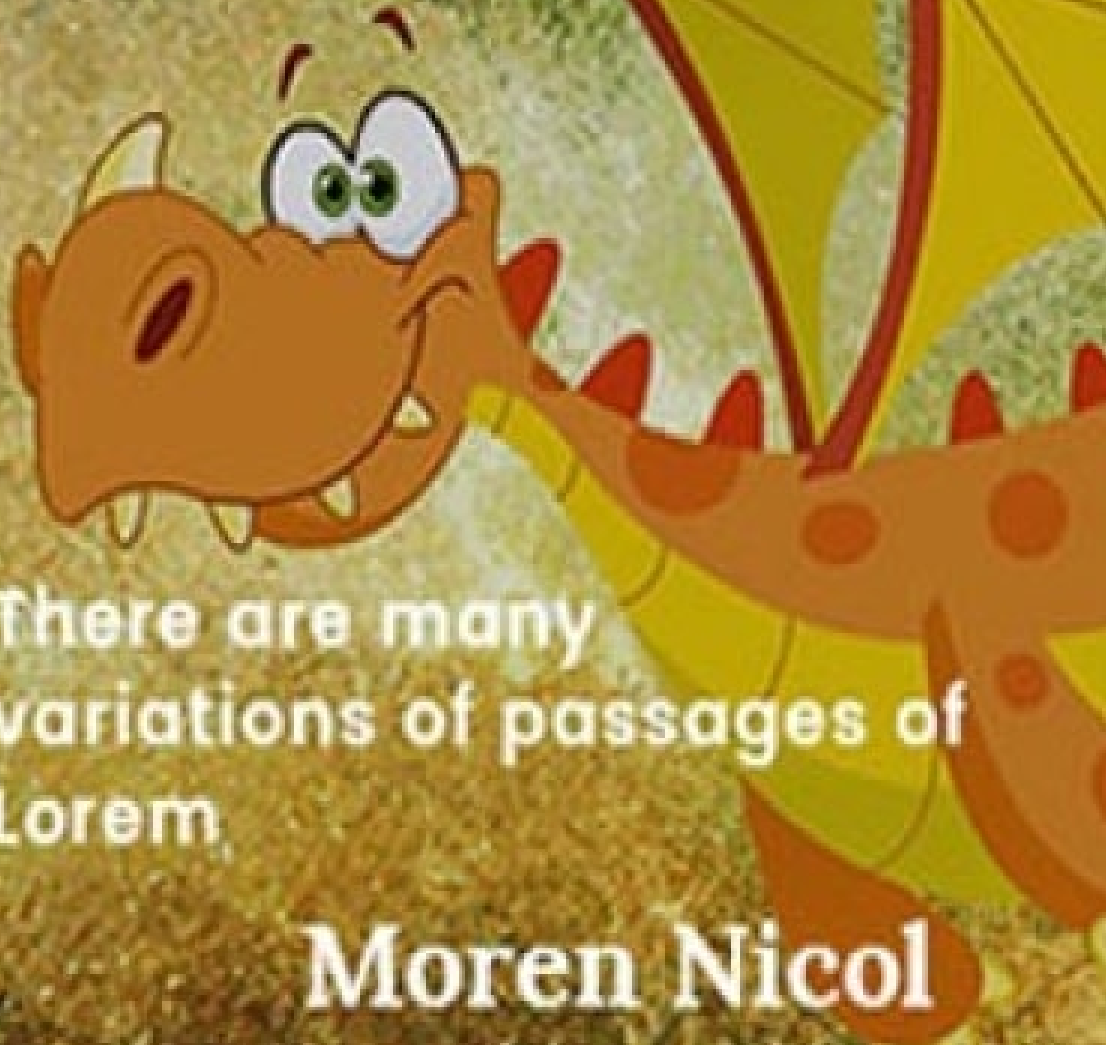


# War Of Dragon



There are many  
variations of passages of  
Lorem.

**Moren Nicol**

This is

# War of Dragon

*The shadows of evil sweep down across the peaceful land of Argonath as the Masters prepare to unleash dread monstrosities on the world, and only Relkin and dragon Basil Broketail stand between the forces of darkness and Argonath's survival.*

Written by:

[Mohamed](#)

[Ali](#)

[Nahla](#)

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# Book Intro

Written by:

[Mohamed](#)



## MiNa's SONG

The day has passed beyond our power.

The petals close upon the flower. The light is failing in this hour  
Of day's last waning breath.

The blackness of the night surrounds The distant souls of stars now found,  
Far from this world to which we're bound, Of sorrow, fear and death.

Sleep, love; forever sleep.

Your soul the night will keep.

Embrace the darkness deep.

Sleep, love; forever sleep.

The gathering darkness takes our souls, Embracing us in chilling folds, Deep  
in a Mistress's void that holds Our fate within her hands.

Dream, warriors, of the dark above And feel the sweet redemption of The  
Night's Consort, and of her love For those within her bands.

Sleep, love; forever sleep.

Your soul the night will keep.

Embrace the darkness deep.

Sleep, love; forever sleep.

We close our eyes, our minds at rest, Submit our wills to her behest,  
Our weaknesses to her confessed,  
And to her will we bend.

The strength of silence fills the sky, Its depth beyond both you and I.  
Into its arms our souls will fly, Where fear and sorrows end.  
Sleep, love; forever sleep.  
Your soul the night will keep.  
Embrace the darkness deep.  
Sleep, love; forever sleep.

Chapter 1

# HE SONG OF DEATH

Written by:

[Mohamed](#)

## HE SONG OF DEATH

The dwarves named the valley Gamashinoch-the Song of Death. None of the living walked here of their own free will. Those who entered did so out of desperation, dire need, or because they had been ordered to do so by their commanding officer.

They had been listening to the” song” for several hours as their advance brought them nearer and nearer the desolate valley. The song was eerie, terrible. Its words, which were never clearly heard, never quite distinguishable-at least not with the ears-spoke of death and worse than death. The song spoke of entrapment, bitter frustration, unending torment. The song was a lament, a song of longing for a place the soul remembered, a haven of peace and bliss now unattainable.

On first hearing the mournful song, the Knights had reined in their steeds, hands reaching for their swords as they stared about them in unease, crying “what is that?” and “who goes there?”

But no one went there. No one of the living. The Knights looked at their commander, who stood up in his stirrups, inspect-ing the cliffs that soared above them on their right and the left. “It is nothing,” he said at last. “The wind among the rocks.

Proceed.”

He urged his horse forward along the road, which ran, turn-ing and twisting, through the mountains known as the Lords of Doom. The men under his command followed single file, the pass was too narrow for the mounted patrol to ride abreast.

“I have heard the wind before, my lord,” said one Knight gruffly, “and it has yet to have a human voice. It warns us to stay away. We would do well to heed it.”

“Nonsense!” Talon Leader Ernst Magi swung around in his saddle to glare at his scout and second-in-command, who walked behind him. “Superstitious claptrap! But then you minotaur's are noted for clinging to old, outmoded ways

and ideas. It is time you entered the modern era. The gods are gone, and good riddance, I say. We humans rule the world.”

A single voice, a woman’s voice, had first sung the Song of Death. Now her voice was joined by a fearful chorus of men, women, and children raised in a



dreadful chant of hopeless loss and misery that echoed among the mountains. At the doleful sound, several of the horses balked, refused to go farther, and, truth told, their masters did little to urge them. Magit's horse shied and danced. He dug his spurs into the horse's flanks, leaving great bloody gouges, and the horse sulked forward, head lowered, ears twitching. Talon Leader Magit rode about half a mile when it occurred to him that he did not hear other hoof beats. Glancing around, he saw that he was proceeding alone. None of his men had followed.

Furious, Magit turned and galloped back to his command. He found half of his patrol dismounted, the other half looking very ill at ease; sitting astride horses that stood shivering on the road.

"The dumb beasts have more brains than their masters," said the minotaur from his place on the ground. Few horses will allow a minotaur to sit upon their backs and fewer still have the strength and girth to carry one of the huge minotaurs. Galdar was seven feet tall, counting his horns. He kept up with the patrol, running easily alongside the stirrup of his commander.

Magit sat upon his horse, his hands on the pommel, facing his men. He was a tall, excessively thin man, the type whose bones seem to be strung together with steel wire, for he was far stronger than he looked. His eyes were flat and watery blue, without intelligence, without depth. He was noted for his cruelty, his inflexible-many would say mindless-discipline, and his complete and total devotion to a single cause: Ernst Magit.

"You will mount your horses and you will ride after me," said Talon Leader Magit coldly, "or I will report each and every one of you to the groupcommander. I will accuse you of cowardice and betrayal of the Vision and mutiny. As you know, the penalty for even one of those counts is death."

"Can he do that?" whispered a newly made Knight on his first assignment.

"He can," returned the veterans grimly, "and he will."

The Knights remounted and urged their steeds forward, using their spurs. They were forced to circle around the minotaur, Galdar, who remained standing in the center of the road.

"Do you refuse to obey my command, minotaur?" demanded Magit angrily.

"Think well before you do so. You may be the pro-teege of the Protector of the Skull, but I doubt if even he could save you if I denounce you to the Council as a coward and an oath-breaker." Leaning over his horse's neck, Magit spoke in mock confidentiality. "And

from what I hear, Galdar, your master might not be too keen on protecting you anymore. A one-armed minotaur. A minotaur whose own kind view him with pity and with scorn. A minotaur who has been reduced to the position of scout.' And we all know that they assigned you to that post only because they had to do something with you. Although I did hear it suggested that they turn you out to pasture with the rest of the cows."

Galdar clenched his fist, his remaining fist, driving the sharp nails into his flesh. He knew very well that Magit was baiting him, goading him into a fight. Here, where there would be few witnesses. Here where Magit could kill the crippled minotaur and return home to claim that the fight had been a fair and glorious one. Galdar was not particularly attached to life, not since the loss of his sword arm had transformed him from fearsome warrior to plodding scout. But he'd be damned if he was going to die at the hands of Ernst Magit. Galdar wouldn't give his commander the satisfaction.

The minotaur shouldered his way past Ernst Magit, who watched him with a sneer of contempt upon his thin lips. The patrol continued toward their destination, hoping to reach it while there was yet sunlight-if one could term the chill gray light that warmed nothing it touched sunlight. The Song of Death wailed and mourned. One of the new recruits rode with tears streaming down his cheeks. The veterans rode hunkered down, shoulders hunched up around their ears, as if they would block out the sound. But even if they had stuffed their ears with tow, even if they had blown out their eardrums, they would have still heard the terrible song.

The Song of Death sang in the heart.

The patrol rode into the valley that was called Neraka.

In a time past memory, the goddess Takhisis, Queen of Darkness, laid in the southern end of the valley a foundation stone, rescued from the blasted temple of the Kingpriest of Istar. The foundation stone began to grow, drawing upon the evil in the world to give it life: The stone grew into a temple, vast and awful; a temple of magnificent, hideous darkness.

Takhisis planned to use this temple to return to the world from which she'd been driven by Huma Dragonbane, but her way was blocked by love and selfsacrifice. Nevertheless she had great power, and she launched a war upon the world that came near to destroying it. Her evil commanders, like a pack of wild dogs, fell to fighting among themselves. A band of heroes rose up. Looking into their hearts, they found the power to thwart her, defeat her, and cast her down. Her temple at Neraka was destroyed, blasted apart in her rage at her downfall. The temple's walls exploded and rained down from the skies on that terrible day, huge black boulders that crushed the city of Neraka. Cleansing fires destroyed the buildings of the cursed city, burned down its markets and its slave pens, its numerous guard houses, filling its twisted, mazelike streets with ash. Over fifty years later, no trace of the original city remained. The splinters of the temple's bones littered the floor of the southern portion of the valley of Neraka. The ash had long since blown away. Nothing would grow in this part of the valley. All sign of life had long been covered up by the swirling sands. Only the black boulders, remnants of the temple, remained in the valley. They were an awful sight, and even Talon Leader Magit, gazing upon them for the first time, wondered privately if his decision to ride into this part of the

valley had been a smart one. He could have taken the long route around, but that would have added two days to his travel, and he was late as it was, having spent a few extra nights with a new whore who had arrived at his favorite bawdyhouse. He needed to make up time, and he'd chosen as his shortcut this route through the southern end of the valley.

Perhaps due to the force of the explosion, the black rock that had formed the outer walls of the temple had taken on a crystalline structure. Jutting up from the sand, the boulders were not craggy, not lumpy. They were smooth-sided, with sharply defined planes culminating in faceted points. Imagine black quartz crystals jutting up from gray sand, some four times the height of a man. Such a man could see his reflection in those glossy black planes, a reflection that was distorted, twisted, yet completely recognizable as being a reflection of himself. These men had willingly joined up with the army of the Knights of Takhisis, tempted by the promises of loot and slaves won in battle, by their own delight in killing and bullying, by their hatred of elves or kender or dwarves or anyone different from themselves. These men, long since hardened against every good feeling, looked into the shining black plane of the crystals and were appalled by the faces that looked back. For on those faces they could see their mouths opening to sing the terrible song.

Most looked and shuddered and quickly averted their gaze. Galdar took care not to look. At first sight of the black crystals rising from the ground, he had lowered his eyes, and he kept them lowered out of reverence and respect. Call it superstition, as Ernst Magit most certainly would. The gods themselves were not in this valley. Galdar knew that to be impossible; the gods had been driven from Krynn more than thirty years ago. But the ghosts of the gods lingered here, of that Galdar was certain.

Ernst Magit looked at his reflection in the rocks, and simply because he shrank from it inwardly, he forced himself to stare at it until he had stared it down.



## Chapter 2

# **SILVANOSHEI**

Written by:

[Mohamed](#)

## SILVANOSHEI



The strange and unnatural storm laid siege to all of Ansalon. Lightning walked the land; gigantic, ground-shaking warriors who hurled bolts of fire. Ancient trees-huge oaks that had withstood both Cataclysms-burst into flame and were reduced to smoldering ruin in an instant. Whirlwinds raged behind the thundering warriors, ripping apart homes, flinging boards, brick, and stone and mortar into the air with lethal aban-Idon. Torrential cloudbursts caused rivers to swell and overflow their banks, washing away the young green shoots of grain struggling up from the darkness to bask in the early summer sun. In Sanction, besieger and besieged alike abandoned the ongo-ing struggle to seek refuge from the terrible storm. Ships on the .. high seas tried to ride it out,

with the result that some went under, never to be seen or heard from again. Others would later limp home with jury-rigged masts, telling tales of sailors swept over-board, the pumps at work day and night.

In Palanthas, innumerable cracks appeared in the roof of the Great Library. The rain poured inside, sending Bertrem and the monks into a mad scramble to staunch the flow, mop the floor and move precious volumes to safety. In Tarsis, the rain was so heavy that the sea which had vanished during the Cataclysm returned, to the wonder and astonishment of all inhabitants. The sea was gone a few days later, leaving behind gasping fish and an ungodly smell.

The storm struck the island of Schallsea a particularly devastating blow. The winds blew out every single window in the Cozy Hearth. Ships that rode at anchor in the harbor were dashed against the cliffs or smashed into the docks. A tidal surge washed away many buildings and homes built near the shoreline. Countless people died, countless others were left homeless. Refugees stormed the Citadel of Light, pleading for the mystics to come to their aid.

The Citadel was a beacon of hope in Krynn's dark night. Trying to fill the void left by the absence of the gods, Goldmoon had discovered the mystical power of the heart, had brought healing back to the world. She was living proof that although Pal-adine and Mishakal were gone, their power for good lived on in the hearts of those who had loved them.

Yet Goldmoon was growing old. The memories of the gods were fading. And so, it seemed, was the power of the heart. One after another, the mystics felt their power recede, a tide that went out but never returned. Still the mystics of the Citadel were glad to open their doors and their hearts to the storm's victims, provide shelter and succor, and work to heal the injured as best they could. Solamnic Knights, who had established a fortress on Schallsea, rode forth to do battle with the storm-one of the most fearsome enemies these valiant Knights had ever faced. At risk of their own lives, the Knights plucked people from the raging water and dragged them from beneath smashed buildings, working in the wind and rain and lightning-shattered darkness to save the lives of those they were sworn by Oath and Measure to protect.

The Citadel of Light withstood the storm's rage, although its buildings were buffeted by fierce winds and lancing rain. As if in a last ditch attempt to make its wrath felt, the storm hurled hailstones the size of a man's head upon the citadel's crystal walls. Everywhere the hailstones struck, tiny cracks appeared in the crystalline walls. Rainwater seeped through these cracks, trickled like tears down the walls.

One particularly loud crash came from the vicinity of the chambers of Goldmoon, founder and mistress of the Citadel. The mystics heard the sound of breaking glass and ran in fear to see if the elderly woman was safe. To their astonishment, they found the door to her rooms locked. They beat upon it, called upon her to let them inside.



A voice, low and awful to hear, a voice that was Goldmoon's beloved voice and yet was not, ordered them to leave her in peace, to go about their duties. Others needed their aid, she said. She did not. Baffled, uneasy, most did as they were told. Those who lingered behind reported hearing the sound of sobbing, heartbroken and despairing.

"She, too, has lost her power," said those outside her door.

Thinking that they understood, they left her alone.

When morning finally came and the sun rose to shine a lurid red in the sky, people stood about in dazed horror, looking upon the destruction wrought during the terrible night. The mystics went to Goldmoon's chamber to ask for her counsel, but no answer came. The door to Goldmoon's chamber remained closed and barred.





The storm also swept through Qualinesti, another elven kingdom, but one that was separated from its cousins by distance that could be measured both in hundreds of miles and in ancient hatred and distrust. In Qualinesti, whirling winds up-rooted giant trees and flung them about like the slender sticks used in Quin Thalasi, a popular elven game. The storm shook the fabled Tower of the Speaker of the Sun on its foundation, sent the beautiful stained glass of its storied windows raining down upon the floor. Rising water flooded the lower chambers of the newly constructed fortress of the Dark Knights at Newport, forcing them to do what an enemy army could not-abandon their posts.

The storm woke even the great dragons, slumbering, bloated and fat, in their lairs that were rich with tribute. The storm shook the Peak of Malys, lair of Malys, the enormous red dragon who now fashioned herself the Queen of Ansalon, soon to become Goddess of Ansalon, if she had her way. The rain formed rushing rivers that invaded Malys's volcanic home. Rainwater flowed into the lava pools, creating enormous clouds of a noxious-smelling steam that filled the corridors and halls. Wet, half-blind, choking in the fumes, Malys roared her indignation and flew from lair to lair, trying to find one that was dry enough for her to return to sleep.

Finally she was driven to seek the lower levels of her mountain home. Malys was an ancient dragon with a malevolent wisdom. She sensed something unnatural about this storm, and it made her uneasy. Grumbling and muttering to herself, she entered the Chamber of the Totem. Here, on an outcropping of black rock, Malys had piled the skulls of all the lesser dragons she had consumed when she first came to the world. Silver skulls and gold, red skulls and blue stood one atop the other, a monument to her greatness. Malys was comforted by the sight of the skulls. Each brought a memory of a battle won, a foe defeated and de-voured. The rain could not penetrate this far down in her mountain home.



She could not hear the wind howl. The flashes of lightning did not disturb her slumbers.

Malys gazed upon the empty eyes of the skulls with pleasure, and perhaps she dozed, because suddenly it seemed to her that the eyes of skulls were alive and they were watching her. She snorted, reared her head. She stared closely at the skulls, at the eyes. The lava pool at the heart of the mountain cast a lurid light upon the skulls, sent shadows winking and blinking in the empty eye sockets. Berating herself for an overactive imagination, Malys coiled her body comfortably around the totem and fell asleep.

Another of the great dragons, a Green known grandiosely as Beryllinthranox was also not able to sleep through the storm. Beryl's lair was formed of living trees-ironwoods and redwoods-and enormous, twining vines. The vines and branches of the trees were so thickly interwoven that no raindrop had ever managed to wriggle its way through. But the rain that fell from the roiling black clouds of this storm seemed to make it a personal mission to find a way to penetrate the leaves. Once one had managed to sneak inside, it opened the way for thousands of its fellows. Beryl woke in surprise at the unaccustomed feel of water splashing on her nose. One of the great redwoods that formed a pillar of her lair was struck by a lightning bolt. The tree burst into flames, flames that spread quickly, feeding on rainwater as if it were lamp oil.

Beryl's roar of alarm brought her minions scrambling to douse the flames. Dragons, Reds and Blues who had joined Beryl rather than be consumed by her, dared the flames to pluck out the burning trees and cast them into the sea. Draconians pulled down blazing vines, smothered the flames with dirt and mud. Hostages and prisoners were put to work fighting the fires. Many died doing so, but eventually Beryl's lair was saved. She was in a terrible humor for days afterward, however, convincing herself that the storm had been an attack waged magically by her cousin Malys. Beryl meant to rule someday in Malys's stead. Using her magic to rebuild-a magical power that had lately been dwindling, something else Beryl blamed on Malys-the Green nursed her wrongs and plotted revenge.

Khellendros the Blue (he had abandoned the name Skie for this more magnificent title, which meant Storm over Ansalon), was one of the few of the dragons native to Krynn to have emerged from the Dragon Purge. He was now ruler of Solamnia and all its environs. He was overseer of Schallsea and the Citadel of Light, which he allowed to remain because-according to him-he found it amusing to watch the petty humans struggle futilely against the growing darkness. In truth, the real reason he permitted the citadel to thrive in safety was the citadel's guardian, a silver dragon named Mirror. Mirror and Skie were longtime foes and now, in their mutual detestation of the new, great dragons from afar who had killed so many of their brethren, they had become not friends, but not quite enemies either.

Khellendros was bothered by the storm far more than either of the great dragons, although-strangely enough-the storm did not do his lair much damage. He paced restively about his enormous cave high in the Vingaard mountains, watched the lightning warriors strike viciously at the ramparts of the High Clerist's Tower, and he thought he heard a voice in the wind, a voice that sang of death. Khellendros did not sleep but watched the storm to its end.

The storm lost none of its power as it roared down upon the ancient elven kingdom of Silvanesti. The elves had erected a magical shield over their kingdom, a shield that had thus far kept the marauding dragons from conquering their lands, a shield that also kept out all other races. The elves had finally succeeded in their historic goal of isolating themselves from the troubles of the rest of the world. But the shield did not keep out the thunder and rain, wind and lightning.

Chapter 3

# THE HOLY FIRE

Written by:

[Mohamed](#)

## THE HOLY FIRE

In the old days, the glory days, before the War of the Lance, the road that led from Neraka to the port city of Sanction had been well maintained, for that road was the only route through the mountains known as the Lords of Doom. The road-known as the Hundred Mile Road, for it was almost one hundred miles long, give or take a furlong or two-was paved with crushed rock. Thousands of feet had marched over the crushed rock during the intervening years; booted human feet, hairy goblin feet, clawed draconian feet. So many thousand that the rock had been pounded into the ground and was now deeply embedded.

During the height of the War of the Lance, the Hundred Mile Road had been clogged with men, beasts, and supply wagons. Anyone who had need of speed took to the air, riding on the backs of the swift-flying blue dragons or traversing the skies in floating citadels. Those forced to move along the road could be delayed for days, blocked by the hundreds of foot soldiers who slogged along its torturous route, either marching to the city of Neraka or marching away from it. Wagons lurched and jolted along the road. The grade was steep, descending from the high mountain valley all the way to sea level, making the journey a perilous one.

Wagons loaded with gold, silver, and steel, boxes of stolen jewels, booty looted from people the armies had conquered, were hauled by fearsome beasts known as mammoths, the only creatures strong enough to drag the heavily laden wagons up the mountain road. Occasionally one of the wagons would tip over and spill its contents or lose a wheel, or one of the mammoths would run berserk and trample its keepers and anyone else unfortunate enough to be in its path. At these times, the road was shut down completely, bringing everything to a halt while officers tried to keep their men in order and fumed and fretted at the delay. The mammoths were gone, died out. The men were gone too. Most of them now old. Some of them now dead. All of them now forgotten. The road was empty, deserted. Only the wind's whistling breath blew across the road, which, with its smooth, inlaid gravel surface, was considered one of the man-made wonders of Krynn.

The wind was at the backs of the Dark Knights as they galloped down the winding, twisting snake's back that was the Hundred Mile Road. The wind, a remnant of the storm, howled among the mountain tops, an echo of the Song of Death they had heard in Neraka, but only an echo, not as terrible, not as

frightening. The Knights rode hard, rode in a daze, rode without any clear idea of why they rode or where they were heading. They rode in an ecstasy, an excitement that was unlike anything they had ever before experienced. Certainly Galdar had felt nothing like it. He loped along at Mina's side, running with new-found strength. He could have run from here to Ice Wall without pause. He might have credited his energy to pure joy at regaining his severed limb, but he saw his awe and fervor reflected in the faces of the men who made that exhilarating, mad dash alongside him. It was as if they brought the storm with them-hooves thundering among the mountain walls, the iron shoes of the horses striking lightning bolts from the rock surface. Mina rode at their head, urging them on when they would have stopped from fatigue, forcing them to look into themselves to find just a bit more strength than they knew they possessed. They rode through the night, their way lit by lightning flashes. They rode through the day, halting only to water the horses and eat a quick bite standing. When it seemed the horses must founder, Mina called a halt. The Knights had traversed well over half the distance. As it was, her own roan, Foxfire, could have continued on. He appeared to actually resent the stop, for the horse stamped and snorted in dis-pleasure, his irritated protests splitting the air and bouncing back from the mountain tops. Foxfire was fiercely loyal to his mistress and to her alone. He had no use for any other being. During their first brief rest stop, Galdar had made the mistake of approaching the horse to hold Mina's stirrup as she dismounted, as he had been trained to do for his commander and with much better grace than he'd used for Ernst Magit. Foxfire's lip curled back over his teeth, his eyes gleamed with a wild, wicked light that gave Galdar some idea of how the beast had come by his name. Galdar hastily backed away. Many horses are frightened by minotaurs. Thinking this might be the problem, Galdar ordered one of the others to attend the commander. Mina countermanded his order. "Stay back, all of you. Foxfire has no love for any being other than myself. He obeys only my commands and then only when my commands agree with his own instincts. He is very protective of his rider, and I could not prevent him from lashing out at you if you came too near." She dismounted nimbly, without aid. Removing her own saddle and bridle, she led Foxfire to drink. She fed him and brushed him down with her own hands. The rest of the soldiers tended to their own weary mounts, saw them safely settled for the night. Mina would not allow them to build a campfire. Solamnic eyes might be watching, she said. The fire would be visible a long distance. The men were as tired as the horses. They'd had no sleep for two days and a night. The terror of the storm had drained them, the forced march left them all shaking with fatigue. The excitement that had carried them this far began to ebb. They looked like prisoners who have wakened from a wonderful dream of freedom to

find that they still wear their shackles and their chains.

No longer crowned by lightning and robed with thunder, Mina looked like any other girl, and not even a very attractive girl, more like a scrawny youth. The Knights sat hunched over their food in the moonlit darkness, muttering that they'd been led on a fool's errand, casting Mina dark looks and angry glances. One man even went so far as to say that any of the dark mystics could have restored Galdar's arm, nothing so special in that.

Galdar could have silenced them by pointing out that no dark mystic had restored his arm, though he had begged them often enough. Whether they refused because their powers were not strong or because he lacked the steel to pay them, it was all the same to him. The dark mystics of the Knights of Neraka had not given him an arm. This strange girl had and he was dedicated to her for life. He kept quiet, however. He was ready to defend Mina with his life, should that become necessary, but he was curious to see how she would handle the increasingly tense situation.

Mina did not appear to notice that her command was slowly slipping away. She sat apart from the men, sat above them, perched on an enormous boulder. From her vantage point, she could look out across the mountain range, jagged black teeth taking a bite out of the starry sky. Here and there, fires from the active volcanoes were blots of orange against the black. Withdrawn, abstracted, she was absorbed in her thoughts to the point that she seemed totally unaware of the rising tide of mutiny at her back.

"I'll be damned if I'm riding to Sanction!" said one of the Knights. "You know what's waiting for us there. A thousand of the cursed Solamnics, that's what!"

"I'm off to Khur with the first light," said another. "I must have been thunderstruck to have come this far!"

"I'll not stand first watch," a third grumbled. "She won't let us have a fire to dry out our clothes or cook a decent meal. Let her stand first watch."

"Aye, let her stand first watch!" The others agreed.

"I intend to," said Mina calmly. Rising from her seat, she descended to the road. She stood astride it, her feet planted firmly. Arms crossed over her chest, she faced the men. "I will stand all the watches this night. You will need your rest for the morrow. You should sleep."

She was not angry. She was not sympathetic. She was certainly not pandering to them, did not seem to be agreeing with them in hope of gaining their favor. She was making a statement of fact, presenting a logical and rational argument. The men would need their rest for the morrow.

The Knights were mollified, but still angry, behaving like children who've been made the butt of a joke and don't like it. Mina ordered them to make up their beds and lie down.

The Knights did as they were told, grumbling that their blankets were still

wet and how could she expect them to sleep on the hard rock? They vowed, one and all, to leave with the dawn.

Mina returned to her seat upon the boulder and looked out again at the stars and the rising moon. She began to sing.

The song was not like the Song of Death, the terrible dirge sung to them by the ghosts of Neraka. Mina's song was a battle song. A song sung by the brave as they march upon the foe, a song meant to stir the hearts of those who sing it, a song meant to strike terror into the hearts of their enemies.

Glory calls us  
With trumpet's tongue,  
calls us do great deeds  
on the field of valor,  
calls us to give our blood  
to the flame,  
to the ground,  
the thirsty ground,  
the holy fire.

The song continued, a paeon sung by the victors in their moment of triumph, a song of reminiscence sung by the old soldier telling his tale of valor. Closing his eyes, Galdar saw deeds of courage and bravery, and he saw, thrilling with pride, that he was the one performing. these heroic feats. His sword flared with the purple white of the lightning, he drank the blood of his enemies. He marched from one glorious battle to the next, this song of victory on his lips. Always Mina rode before him, leading him, inspiring him, urging him to follow her into the heart of the battle. The purple white glow that emanated from her shone on him.

The song ended. Galdar blinked, realized, to his astonishment and chagrin, that he had fallen asleep. He had not meant to, he had intended to stand watch with her. He rubbed his eyes, wished she would start singing again. The night was cold and empty without the song. He looked around to see if the others felt the same.

They slumbered deeply and peacefully, smiles on their lips. They had laid their swords within reach on the ground beside them. Their hands closed over the hilts as if they would leap up and race off to the fray in an instant. They were sharing Galdar's dream, the dream of the song.

Marveling, he looked at Mina to find her looking at him.

He rose to his feet, went to join her upon her rock.

"Do you know what I saw, Commander?" he asked.

Her amber eyes had caught the moon, encased it. "1

know,”

she replied.

“Will you do that for me, for us? Will you lead us to victory?”

The amber eyes, holding the moon captive, turned upon him.

“I will.”

“Is it your god who promises you this?”

“It is,” she replied gravely.

“Tell me the name of this god, that I may worship him,” said

Galdar.

Mina shook her head slowly, emphatically. Her gaze left the minotaur, went back to the sky, which was unusually dark, now that she had captured the moon.

The light, the only light, was in her eyes. “It is not the right time.”

“When will it be the right time?” Galdar pursued.

“Mortals have no faith in anything anymore. They are like

men lost in a fog who can see no farther than their own noses, and so that is what they follow, if they follow anything at all. Some are so paralyzed with fear that they are afraid to move. The people must acquire faith in themselves before they are ready to believe in anything beyond themselves.” “Will you do this,

Commander? Will you make this happen.”

“Tomorrow, you will see a miracle,” she said.

Galdar settled himself upon the rock. “Who are you,

Com-

mander?” he asked. “Where do you come from?”

Mina turned her gaze upon him and said, with a half-smile, “Who are you, Sub commander? Where do you come from?”

“Why, I’m a minotaur. I was born in-“

“No.” She shook her head gently. “Where before that?” “Before I was born?”

Galdar was confused. “I don’t know. No person does.”

“Precisely,” said Mina and turned away.

Galdar scratched his homed head, shrugged in his turn. Obviously she did not want to tell him, and why should she? It was none of his business. It made no difference to him. She was right. He had not believed in anything before this moment. Now he had found something in which to believe. He had found Mina.

She confronted him again, said abruptly, “Are you still tired?”

“No, Talon Leader, I am not,” Galdar replied. He had slept

only a few hours, but the sleep had left him unusually refreshed.

Mina shook her head. “Do not call me ‘Talon Leader.’ I want you to call me ‘Mina.’ “

“That is not right, Talon Leader,” he protested. “Calling you by your name does not show proper respect.”

“If the men have no respect for me, will it matter what they call me?” she

returned. “Besides,” she added with calm conviction, “the rank I hold does not



yet exist.”

Galdar really thought she was getting a bit above herself now, needed taking down a notch or two. “Perhaps you think you should be the ‘Lord of the Night,’” he suggested by way of a joke, naming the highest rank that could be held by the Knights of Neraka.

Mina did not laugh. “Someday, the Lord of the Night will kneel down before me.”

Galdar knew Lord Targonne well, had difficulty imagining the greedy, grasping, ambitious man kneeling to do anything unless it might be to scoop up a dropped copper. Galdar didn’t quite know what to say to such a ludicrous concept and so fell silent, returning in his mind to the dream of glory, reaching for it as a parched man reaches out to water. He wanted so much to believe in it, wanted to believe it was more than mirage.

“If you are certain you are not tired, Galdar,” Mina continued, “I want to ask a boon of you.”

“Anything, Tal-Mina,” he said, faltering.

“Tomorrow we ride into battle.” A little frown line marred Mina’s smooth complexion. “I have no weapon, nor have I ever been trained in the use of one. Have we time to do so tonight, do you think?”

Galdar’s jaw went slack. He wondered if he’d heard correctly. He was so stunned, he could at first make no reply. “You. . . you’ve never wielded a weapon?”

Mina shook her head calmly.

“Have you ever been in battle, Mina?”

She shook her head again.

“Have you ever seen a battle?” Galdar was feeling desperate.

“No, Galdar.” Mina smiled at him. “That is why I am asking for your help. We will go a little ways down the road to practice, so that we will not disturb the others. Do not worry. They will be safe. Foxfire would warn me if an enemy approached. Bring along whatever weapon you think would be easiest for me to learn.”

Mina walked off down the road to find a suitable practice field, leaving an amazed Galdar to search through the weapons he and the others carried, to find one suitable for her, a girl who had never before held a weapon and who was, tomorrow, going to lead them into battle.

Galdar cudgeled his brain, tried to knock some common sense back into his head. A dream seemed reality, reality seemed a dream. Drawing his dagger, he stared at it a moment, watched the moonlight flow like quicksilver along the blade. He jabbed the point of the dagger into his arm, the arm Mina had restored to him. Stinging pain and the warm flow of blood indicated that the arm was real, confirmed that he was indeed awake.

Galdar had given his promise, and if he had one thing left to him in this life

that he hadn't sold, battered, or flung away, it was his honor. He slid the dagger back into its sheathe upon his belt and looked over the stock of weapons. A sword was out of the question. There was no time to train her properly in its use, she would do more damage to herself or those around than to a foe. He could find nothing that he deemed suitable, and then he noticed the moonlight shining on one weapon in particular, as if it were trying to bring it to his attention-the weapon known as a morning star. Galdar eyed it. Frowning thoughtfully, he hefted it in his hand. The morning star is a battlehammer adorned with spikes on the end, spikes the fan-ciful said give it the look of a star





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