew what had to happen next. "Papa. Is it time?"

He looked at her with the warmth of the forges fire in those eyes again and smiled. He stood up straight and nodded. Her mother joined him by holding his hand. Together they walked outside the house Cordelia following close behind.

"Goodbye!" She turned to wave at Elloveve who smiled back stirring that large pot.

They stepped out into the rain by the old tree. The bonfire crackled and sputtered. 3 orcs were in mid sprint frozen in time. One swung a huge greataxe in an arc forward at an invisible target. The dark armor of Lord Pallus was kicking something on the ground also frozen in time. She looked the road and saw 6 cloaked bodies hiding just to the other side of the fence. And a small horse.

She hugged her father one more time. Choking back the tears to show her strength, she felt she needed to be strong for them too. She held her mother's hands before they both silently sobbed in each other's arms. She began to walk to the cloaked children, her legs damp from the tall wet grass.

"Mother!" She remembered and ran to her. Her mother looked surprised until she saw Cordelia hold up the sword tattoo. "You will need this." Her mother smiled and nodded. Lorahana held

her hand on the tattoo gently as it transferred from Cordelia to reappear on Lorahanas wrist once again.

They parted ways. She saw her father kneel before Pallus. Her mother walked to the field where the orcs great axe gleamed. Cordelia walked and knelt behind the smallest of the children, her black hair dampened from the rain, and gently wrapped her arms around her. "Don't worry. I'm here too. We both are now."

"We will leave together"

Her mother smiled at her before touching the tattoo the sword flaring like a mighty torch in her hand. Time resumed as the worst night of her life played itself out all over again.

>>>>

Sophie nervously looked to the opening to the labyrinth. "Cordelia has been gone a few hours. Hey, Rue is she ok?"

He smiled gently "yes. Your sister is more free now than she has been in a long time."

"There she is!" Zorin pointed at the opening as Cordelia strode out proud and strong. Benedict stood up with a slight tremble and walked to her. she threw her arms around her beloved cousin dispelling the last thought of the dark version she defeated.

"Congratulations Cordelia. Your story is recorded for others to learn from and gain strength by it."

The one eyed librarian stepped forward "Your debt is paid, you are a librarian here. You may study whenever you like."

She nodded.

"Mr Zorin. This letter came to us to deliver to you." The elven librarian held out a folded letter sealed in wax with a large letter E.

Zorin looked confused at his comrades who all were curious. Zane shrugged "it's not gonna bite ya open it up!" "Yeah". "Do it"

"I'm being invited to a tournament involving the bravest of heroes." They all smiled at it. "Its only south in Ellington. Thats just a week or so away."

Benedict said i'll go with you. Cordelia can use the time to study and the rest of the group can rest up. Its been a long journey.

Zorin smiled and looked around at his friends. He smiled thinking of the future.

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Epilogue -

Far away a mailed hand looked at a similar letter by a river. He stroked the grey beard at his chin, his purse was lighter than he wished and the prize could help him on his way. The white and steel colored mane of his armored warhorse felt soft under his palm. He thought of someone, and their gentle grace. He smiled in their warm memory as he mounted.

A different strong hand put away the letter before jumping on the back of a small pony in the grasslands. The bald head, bulbous nose and less than charismatic attitude kept many away from the dwarf. It made him laugh. He had no family, no friends of note. But this contest should bring some lively he hoped clutching the axe in his hands.

In a forest a owl clung to his thin elven shoulders through the robes, he knew this tourney would be another step in his journey for enlightenment. He smiled as fire danced across his knuckles in perfect time. Standing he began to walk out of the trees to the valley below cradling the sprawling rich and robust town of Ellington. the owl leaping from his shoulder to scout the path best suited to the wizard.