

There is a strong summer wind that blows violently for a brief moment, forcing the nearby trees to bend to its' will as Tenia hunkers down behind a large gray rock covered in old strongly scented moss. She slowly leans her head around the rock, checking to see if she has been noticed by anyone or anything. Slowly she moves from tree to tree, her black soft leather shoes muffling the sound of small branches and leaves crunching under her feet as she advances. Tenia knows that the darkness of night will hide her from most prying eyes, but not all. In the back of her mind, the thought of being safe surfaces over and over again. She knows that being out alone is never wise. Especially at night on this dark and untraveled area of the woods. She could have asked Cyril for his assistance, but he would have reveled at the chance to possibly see combat once again. Grabbing his seldom used and battered silver dwarven armor while gathering a full thirty man hunting party alerting everyone in the village that there could be something a foot. Making things just a little bit more dangerous than what it needed to be. This is something she did not want. Cyril is the head of the guard and a damn good friend. Tenia did not want to involve anyone in this outing, especially if it turns out to be over...nothing. Cyril sometimes, most of the time, has a way of over reacting to things. He has ways of telling tales of his battles long ago, the beasts he defeated, each scar on his body has a tale. Now Tenia begins second guess herself, is she the one over

reacting? She questions while slowly removing her silver body chain from around her hips and placing it in the soft thin leather bag that hangs from her shoulder. Magma always complimented on the way she dressed.

“The simple peasant look, you make it work!” he would tell her.

She does not wear the traditional garb, robes and things the others on the council tend to wear. Her thin white shirt with an open dress that shows her dark blue pants does not always go over well with the older council members. They say that she must wear the robes, a sign of respect.

“Clothing does not make others respect you. Your actions do,” Tenia would always reply.

Magma has always been very proud of her for being herself. For being different. For seeing things with a bit more clarity for what they truly are. But as of this moment, he is not here to tell her these things. In fact, Magma has not been seen for most of the day. He never reached the nearby town of Godwin, not relaying a message that he arrived is what disturbs her. He was supposed to assist with some local farming issues they were having with the soil, a simple task he said. Something so easy, that he prompted her not to go with him. Saying that it would be boring for her. Things like this are extremely easy for him, being what Rynos classified as true an earth elemental. A term he really despises, yet she calls him this as a tease. A simple task, Magma would just go and read the chemical

compounds in soils and tell the farmers what they have too much of or too little. He has always had a larger than life heart and would do anything to help those who were in need. This is the reason the people around them appreciate him, they not only love him because of his charm and wit, as he would often say, but for his actions. He is extremely punctual and respectful of others. So for her not to hear from him for almost a full solar day is not like him. She reached out to some of the local farmers to find out if they were still waiting for his arrival, and they were. Magma would never worry her, not like this. Looking upward into the night sky, Tenia notices a single blood owl looking down at her. The beautiful dark red feathers and yellow eyes that seem to glow in the darkness. Behind the blood owl, barely visible against the night sky, she spies the outline of a giant ancient structure embedded into the side of the mountain, just peaking over the top of the forests tallest trees in the distance. The closer she gets, the more of it comes into view. A lone, lifeless structure that looks older than all that is around it. The weathered stone walls, the large pieces of dark gray stone missing from the towers that stretch upward, it is a sight to behold. Tucked halfway inside of the mountain, the building looks as if the mountain walls seemingly tried to swallow it up whole. But the closer she gets to this magnificent structure, she sees that it seems to have been built into the rock with a purpose. The craftsmanship is incredible, from the tall bleak ivy covered towers, to the

sidewalls that connect into the mountain side. Hidden from plain sight all this time, it is no wonder that most that even dare to come this deep into the woods have never truly seen its' beauty. In this part of the forest, the trees and vegetation seem to grow thicker than usual. Tenia begins to sense the air around her becoming heavier, more damp, and the strange smell of death that travels on warm clammy breezes as she advances. Small sets of glowing eyes can be seen just out of reach in the darkness, piercing the unwanted souls of whomever wanders into this part of the forest. Tenia begins to remember the children telling tales of a hidden catacomb that was buried in a landslide long ago. She had not given their tales much thought, until now. Even at the Wander's Inn, there had been tales from some of the old seasoned warriors that would weave stories about these mysterious ruins. Tenia is no hunter, nor does she pretend to be one. But those tales told by men who traveled these woods still chill her to the bone, especially now. Talk of the darkness, how unseen creatures made their home near the ancient ruins and would devour anyone that dared to enter their domain.

"Tales told to the young," she mutters while moving closer to the castle.

Now, she really misses the small quaint village and the beauty and warmth it has brought to them both. It has been their home for some time now, ever since she and Magma decided to slow down. Things moved so

fast once they arrived. She had made their home just as comfortable if not more as when they lived onboard the Vollaria. Living a more simple less exciting life does not bother her on bit. But when they were elected to sit on the counsel, and she was made a cleric of peace, she knew life with Magma had really just begun. More than just a simple dream, but a true life. She always believed him to be a better leader than she ever could be. He is much more open to ideas, clamoring at any chance to help those in need, even if they are complete strangers. Guessing that he probably missed the days of adventure that never seemed to end, helping those in need was something that he needed to do. Magma has always been that way, she always knew a lot of those traits came from his father Garum. But she knew that they both excelled in their skill sets growing up in the shadow of Dra'con and Eeri. How she misses all of them so much. Either way, she has never been comfortable being the one that people would depend on for information or guidance. Becoming the community's only and first cleric of peace is something she did not ask for. Tenia had witnessed dozens of missions where she saw Eeri use her ability to calm turbulent situations. Turning volatile moments into ones where she could convince others that there was no need for hostilities showing them a peaceful end. Eeri was very, very good at what she did. Tenia too wanted to be able to spread peace as Eeri did. She trained heavily with the beautiful Eeri, learning to call upon the blessings from the goddess of

peace and tranquility, Eirene, for assistance. Tenia had never met Eirene let alone even heard of her. So all of this tranquil stuff contrasts her life growing up. That along with intensive training Dra'con requested that she learn before leaving. She never forgot the way he pushed her to the limits of which one could endure. Eeri would always remind him that she was a young adult and should be given leniency. Tenia chuckles momentarily, like that would ever happen she remembers thinking to herself. Looking back on it now, she would have not had it any other way. He gave her the ability to protect herself when she needed to. These thoughts are suddenly wiped away when a brisk chill of wind causes her to stop advancing toward the catacombs. There is an uneasy silence that creeps over the area around her. Tenia slowly squats, putting herself closer to the ground, listening carefully. Her eyes trying to focus in the darkness, looking for any type of movement. Suddenly from the depths of the dark forest a howl erupts. A soft yet direct howl, a wolf's call, echoing in the distance.

“Wolves? No...that is something else,” she says while quietly listening to estimate their distance from where she stood.

Another howl, her head shifts. An answer back? After a few moments of silence, Tenia begins to move again, advancing closer to the entry of the structure. This time at a faster pace. She carefully walks down the thin dirt path to where it slowly opens up to display a desolate area

just before the base of the mountain. Before her stands two giant ancient marble statues. They are of the twin male gods Hypnos and Thanatos, gods of sleep and death. Looking up at them, Tenia is in awe at the beauty and craftsmanship that it took to build something so grand and powerful. Several dark green Ivy vines creeps up the side of the twin's marble pedestals and far up the walls of the entryway, covering most of the massive wooden doorway that lies between her and the inside. The air around her is staler than before she notices while approaching. Her heart beat begins to quicken. The two statues sit on both sides of the doorway facing one another, each holding a great weapon. Hypnos, a great sword, and Thanatos, a war axe. Moving closer cautiously, Tenia glances up at the doorway to notice an ancient writing carved deep into the stone frame that surrounds the doorway. The crunching sound beneath her feet is of dead vegetation and is the only sound that she hears. It is too quiet. As if triggered by her presence, the ancient writing suddenly begins to stir, moving ever so gently as soft voices echo all around her.

“A guardian seal, this is never good!” she says with concern.

Taking a few steps back she suddenly hears another howl penetrating the darkness, but this time much closer than before. Quickly turning around to the area from which the sound came.

“And that would be the guardian!” she says softly pulling a short blade from its' holster just above her thigh.

From the darkness, there is the sound of branches being walked upon nearby. Glaring through the pitch black forest, Tenia begins to see a set of tiny lights moving toward her. As they get closer, she realizes that they are not lights, but four sets of yellow glowing eyes from within the darkness. The sinister eyes advance toward her, moving into the moon lit area. Before her stands a gray wolf, glaring at her with two sets of gray eyes. She then suddenly picks up the overpowering scent of ash as it fills her nostrils. Another wolf walks from the darkness beside her, looking into her eyes while growling softly. The wolves' bodies seem to smolder in the softly lit area as dark gray smoke rises from their fur. Another disturbance is heard as Tenia turns to see another wolf making its' way through the thick underbrush on her other side. And then another creeps its' way from behind her. They have her surrounded. Wolves usually do not venture this close to the villages, but these are not ordinary wolves. They are the legendary smoke wolves of dark forest. Crossing one means immediate death for the unwary traveler. Coming into contact with a pack is unheard of. For them to be here as guardians means someone, usually a powerful mage placed a summoning spell on this area to protect or guard something. Something of great importance, to summon a smoke wolf means to offer your soul in return. The great wolf before her takes a

few steps forward and stops suddenly. Glaring at her with its four glowing yellow eyes, the beast is large, larger than the others. The dull fur that covers this one is much darker and richer in color than the others with a silver streak flowing from behind its' large ears.

"You must be the alpha," Tenia mumbles.

"You are on sacred ground human!" a voice says.

The voice is not heard from a single source, but seems to be coming from within her own head.

"Telepathy?" Tenia says aloud.

"I mean no harm or disrespect to these hollowed grounds. I come in search of my husband, nothing more. And I believe him to be somewhere beyond the catacomb walls," Tenia tells them.

"This is not possible human, none pass through these walls. Not only is it forbidden, entering this area means certain death!" the voices say while leaping over one another.

"I sense fear in you, are you afraid?" they ask.

"I do not fear death! When she comes for me I will go, but at this moment I will not leave here until find my husband!" Tenia says with compassion and strength.

She holds up her blade as an electrical current surges from her hands and over the blade.

The great alpha wolf moves a few steps closer. His yellow eyes glow even brighter as he stares into her eyes, into her soul. Tenia cannot move. She can feel her mind slipping as visions of Magma flash before her eyes. Visions of the two of them, younger, getting into mischief. The two of them kissing for the first time, holding hands, and hugging their friends' goodbye as they part ways.

"What are you doing to me?!" she shouts while trying to break free of this power.

Her body is cold. They could have killed her by now, yet they have not made a move toward her, why? Like a pair of cold dead hands loosening their grip, Tenia feels her senses coming back. Her body suddenly jerks forward while falling to her knees. The alpha wolf eyes slowly fade back to a normal glow.

"Your heart is heavy young one, it does not beckon for the company of treasure. You seek out the one called Magma, your true love," the voices say to her.

Tenia stares at the ground, where her hands lay, only to feel the coldness that it brings.

"He should not be here," she says softly as a tear from her face strikes her hand below.

"He is not alone,"

Tenia jerks her head up only to see the alpha wolf just inches from her face.

“What do you mean he is not alone?” she asks.

The other wolves lift their noses to the air and begin sniffing and growling.

“The witch guides his movements!”

“What? Wait, did you just say a witch? What witch?” Tenia asks surprisingly.

“The witch from the bog nearby. Her evil presence has haunted these woods for some time. Yet for her to enter the catacombs, she would have needed help. Your husband's help,”

“No, he would not do such a thing!” Tenia shouts.

“We realize this, the witch can deceive mortal and beast alike. Her means and motives are always unclear. She is also a creature of habit, always trying to enter these catacombs. Yet now, they now have the key to enter what was once inaccessible,”

“How? Magma cannot enter this place. There is a guardian seal over the entryway. And I would further guess that a spell has been placed on all passages that lead to the inside. This makes no sense,” says Tenia as she stands.

“He was not singled out is not by chance, his life is lost,”

“I am not leaving without my husband! If his life is threatened, then so is mine!” Tenia says as her fingers tighten around the leather handle of her blade.

The white jewel on Tenia's silver bracelet flashes softly with a blue light from her wrist.

“See this?” she points to the bracelet.

“This means that he is somewhere in there alive! And I will not leave without him,”

There is a tense moment between the wolves and Tenia as she will does not back down.

“If you were to enter the catacombs, you would surely meet the same fate as your husband. Are you willing to die for him?” the alpha wolf asks.

“Without any question I am,” she replies with no hesitation.

The alpha wolf barks and the other wolves slowly back away. Vanishing into a gray colored vapor as they move into the darkness of the woods.

“There are those who would say your bravery to be foolish, the perils inside are more than just simple tests, they seek out those that are selfish and have darkness within their heart. Fear is what drives them, you however will not trigger these trials because of what is inside you. A

goddess watches over you, but once inside the catacombs, even her eyes will be blinded," the alpha remarks.

"If you are to let me pass, then I will risk whatever is waiting for me inside, whatever it takes to bring my husband home," Tenia says.

"She is not one to be trifled with, you must be willing to kill in order to accomplish your goal. Hesitation will mean certain death,"

"I will do what I must,"

"Remember, she is the reason he is here, why is unknown. But I can tell you that whatever the reason, once they are done with him, she will kill him,"

"They? That is the second time you mentioned they. Who else is in there?"

"The Minotaur of course," the alpha says as he walks around her.

"Of course, why did I even ask?" Tenia comments sarcastically.

"I must ask, if you, wolves were summoned to guard the entrance, how did she and my husband enter?"

"Easily explained, he is an earth elemental. Your mate is the essence of what was once lost. That is how she was able to enter, but that is not the reason why. This is something to ponder," the alpha says while sitting, looking up at the castle above.

"So you do not know why or who summoned you?"

“Who is none of our concern, neither is what it is we protect,” the alpha says.

“That is unfortunate, whoever did so, should have at least given you the knowledge to help you complete your goal,” says Tenia trying her best to retrieve more information from the large wolf.

A trait she picked up from Eeri. She knows that the more information she can get, the better she can be prepared for what is inside.

“That in itself is a rarity,” the wolf replies.

The alpha stands facing the doorway. His eyes locked on the giant wooden doors.

“There are some things that even we cannot foresee. The taste of evil, once within the body, breeds and takes over. She will use him for whatever it is that she needs him for, after that, all will be lost...for you both. If you are to survive, once inside, you will need to break the Wolf's Tooth when it may come of assistance. It may be the only chance the two of you have to make it out alive. Remember, sometimes evil has a purpose,” he says while slowly turning and walking back toward the forest edge. Suddenly, the alpha wolf's body begins to vanish in a vapor trail of gray smoke.

“Wolf's Tooth?! What is that?” asks Tenia as she tries to follow him into the woods.

He is gone. Tenia stands in the dimly lit area alone once again. She looks around in the darkness knowing that things are going to get a little bad once she enters the catacombs. She glances down at her ID bracelet once more. The system is still linked with Magma's and the light never loses its luminosity. It has lead her here, and he is still alive and seemingly at full health. Her finger rubs across the blue jewel's surface as a small hologram hovers just above its surface. The visual light green translucent map shows a yellow dot that pinpoints Magma's exact position inside the ruins.

"May your goddess guide over you, granting you a better chance that what my mate and I had," the alpha wolf's words echo throughout the darkness.

There is a howl in the distance as the natural sounds of the night return once more. Suddenly, there is a bright flicker of light that quickly vanishes beneath Tenia's feet. Catching her attention, she glances down. There within the blades of grass, she notices a small dark necklace that was not there before.

"What is this?"

Reaching down, she picks up the necklace. The black rope has something on it that glimmers in the star lit night. It is a thick and heavy metallic claw that grips a large impressive white tooth between its' four angry fingers. Looking at the beautiful piece of jewelry closely, her eyes

focus on something moving, flowing from inside the tooth itself. Tilting it upward against the moon light, she rocks it back and forth, trying to identify its strange contents.

“An actual Wolf's Tooth? Incredible...thank you,” she says softly.

She spreads the dark rope wider and places it over her head and down around her neck. She cannot help but be amazed at this jewel that sits around her neck. Holding it between her fingers she moves the tooth back and forth feeling its smooth surface.

“A gift from a Smoke Wolf Pack? No one will ever believe me,” she says while staring at the artifact.

She knows she was left to her own demise, but why? She also knows that this could have easily been her last moments alive, but the wolves let her live. Her mind spins with unanswered questions.

“Okay, I need to stay focused on the task at hand,” she says while her eyes slowly climb up the massive building that stands before her.

Tenia looks over at the giant wooden doorway. Massive and intimidating she glares at it with a purpose.

“Now, to figure out how to get inside. How am I going to open this thing?” she asks.

Walking up to the door, she places her hands on the ancient wood feeling for a trigger or handle. Something to tug against. Moving away the ivy that blocks her from seeing most of the door's surface, the air

around her is filled with the smell of old weathered wood. Suddenly, there is a loud noise of wood cracking. The sudden noise causes her to jump while quickly removing her hands from the door. Leaning back just a bit to see where the noise originated, she sees a large crack within the door frame, slightly hidden by the ivy. The crack, which was not there before, seems suspiciously just about her size.

“Really? Okay,” she mumbles.

She moves toward the crack, leaning in closer trying to see through the darkness inside. A cold breeze blows through the hole bringing with it the smell of dampness and earth. Looking at into the darkness, she does not falter. Squatting lower to the ground, she begins to wiggle her way through as a sliver of wood catches her sleeve. She pulls her arm back and slowly frees the cloth from the old splintered door. As she vanishes into the darkness, unseen by her eyes, are the two guardian statues above the doorway. Who's heads are now facing down to where the crack in the doorway had suddenly appeared.

Once Tenia had made her way through the tight area, she opens her hand releasing three balls of electricity. Their energy causes the area around them to be seen once again by the bright light as they float from her hand slowly rising up and circling around her. They quickly move up and outward. The walls of the interior become brightly lit as the balls of

electrical energy slowly climb upward. They light up what appears to be the giant hall. One of the energy spheres stays just a few feet in front of Tenia as she moves into the hall.

“Massive,” she says as her voice echoes within the giant room.

The hall is now more distinguished, and she can see the intensive artwork that covers most of the ceiling. Several large statues seem to hold roof of the ceiling. Making her way forward, she walks past several beautiful blue silk lined chairs covered with dust and cobwebs sitting around a giant stone table. The in wall cut outs where the torches and lamps are also covered in webbing showing that this place has not seen light in some time. Tenia slowly approaches the large table. More than a few gold plates and cups still remain on its surface covered in a thick layer of dust and dirt. No one has been here for ages. She glances down at her bracelet, the hologram again appears, this time showing her a map with several levels buried deep within the mountain. Tenia begins to move forward as the spheres of energy follow.

“How did you get in here Hun?” she asks softly.

She wonders how Magma entered this place and why did the witch bring him here? She passes through a large doorway into another hall. Not as large as the last, but just as impressive. Lined with statues and dead trees she figures she is walking through what was once a garden. Making her way through this room, she comes across a large structure in

its center. Walking up to the structure, she looks at the dust covered fountain. Even while covered in dust, it is still a thing of beauty. She has never seen anything like it. The sides have small statues carved in it that seem to step away from the stone they are carved into. In the center stands a large stone Minotaur. It holds over its shoulder a large watering container from which, at one point, poured waves upon waves of crystal clear water. Around the structure sits several stone benches, beautifully hand crafted. There seems to be one out of place, cracked in half on the floor. On the edge of the fountain's stone structure sits a single gold goblet.

"I can see why treasure hunters would come here," she says.

Tenia wonders whatever happened to the people that at one point called this place home. Looking around, she again, notes no visible foot prints. Holding her wrist out, the map shows this lonely passage just before a massive stairwell that leads down toward the inner levels and toward Magma's location. The map vanishes as she begins to make her way toward the doorway. One of the spheres of energy swoops downward, laminating the stairs before her as she carefully makes her way down. Winding down for a few moments, she then enters a smaller room. The room is lined with many crates and other objects.

"Storage," she says.

At the end of the room are two smaller wooden doors. One is partially blocked by a few wooden crates. Some opened, others still sealed shut. Tenia carefully moves around an opened crate to see what looks like wine bottles unopened in them.

“Strange, these are not that old,” she says.

Turning slowly, she realizes a sudden change in the room. The energy feels different, something has disturbed the energy structure that the room would normally have. Other than furniture and other solid objects that do not give off an electrical force, a body which usually has mass has entered and broken her sphere. A little trick Dra'con taught her, use her natural abilities to feel the energy around her. From that, she could feel changes that were close to her. Two of the spheres slowly float behind her as she turns. The spheres suddenly stop and begin to shoot out electrical arches around her for protection.

“Impressive, the young wife comes to rescue the hapless husband. The fact that you made it in this far gives me the most concern,” a damaged and older female voice says from the darkness.

Tenia holds her position. The single energy sphere that sat just above the doorway quickly floats before her, splitting in two. Now surrounded by four energy spheres, the room becomes a lot brighter than before. Casting creepy shadows all around her, yet giving her enough

light to see the lone figure standing in the now visible corner of the room.

Tenia's fear now turns to anger.

"Where is he witch?!" Tenia says strongly while pulling out her blade across her body in a defensive stance.

"My dear beautiful Tenia, you ask questions that will never be answered I am afraid," the voice says.

From the darkness the bog witch slowly moves into the light. A strange glowing green fog creeps from around her body as she moves forward. Her dark dry bark like skin creaks as she moves. There are small traces of dead moss that cling onto parts of her. The foul smell of stagnate water that has been sitting for years fills the room. Her stringy grayish colored hair entangles itself in a fog trail that seems to rise above her head. Standing in the middle of the room, the bog witch looks at Tenia with glowing dead eye sockets.

"You know me?" Tenia asks.

"I know a lot of things dear. I have watched you and your husband for some time. Learning about you, there were even times where I was just an arm's length from you both, and you knew not," the witch says with a voice that vibrates the surrounding air.

"Then you know what I will do to get my husband back! Where is he?" asks Tenia taking a few steps toward the bog witch.

She had never seen a bog witch in her lifetime, but had heard many tales of their deception and the illnesses that they would bring to unsuspecting villages. The stench is strong and overwhelming, but Tenia does not show it.

“The handsome boy is being a good little specimen I am afraid. Oh so special he is to some, but in my eyes, I see beauty and a strong life force! I will caress his once health body and his soul shall remain in my dark waters trapped for eternity as will yours!”

Suddenly, the bog witch throws up her hand to the sound of cracking wood as a blast of cold air and fog streak toward Tenia. The blast hits Tenia shield of energy. Even though protected by the field, she is still thrown into the air, crashing through several wooden crates behind her. The bog witch's magic is powerful. Tenia leaps up as one of the spheres projects an energy blast at the witch. The energy hits a visible fog barrier and dances round its surface as lightening in storm clouds. Tenia attacks! Swinging at the witch with a sphere just inches from her fists. The witch vanishes in a dense fog cloud, just before reappearing behind Tenia. Striking her from behind, her sharp wooden nails penetrate her should. She tosses Tenia like a doll into the stone wall. She slams up against the wall, but releases two spheres toward the witch with an out stretched hand. The spheres explode on impact, knocking debris from the ceiling while creating a huge hole in the wall where the witch once

stood who vanished in the fog. The dense fog sweeps up just before Tenia as the bog witch's wooden grotesque hand reaches up from within the fog and grabs her by the neck. She lifts the struggling Tenia out of the debris, holding her high as her body becomes tangible once again.

“What...does the Minotaur...want with my...husband!?” Tenia struggles to say.

“How do you know this?” the witch asks with anger while applying pressure to Tenia's neck.

“Surprised? You say...you were watching...us? Maybe it was...you who was...being watched!” says Tenia trying to breathe.

In anger, the witch tosses Tenia into a huge stack of wooden crates violently. The huge crates break into pieces and come crashing down on her. Tenia, in desperation, tosses the last two energy spheres at the bog witch. The witch reaches up, slapping them out of the air into a tall crate behind her as it explodes on contact. The wood and the stone statue inside the crate shatter into pieces. Without warning, several tree roots burst through the stone floor and wrap around Tenia's legs and arms. They lift her up into the air as the bog witch laughs loudly.

“You, you are amusing young mage! Amusing to the end I suppose. I have battled countless mages before you! Stronger, smarter, and even prettier than you!” her crackling voice pierces Tenia's ears.

The witch walks up and stands before Tenia, reaching out and tightly wrapping her long fingers around her neck. She squeezes, the roughness of her skin cuts into Tenia's flesh as blood begins to run down through her fingers and down the front of Tenia's now dirt filled shirt.

“You peaked my curiosity momentarily before the answer came to me. Those filthy dogs! There is no other explanation. How else could you have found your way into the catacombs and survived this long! Why they would let you live puzzles me though? But as of now, that does not matter. We will free the Minotaur and he will regain again over that which was once his! And we will start here on this blessed island! With or without your husband's help!”

Tenia struggles to breathe as the bog witch pulls her closer.

“As for your filthy husband, he will be joining you shortly!” says the bog witch as the glowing fog begins to encircle both her and Tenia.

“Not...today!” Tenia says as blood begins to run from her nose.

Suddenly, large electrical currents overcome the both of them. Violently dancing over their bodies. The sudden smell of burnt wood fills the air as the bog witch screams in agony. Her head jolts back as her empty eyes sockets violently burst from the electrical charge that is surging throughout her body. The witch screams a horrible vibrating scream that causes the stone walls around them to tremble. Tenia can almost feel a layer of flesh being stripped away from her face as she

closes her eyes in pain. A small amount of blood slowly trickles from Tenia's ear just as an explosion of energy send her flying across the room. Her body impacts the stone wall with force as she hits the ground face first. Smoke fills the room from the pile of burning wood, the remains of the witch. Moments pass, Tenia slowly begins to move. Sitting upward and refocusing her vision to see several pieces of bright red amber slowly falling before her. She slowly leans back against the wall as she wipes the blood from her mouth. Her ears still ring from the scream, she glances over at the remains of the bog witch in the distance. This fatal move was something that she had done only once, on Dra'con. Channeling her energy and releasing it on anything she was in contact with. A technique that he explained would only work if she was in direct contact with the enemy. Direct contact with the enemy, something she never thought she would have to experience. Yet his intense training paid fully on this day.

“That still hurts,” she says trying to catch her breath.

Tenia slowly places her blooded hand against the wall and begins to stand. Walking gingerly and with a slight limp, she takes a few painful steps while circling around the pile of smoldering debris toward her blade. Reaching down, she grabs the blade Dra'con gave her by its hilt. She slides it back into the sleeve strapped to her leg. She turns and moves at a quickened pace through the doorway toward Magma's location.



Magma slowly begins to open his eyes. Feeling stunned and having a vague memory of what happened, he finds his surrounding much different than before. His eyes are drawn to the crackling sound that he hears beside him. A wood burning torch that hangs on the side of a stone wall illuminates the room with a soft glow. Several more are scattered along the walls around him. As he begins to look over his surroundings, it is now certain that this is not the cave he once occupied, but a large octagon shaped room. At each of the eight sided walls sits a door. Each of these doors are magnificently crafted from what appears to be different types of exotic material. Wood, Iron, Steel, Bronze, Stone, Crystal, Glass, and Copper. Magma sits in the center of this large room. Looking down he sees that he sits just above an octagonal symbol that is elevated a few inches above the stone floor. He tries to move, but is tightly bound by thick brown roots that come up through several large cracks in the floor. His hands seem to be encased in a ball created from the roots. Looking down he sees that his legs are also bound by the same roots. The roots have also ripped large holes through his gray trousers.

“Ah man, I really liked these pants!” he says.

The dark roots hold him just inches off the ground, steady and strong. The sound of creaking bark is heard echoing off the walls as the roots tighten, restricting his movement. He begins trying to remember how he got here. What happened before he blacked out? As these thoughts

cloud his mind, he suddenly remembers. The horrible sound of stone collapsing around him, then the deafening scream, or what he believed to be a scream, which seemed to burn within his head. He recalls walking through the early morning woods on his normal route to the village of Godwin. A small farming village not too far to the south. The giant red sun had just begun to settle upward as he heard a disturbance in the distance that seemed to echo through the woods. Holding tightly to his leather shoulder pack, he quickly makes his way toward the noise. Curious if someone was injured. Running through the woods, he makes his way to a small clearing off the beaten path. There he finds a thin frail old woman in tattered farmers clothing on her knees tugging at a large mound of rocks in the middle of the forest.

“Are you alright?!” Magma shouts running up to her side dropping his pack beside them.

She continues pulling at the rocks that are visibly too heavy for her frail body to move.

“She is trapped in there! It just collapsed, please help her! Please!” she says frantically while grabbing at his vest.

Magma reaches down and grabs the frail woman gently by the arm.

“I am going to need you to stand back, okay?” he says calmly.

The woman, sobbing, reluctantly stands. Magma carefully guides her back away from the pile of rocks and places her behind him. His torso begins to glow a faint yellowish hue. The ground before him begin to shake gently.

“There is a well here! An old one at that,” he says while holding his hand outward.

In a lifting motion, Magma moves his hand upward. Controlling the rocks that cover the well. They begin to float, lifting into the air as if made from the leaves of the forest. Floating upward, Magma carefully guides them away from the top of the well. They move by his command, as he feels them, becomes them. Placing them away from the well, he moves up and leans over the well's entrance dropping to his knees at its edge and shouts down into the darkness.

“Hello, are you injured?!” he asks listening carefully for a response.

“Mommy?” a little girl's voice replies from deep within the darkness.

“Hold still, we will get you out of there!” Magma replies.

“My baby!!” the lady shouts as she runs up to his side.

“Please, the area seems extremely fragile. Any extra weight or sudden movements could bring the whole well down on her. I will get her out, I promise!” Magma says looking into the elderly woman's tear damped face.

Turning his attention to the well entrance, Magma places his hands on the edge of the well. Once again, he begins to glow. Some debris begins to fall down into the darkness and echo back with the splash of water that seem to be at the bottom.

“Damn, it is too weak to climb down!” he says.

“Mommy, I am scared!” the voice from below echoes.

“Hold on baby, we are coming!” the elderly woman shouts.

“Okay, looks like we have to do this the hard way,” he says.

Magma concentrates on the walls of the old well. From within the well, two large stone bricks from inside its walls slowly free themselves from their aged old home and slowly begin to float up toward Magma. He suddenly leaps onto them. Adjusting his weight, he begins to float over the well entrance.

“Be right back,” he says with a smile to the elderly woman as he slowly begins his descent.

Carefully lowering himself through the tight opening, he pulls his arms tightly to his body as the well shaft is a bit smaller than he thought.

“Should have had a lighter meal this morning,” he comments as small rocks begin falling down on him from the walls above as he descends causing him to blow the dirt from his face.

“It is caving in!” the little girl says frantically.

"It is okay, I am on my way to you...almost there!" he shouts as a good sized rock suddenly stops midair and hovers just above his head.

The well is deep, but he makes it down to the bottom. Jumping down off the stones, he splashes into the ankle high water. He reaches in his pouch pulling out a glow stone. The stone begins to glow brightly as he holds it just above his head.

"Hello? Little girl are you alright?" he asks.

"I want my mommy!" a voice echoes from down a small tunnel before him.

"Hold still, I am going to take you to her!"

Magma squats down making himself smaller in order to fit through the small damp tunnel. Holding the glow stone before him he is able to see the young girl sitting up against the tunnel wall just before him.

"Are you hurt?" he asks while moving toward her.

"I think I hurt my ankle," she says sobbing.

"Grab my hand, let us get you out of here," he says reaching out with his free hand.

The smile from Magma's face changes as the little girl reaches up to grab his hand. The light from the glow stone casts is on her face. Her face changes, from the gentle face of a little girl, to that of a terrible a rat demon. The creature hisses at him and suddenly tosses a small brown wrinkled bulb from its' other hand. The bulb comes up to his face, before

impact, it suddenly bursts. Causing a thick white pollen to quickly fill the air while sticking to his face and entering his nostrils. He begins to cough violently and gasping for air. Jerking his hand away he stumbles backward unable to see and is disorientated. Instinctively, he quickly forces several stones from the cavern wall toward the rat demon. The stones strike the rat, knocking it further back into the tunnel as it squeals. Trying to catch his balance, Magma places his hands against the sides of the tunnel. Without warning, the ground beneath him erupts with wicked dark plant roots that snake around him quickly, pulling him down through the ground below as he blacks out.

“Memory coming back to you now is it?” a deep voice says from the darkness.

Lifting his head, Magma’s torso begins to glow.

“You have to be in contact with the earth to be able to control it. I am sure you already know this? I tried to explain this to the witch, but sadly, the knowledge of magic does not always loan itself to those who use it,” the heavy voice tells him.

Magma turns his head in the direction of something large approaching. The heavy muffled footsteps become louder as what sounds like hooves on a stone street echo, becoming louder at each step. The light from the torches within the room are just bright enough for him to see the approaching silhouette approaching. From within the single dark hallway the silhouette lowers its head as it passes through. Once in the well lit room, the beast is easily identified. The massive muscular body covered with long dirty brown hair. The huge bull like head, horns that seem sharpened to penetrate even the thickest of flesh. There is no doubt what Magma sees standing before him.

“A minotaur? Not that is different,” says Magma.

The small skulls that line the shoulder straps are joined together by a battle worn leather tunic jostles loudly as he moves in front of Magma.

“It is good to finally meet you Magma. By the expression on your face I can assume that you have never seen a creature such as I?” the Minotaur says with almost a smile on his bull like face.

“I heard tales of beings such as yourself, having the face only a mother could love,”

The Minotaur breaks out into laughter.

“Good, no fear! I would have been very disappointed if you were to display any irrational emotion such as fear. I am sure you are overflowing with an absurd amount of endless questions, so please,” he says gesturing with his hand.

“It is nice that you know who I am, but I only have one question. What do you want?” Magma asks angrily.

The mythical beast stands with dark black eyes that show no emotion staring directly into Magma’s. His metal war hammer slides from his hand and strikes the stone floor with a thud of thunder. Grabbing his hammers thick wooden handle with humanoid like hand, he leans forward.

“Straight to the most reasonable question I see. Excellent! As for what is it I want? That prodigious question has many answers in itself. But, before I answer on your question, allow me to plant this particular seed into your undeveloped mind. What if I told you, you are not the only remaining earth elemental?”

Magma's eyes widen with surprise.

“Ah, curiosity peaked? Good, allow me to feed your mind, even if it is just a taste, so that you might hunger for more. What you see before you is a lie! Do you know why?” the Minotaur asks.

“You are the accursed! To become what you are would mean something horrible was done by your hand causing your banishment to these catacombs. I would dare say it was not honorable!”

Unnoticed behind Magma, out of the Minotaur's field of vision, a slow but steady stream of sand particles begin quietly to slide toward Magma.

“Honorable? Honorable, I took the lives of fourteen members of what was once called The Council of the Living Well, a group of radicals that saw earth elementals as a threat. An abomination that tipped the balance away from the mages and healers that protected their cities!” he says with a burning hatred in his eyes.

“You?!?”

“We were the species that should have not existed. I tried to protect our people, I was their only voice! And for this I was seen as more than a threat, but a movement that could have over thrown a weak and imperfect society. Those that shared my mutual values were eliminated immediately of course. So tell me, who failed in being honorable?”

"It is impossible? How can you be an elemental?" Magma says fearing the truth.

"Impossible? Really Magma, is that all you can say? Impossible? I think you know I am telling the truth,"

The Minotaur quickly drops to one knee before Magma's face as a blast of hot air flows from his large black nostrils. The silver ring that pierces his nose gathers moisture on its surface as Magma turns his head slightly to avoid being sprayed in the face. The Minotaur grabs his face with his large filthy hand and turns his head back to face his.

"What do you feel Magma?! What does your body and mind tell you?!" the Minotaur asks.

Magma cannot move away. He knows what the Minotaur says is true. He only knows what Rynos once told him. The myth of natural born elementals and how they ceased to exist, vanished without a trace. While keeping his focus, the sand particles continue collecting on the roots. Slipping in between the cracks and crevices. They slowly begin to move over the surface of the roots bounding Magma's hands and legs.

"You can sense it! I know you can! Your abilities make you an outcast, a flaw in a perfect society of mages and priestesses they all refuse to see our type as an equal! But to understand, one must have the knowledge! Knowledge....is what you are lacking, and it is what I offer," the Minotaur releases his face and stands.

He walks over to one of the eight doors and places his large hairy hand on its' surface.

"You asked me before what was it I wanted. Freedom, the same freedom that you take for granted each and every day of your being! I want to be able to leave these walls that have become my everlasting prison. Once I have gained the freedom that was taken from me, my homeland. You and I, I know they must be others! Others that to feel that they were accursed! We shall not be seen as outcast ever again!" he says as he moves to another door.

"Somewhere, behind one of these many doors is the key to my lasting freedom," he says.

"Some doors are not meant to be opened," replies Magma.

The sand particles stick to the roots and begin moving around on its dry surface, faster and faster. Stripping off the dark brown skin of the root, exposing the soft tissue below. Slowly weakening the roots that hold his feet and hands.

The Minotaur turns and laughs loudly, his voice echoes off the walls that surround them.

"Humor, you amuse me Magma. Tied and unable to escape, you still find a way to keep the seriousness of your position...light hearted? My associate, sees you as a failed mage. A failed mage she says, hmmm, as you now can comprehend she does not nor will she ever quite

understand our unique abilities. She would not understand even if I had taken the time to explain," he says with a smile.

The Minotaur reaches over and grabs his war hammer, gripping it tightly by the wooden handle, he raises it high placing it on his shoulder. The weapon vibrates the air in the room. He turns to face the glass door before him. Glancing back at Magma, he smiles. Then with a mighty swing, his hammer circles toward the glass door. The iron shackles around his wrists rattle loudly as the hammer comes into contact with the glass surface. The impact vibrates through Magma's body as the deafening noise brings pain to his uncovered ears. But, to his surprise, as if striking a spider demon's web, his steel war hammer bounces off the glass door, undamaged. The Minotaur looks at the door and reaches over to brush the surface where the hammer made contact with his hand.

"I have tried to explain to her time and time again that no simple mage can do what I need done. For some strange reason she would venture out returning with mages and sorceress alike. Feeble, but it was her way of trying to help of course. How could I complain? But no matter how powerful they were, they could not even scratch its' surface. Their bones began to fill these aged rooms below, becoming boring and quite unnecessary. Only one with unique skills can break the spell placed on these magnificent treasures," the Minotaur says while staring at the door.

He walks over to another door and places his hand on its' surface.

"I must help...my people...our people,"

"You cannot undo the past! Earth elementals were a casualty of that time. We must not let the actions of the past dictate how we live today!" Magma shouts.

"That past is one of ignorance and cruelty! A blood stain that cannot be wash away, but remembered! We can finally put an end to their suffering!"

"This is not about their suffering, it is about your suffering! And what of those that exist now? Those who had no hand in what their ancestors did, are they too to suffer for the crimes of their past?"

"Suffer? That is such a strong expression. My intention is to leave no stone unturned in search for our people and set them free! No longer will we be obedient, no longer will we be misguided, sent into the darkness of the deepest dungeons to quietly rot away! No, this will not continue. Will you deny our people of this opportunity?" the Minotaur asks as he begins to approach Magma.

"I understand and feel for those of which you speak, but this is not the way to freedom. It is a path to destruction and hate! You would lead them down a path where they too would mimic those who did them harm? If you do, that would make you no different from those you condemn," replies Magma.

“Magma, we live in a time where the mage see themselves as the ultimate users of magic. And to most, this is true. Yet, every once in a while nature does something astounding. She gathers her hands together tightly, squeezing until the blood of the pasts souls burn against her skin. An unfavorable taunt against the gods, she bends the rules. And from this, something more pure, more precious is born,” motions the Minotaur with his hands.

“Can you not see that your hate is misguided? This is not the way...”

The sand that moves into the root ball that bounds Magma's hands begins ripping through the roots. More and more sand unseen by the Minotaur slides up from the ground, down the cracks in the stone, and up to Magma's feet and hands. Working hard and fast as if they were alive.

“To freedom?! Is it not? The things I could show you, what you could learn from me!”

The Minotaur holds up his barely unrecognizable hand and looks over it in disgust.

“This state prohibits me from using my true power! But you, you my friend could crush the foundations around you with a wink of your eye! I still remember the river of Ni, the mountain on which our people collected the materials we used for building the galaxies most epic structures! We are family my brother, bound by blood, and bound by what we are!” he says strongly while closing his fist.

“You, you are from my home planet?! How is this possible?”

questions Magma.

The Minotaur stands before him. Looking down on his brethren.

“Will you do this for me brother? Will you aid me in starting our revolution?”

Magma sits with his eyes wide and filled with tears as emotions run wild in his body.

“I cannot let you do this...our people...our ancestors, they would not approve,” he says.

“Of course not, they would rather just stand by and do nothing!” the Minotaur says while raising his war hammer to his shoulder with a thud.

“Earthers like you and I learned how to manipulate the ground around us at an early age...not control it...there is a difference,”

“I know!” shouts Magma.

The roots that bound him make a loud snapping noise as Magma breaks free. Using the particles of sand to force his body into the air he leaps forward toward the Minotaur. His fists become engulfed with the sand as it hardens and with a blow that shakes the foundation of the room, he punches the Minotaur huge bull like head. Knocking the huge creature back into the wall with all his might. The stone formed around his hands brakes into pieces from the impact. Magma lands, ready to take on this creature that has held him close. But as he stands, prepared to

fight, his legs suddenly begin to buckle causing him to fall to the stone floor on his hands and knees. The room feels as if it spins on its' own axis while tilting back and forth. What is this vertigo that has swept over him suddenly? Wave after wave it comes, clouding his vision. Unable to lift his head up, he hears the heavy footsteps of the Minotaur as he approaches. His eyes struggle to see past the stone floor beneath him. Two dirty and worn hooves come into his field of vision, stopping just before him.

"This is why I wanted you by my side, the fire that flows in your soul is like my own! It is a sign of a ferocity that has failed to be a part of our people. They need this type of motivation!" the Minotaur's hammer drops down beside Magma's head with a thunderous boom.

"She insisted on giving you an herbal that would burn your insides causing you great pain and discomfort, but I wanted to weaken you, not kill you. The pollen from the death root bulbs cause extreme dizziness for anyone that happens to breathe in their toxic powder. So their name can be a little misleading. The toxin tends to stay in your system for a while, becoming active when the subject tries to do anything strenuous. Even so, I had hoped that you would find a way to free yourself, it shows that you are more powerful than I had ever hoped. I noticed your boots were designed to give you more contact to the ground by removing the fabric from their bottoms. Excellent work, if I may say," he says while lowering to both knees.

He slowly lifts Magma's face with his filthy long nailed hand.

“Help me remove this curse and we shall go on a crusade like no other before us! Help me, bring back our people from the depths which they were banished,”

The Minotaur suddenly pauses, glancing over his shoulder. There is a slight rumble in the distance, muffled by the thick stone walls. He snorts and smirks before speaking.

“Hmm, it would seem she is a bit more edgy than what I expected. Oh well, she saved me the trouble of killing the old hag myself. Now, if you will excuse me. It seems I have to welcome our other guest,” he says while standing.

Grabbing his war hammer, the Minotaur begins walking toward the open hallway. He stops before crossing the threshold.

“I should have expected that you would have chosen someone just as strong,” he says while vanishing in the darkness as a large thick wooden door drops from the ceiling behind him.

“Tenia...” Magma struggles to breathe knowing his wife has walked into a trap.

Tenia glances down at the holographic map. The light green hue from the hologram brightens the walls around her as she moves quickly down a long corridor. A yellow throbbing solid circle on the map begins to quicken as tiny small dots show the distance from her target. She is close, really close. But she noticed that Magma's life signs seem to change. He is having a difficult time breathing. A medical overlay comes up beside the map, showing a toxic compound that has entered his system. The overlay gives her information on the toxin and several different types of cures.

"Hold on hun, I am coming!" she says.

Tenia begins running. The tan sash around her waist flows as she runs to the end of the passage. A dead end? She turns and runs back the way she came. Going through another thick wooden door and down this passage. This place was designed to confuse travelers who would enter its halls. It had even managed to trick her sensors meaning magic was indeed involved. Tenia stops at the end of another long hallway and stands just before two sets of wooden doors at the end of the dark passage. On her left is a short hallway with a doorway, and on her right is a hallway that seems to angle downward toward another door. Two spheres of bright electricity quickly float ahead and up toward the double doors. Holding up her wrist, the coordinates direct her to the door on the left. The huge hallways are uncomfortably quiet. Tenia turns and begins

walking down the left corridor. She suddenly pauses, sensing something different about the air around her. The currents around her feel as if they were being pushed. Her eyes widen. Turning around just as a giant war hammer strikes her from within the darkness. The old wooden door shatters as the force of Tenia's body penetrates through causing pieces of dry wood to litter the air. Hitting the ground, she is able to land on her feet, keeping her balance as she comes to a stop at a nearby wall. Quickly standing defensively, her body sparks from the electrical force shield that surrounds her.

"An electric shield? I am impressed Tenia," the Minotaur says while stepping into the light.

The Minotaur slowly enters the room. The sound of wood crushing under his weight. He holds his war hammer firmly gripped in both hands. Tenia clasps her hands together, then slowly pulls them apart creating a web of electricity that lights up the walls around them both.

"Quite impressive," the Minotaur says as he charges her.

He is incredibly fast. Tenia just barely falls to the floor out of the path of the hammer as it screams just inches above her body. She counters with a bolt of electricity that strikes the Minotaur's shoulder. He stumbles back a few steps. Electricity covers Tenia's body, lifting her up from the floor, levitating momentarily before landing on her feet. The Minotaur charges again. Again Tenia sends an electrical bolt toward him, he holds

out his hammer blocking the bolt as he lowers his head. Tenia's body glows with electricity as she leaps upward just above the Minotaur as he charges. Once over his head, she touches his back. Sending a blast of energy against his body. The Minotaur screams as he is thrown through the wall before him. Tenia lands and blasts the ceiling above causing it to cave in on the Minotaur. She quickly turns and runs down the hallway that angles downward toward a door. Stopping before the giant door. She thrust both palms toward it. The door shatters from an electrical force. Tenia looks through the falling debris to see Magma on his hands and knees on the stone floor. She smiles at the sight of him. Magma slowly raises his head to see her blurred image. A smile comes to his face also, but is quickly removed by the image of the Minotaur coming up behind her. Magma instinctively shifts his glowing hands upward, pulling the stone floor up behind Tenia creating a barrier just as the Minotaur crashes through the stone wall. Tenia turns, and while falling back into the room, she releases an electric web that weaves around the debris to trap it's prey. The giant ball of stone and wood fall before her empty. Tenia looks at the lump of rocks confused, but quickly turns and makes her way to Magma's side. She lowers to her knees, hugging him tightly.

“A Minotaur with teleportation skills? Really?!” says Tenia with a smile as her eyes begin to water.

“You know me, I make friends anywhere. I have to keep it interesting right?” replies Magma while holding her with one arm.

Tears streak down her face as she leans her head back looking over him carefully before gazing into his eyes. Reaching behind her, she digs into the pouch underneath her tattered shirt and removes a small coin sized silver disk with a clear bubble like protrusion on its' surface. Pressing her finger against its' surface, four tiny spikes eject from its' bottom. Quickly shaking the disk briskly in the air, Tenia places it against his neck. The spikes clamp on to his rock like skin breaking the surface as the pink liquid inside the see through top begins to drain. A glowing blue ring around the disks edges slowly spins around for a moment, then stops, glowing brightly once the antidote has been completely injected into his system.

“Ouch?” Magma says weakly.

Tenia looks at him sarcastically.

“When did you become...become such a prolific healer?” Magma asks as the dizziness begins to dissipate.

“As much trouble as you get into you really have to ask?” she replies.

“This should help with the toxin in your system,” Tenia says while lifting her hand to gently stroke his face.

“Where did you get this from?” Magma asks while reaching up to touch the metallic disk on his neck.

Tenia catches his hand mid-way, slowly pulling it away from the injector.

“Boks designed these for you and your father, per Raine's specifications. She had requested them on several occasions after patching your father up. She wanted something that would penetrate that tough hide the two of you have. Now let the anti-toxin do its' job,” Tenia says smiling at him.

“Lucky for me you can learn,” he says jokingly.

“Just a little,” she replies.

“I never thought I would see your beautiful face again,” Magma tells her while she helps him to his feet.

“Ah, the romantic couple, united once again!” a voice says in the distance.

They both turn to see the Minotaur peering through the large hole from within the darkness.

“But could it be? What are the odds that two elementals would cross paths let alone become romantically involved? I am truly in the presence of history! It is more than what I could have even imagined. To witness not only one person, but two that could be the key to our

people's resurrection from extinction!" he says while stepping through the massive hole.

Tenia steps in front of Magma suddenly.

"I just want to take my husband home, please let us leave in peace," she asks calmly.

"Ah, the Tiefling diplomat attempts to calm me. Your abilities are useless here my dear. This is my domain, no matter how cursed I may be, I am fully the master of all that surrounds me!"

Magma's torso suddenly begins to glow as he motions his hands through the air ripping up parts of the stone floor beside him.

Tenia quickly speaks, trying to stop another attack from the Minotaur.

"Magma, wait!" she shouts.

But Magma has already forced the large chunks of stone towards the Minotaur. The beast almost kindly smiles while holding his mighty war hammer out before him. His large dark eyes and war hammer begin to glow yellow in the dimly lit room. An invisible barrier around the Minotaur shatters the large fragments of stone hurled at him into small fragments of dust. The dust falls harmlessly to the ground before the smiling Minotaur.

Tenia's eyes open wide. She has only seen one person able to do such feats, and he is standing behind her.

“By your expression I can tell that you do not understand why your mate is here. We have a mutual connection,” the Minotaur says as he places his war hammer over his shoulder in a laid back manner.

“What in the hell are you talking about?” Tenia asks.

“Please,” he gestures at Magma.

“He, the Minotaur, is from possibly from my home world,” Magma says.

“What?” replies a shocked Tenia.

“We are from the same land my dear. We are blood brothers, bounded by our people. Your Magma is what was once called an Earther, unlike myself,” the Minotaur tells her.

“But as you can see, the bigger difference is that I have somewhat of a nasty little curse issue. But the good news, and it is truly good news, is that I am really looking forward to alleviating this issue with your husband’s assistance of course,” he says with a cocky attitude.

“Magma?” the confused Tenia questions, her eyes never leave the Minotaur before them.

“This curse that was placed on him is the same one that will not allow him to leave these catacombs. And from what I could gather whatever is behind one of these doors, is the key to his freedom,” says Magma beginning to get his bearings once again.

“So, as you can see, we were in the middle of a very important matter. One that you could even aid us on...” the Minotaur begins to say.

“Important enough to kidnap a counselor?!” Tenia interrupts him shouting.

“They have been watching us Tenia, probably for some time,” replies Magma.

“I got that part from his wonderful associate upstairs. She seemed a bit too knowledgeable about us. I am afraid she will not be joining us, and as I said before. I just want to take my husband home!” Tenia says in a stronger tone.

“I am sorry, but I will not help you. I will not help you extract revenge on those who are innocent. Your own actions put you here, within these catacombs! Can you not see that you are blinded by what has happened in the past? So much has changed out in the world,” Magma says.

“Changed?! Nothing has changed, you use that word too loosely. There are reasons that those somehow manage to conveniently forget one's corrupted past! The pain that the truth brings can be harsh young one. Harsh, but not forgotten! Our people were suffered onto them humiliation and selfishness that destroyed a civilization. You can never know the pain we suffered!” the Minotaur says gripping the handle of his hammer tighter.

“So how does this correct what has happened? What benefit can come of what you are trying to do? I can only see it as vengeful! You say all you want is your independence so that you can lead them out of the darkness that befalls them, but what you are doing is taking them down a darker path than what has already been traveled. Grant them the knowledge of what was once their past, let them know what forgiveness is, show them how to be stronger, and give them the will to be better than the ignorance that was once placed before them!” Magma says passionately.

Tenia looks back at her husband and smiles, this is the reason why so many people trust in him. And because of this, she is so very proud of him. Proud that he has not let the terrible truth behind why he was brought here against his will take over his emotions. Tenia turns back to the Minotaur.

“I pity you,” she says.

“Hmm, you speak of pity? The house of Las would have never showed pity! Would they have shown forgiveness? I believe not!” the Minotaur says with a devilish smile.

“What did you just say?!” questions Magma as a look of horror comes over his face.

“If you will not assist me, then I have no use for you. You both disappoint me, to throw away your lives knowing that you could be the

last of your kind...that is a pity," the Minotaur says calmly while removing his war hammer from his shoulder.

"No, you will not harm him anymore," Tenia says softly.

Tenia begins to weave another electrical web between her hands. Moving in front of Magma, she blocks the Minotaur's line of sight of her husband onto her. The white electricity begins to cover her body causing the room to glow brightly from the energy being produced by her. Suddenly, the Wolf's Tooth around her neck mysteriously lifts from her skin and shatters. Her clothing sways slowly as if being pushed by an unseen wind. Gently pulling and tugging at her shirt. Magma feels the air around them begin to electrify and much becoming heavier than before. The mysterious glowing powder that was once inside the Wolf's Tooth is now flowing through the air around Tenia. Slowly swirling, growing larger and larger as Tenia's arms spread wide. Then without warning, a strange sound is heard, a popping sound. The air around them seems to sparkle and explode with energy from the mystical powder that flows past Magma's widen eyes.

"What is this?" Magma thinks to himself.

The silver looking powder begins to grow and moves around them both. First in a chaotic frenzy, without shape. Then suddenly, without warning it changes, now it moves with a purpose. Moving into streamed and controlled electrical arcs before Tenia. The cloud of electricity and

silver powder begin coming together, taking form. Now before her stands the forms of several wolves created from the combination of electrically charged powder and something else unseen by his eyes. Glowing brightly, the beasts stand before her glaring down the Minotaur with white cold eyes.

“Tenia? You can summon?!” A surprised Magma asks.

Looking up at Tenia, Magma's vision is blurred by the glowing light that surrounds her body. Arcs of lightning strike the ground around her, kicking up small fragments of stone it has broken away from the surface. Tenia's demeanor changes as she slowly turns to glance back at her husband with hot white eyes and statically charged hair. A very different voice flows from her lips. One that he recognizes and the astral projection of the wolves that stand before her.

*“No harm shall come to you my love!”* the voices says.

The Minotaur frowns, then charges wielding his massive war hammer. A blood curdling howl is heard as a powerful arc of energy flows from Tenia's palms toward the Minotaur. Within the energy that flows toward the Minotaur are the electrically charged wolves. Streaking toward the Minotaur, they run on the currents that carry them. In a blast that shakes the octagon shaped room, they collide with the Minotaur. They move around him at an incredible speed. Slicing his skin with sharp claws and causing parts of his tattered clothing to catch aflame. The

Minotaur swings his hammer blindly as one of his eyes explodes from the powerful energy that is being sent flowing through his body. The Minotaur's hammer glows bright as it moves through one of the approaching wolves body. The wolf suddenly explodes against his massive body, causing his nose ring to rip through his skin while falling to the floor smoldering. The impact forces him through the wall behind him and into the hallway. He slides and rolls uncontrollably before another wolf hits him from the side, knocking him into the air and through an adjacent wall. An exterior wall. The electrically charged teeth of one of the wolves rips off his hand, sending the hammer down to the ground on a free fall with all of them. Once outside the catacomb walls, the spell that keeps the Minotaur inside begins to show its' true strength. As the sunlight creeps over the mountain, it gives warmth and light over the land and onto the Minotaur. Strange symbols suddenly appear on his chest, back, legs, arms, and face. His hair covered skin begins to blister and boil from the sun's rays. He screams in agony as the wolves converge on his body. Within a burst of energy, his body shatters into a cloud of dust. The reflective multicolor dust cloud slowly begins its' descent to the grounds below as a faint howl can be heard cutting through the soft morning wind.

There is a stillness that over covers everything, a silent and smothering darkness. From within this darkness a voice arises penetrating all that is around it. Muffled and unrecognizable. Tiny flashes of bright blue light seem appear and vanish from within the darkness itself. The strange muffled sound begin to increase in intensity, causing Tenia to slowly awaken from her slumber. She opens her eyes only to be greeted by blurred and unrecognizable surroundings. Yet, what she can identify is the slow movement of a surface. A surface that seems to have the color of grass moving, moving away from her. She sluggishly lifts her head to see what looks like the entry of the catacombs as it slowly fades into the distance. Her vision begins coming back into focus. The sound of birds singing all around her, it is a more than welcomed sound. The gloominess that covered the area like a shroud of death feels as if it has been lifted. The dry smell of death has been replaced with the scent of nature once again. Glancing upward, Tenia closes her eyes slightly as bright streaks of sunlight beam downward from an opening in the clouds overhead. She now has a clearer understanding of what is happening. With a smile, she tightens her arms, gently caressing his neck. The scent of Bauge root still on his skin, fills her nostrils as she breathes in deeply. The scent of home. Magma always wore the Bauge root cream she had purchased for him, the sweet smelling plant was not his favorite, but he wore it for her. She remembers how he complained constantly about the smell. How it was

too sweet, how scent made his eyes water. Whenever on travel, she would smell it around them within the forest. A tart yet honeyed smell. It brings back thoughts of them when they were young. The many fights they would have between them. What then seemed more like a strong yet strange type of hate for one another, turned into something else quite different. Dra'con told her that he knew they would one day be an inseparable couple. He never told them how he knew, just that he knew the day would come where the bond that they formed would surface. With this happy thought in her awakened mind, she giggles.

"That is a strange way to wake up," says Magma while walking with Tenia in his arms.

He carries her with the love that she has always felt from him. With her arms wrapped around his neck, she leans back blowing the uncontrolled wild lock of hair away from her face.

"You should keep your hair like that more often, I like it," he says with a warm smile.

"What happened?" she asks.

"You collapsed, scared me for a moment there," Magma says while continuing to make his way through the woods.

"Collapsed?"

"Yes, seems that summoning takes a lot out of you, who knew?"

"Summoning?" Tenia asks surprised.

“You do not remember? The wolves? You somehow summoned a pack of electrically charged wolves. Mighty impressive I might add,”

“Magma, you know I cannot summon. I cannot believe...” Tenia replies.

“Well my dear, you did. And it was magnificent and frightening all at the same time. You looked...different, sexy almost,”

“Wait, I remember now. I remember the Minotaur standing before us, he was going to charge, I am sure of it. But I do not remember what happened after that. Magma, what did I do? Did I harm you?” Tenia asks with worry.

“No my sweet, your summoned entities destroyed the Minotaur. Quite impressively I would add. Remind me not to get on your bad side,”

A smile slowly comes to her face.

“I saved your butt again did I not!?” she says with a smirk on her dirty face.

Magma continues looking forward.

“I could have handled it,” he says.

“Right,” Tenia pulls her arms around him tightly as they press forward moving through a dense area of the woods.

As the sun begins to creep up through the trees, Tenia closes her eyes in relief as she cannot believe what they have just gone through. It had been sometime since they had an adventure together. When they

were younger, it seemed a solar cycle never went by without something incredible happening. Even though Dra'con and the others visit every once in a while, she finds herself missing her friends and the crazy things that would always happen when helping others. Curiously, she notices that something seems different. She reaches down and grabs the Wolf's Tooth, pulling it up to get a better look at it. The strange semitransparent white tooth reflects seems to soak in the sunlight as her eyes focus on the silver and black sand swirling around inside calmly. Magma starts talking about how he got inside the catacombs, when a strange feeling overcomes Tenia. This sense is one that she has felt before. The chill in her bones, to the uneasiness that overcame her when she stood at the base of the castle. Her eyes are pulled toward the wooded area behind them as Magma moves forward, away from the woods. There, standing part way behind the base of a large tree is the alpha wolf. He looks at her with deep yellow eyes. Tenia's eyes momentarily change, mimicking the eyes of the alpha wolf. She now sees through his eyes, and can somehow recognize his feelings. Her lips move, but make now sound. The voices of the pack pulsate mind.

*"We shall always be with you,"*

Slowly, the glow from her eyes fade back to their normal green color. She wants to thank them, but she knows they can feel what she is feeling. They are linked, and if it was not for their intervention, she and

Magma would not be able to walk this path, going home. She never would have even thought about what it is to have a familiar, especially on that was a summoned friend. The alpha wolf lowers its head and within a thick cloud of dark gray vapor, he vanishes. In the distance, a soft howl is heard piercing the sun lit trees. A smile comes to Tenia's face.

"Sounds like you made some new friends," Magma says while stepping over a small downed branch on the pathway.

The sun reflects off the metal clips on his dark boots as he walks to the sound of dirt being crushed beneath his feet. Tenia looks into Magma's eyes as he look forward. Her heart saddens at what he has just learned.

"Was all that he said, do you think it was truth?" she asks hesitantly.

"There were many things he said that I would have brushed off as lore. But, he knew too much of my homeland. With all that said, he wanted to remove his curse. That begs the question, what was in one of those rooms that would have removed the curse placed on him?"

Magma replies.

"So do you think are others, like you and I?" she asks.

"I do not know, I do not know who to even question on that matter,"

"What about Garum? Could it be possible he may know more about this guy? Maybe his story?" Tenia questions.

“How do you even begin to ask?”

“Magma, he is your father. I am sure if he has any information on this guy, he be more than happy to tell you about it!”

“I know...but what puzzles me most is that he mentioned the house of Las,”

“The house of Las? What is that?” Tenia asks with curious look.

“I am not sure, something I thought I heard my father mention. Something to do with my mother, I do not remember,”

Magma struggles to remember what it was he had heard about the House of Las. He did over hear his father talking to Rynos about it on several occasions. Why was it never told to him? Why does it feel like there is more to the story than what the Minotaur mentioned?

“You know, maybe we can do some research on it? I do know a few clerics and mages you know,” says Tenia.

Magma does not answer. There are too many thoughts that cloud his mind on this subject. But now, right now, he wants to get his wife home safe. That is all that is important at this time. Tenia leans her head gently against his and closes her eyes. She is more exhausted than she realized. As they move through the forest, Magma glances at his wife and smiles.

“You know, I should be the one that is being carried,” he says with a smug look on his face.

“Oh really? Do you want me to carry you?” asks Tenia while leaning back to look into his eyes.

“You carry me? Hmmm, I do not think that possible,” Magma replies as he laughs.

“What?? I could do it you know!”

“Sure you could,”

“Put me down, I will do it right now,” Tenia says as they begin to move onto a clearing.

“You would like that, just so you could have an excuse to drop me,” replies Magma.

“Drop you? It is not like I have not done so before,” she whispers in his ear while gently kissing him.

A warm breeze sweeps across the land, gently moving her brown hair in the gust. Magma leans back while looking into her eyes. He cannot imagine life without her. He begins to laugh out loud.

“You know, that was some time ago! If I am not mistaken, we were kids. Besides, I do not believe you liked me much then,”

“No, I did not and I might have to think about if I like you now!” Tenia says while pulling herself closer thankful to have him back in her arms once more.

“You plan on keeping that thing?” she asks while looking down at the Minotaur’s war hammer tightly strapped to his back.

The hammer, now more visible in the sunlight, is quite battle worn. Dry blood stains cover some areas of the large head along with major damage and scuff marks on its' surface. There are several strange symbols that wrap around its' metal surface that she does not recognize. A warding spell perhaps. The handle's material has been repaired several times by the looks of the newly wrapped leather straps that have been installed. Question come to Tenia's mind. Who placed the curse on the Minotaur and where did this war hammer come from?

"You know, this weapon brings up a lot of questions. Questions that may not be happy answers. Are you okay with this?" she asks concerned.

"Maybe, if it can help me find some answers. Guide me I guess. I just wished I could have helped him Tenia. You know, maybe by clearing his mind. Making him understand that things are not what they once were. Prove to him that change is what moves us, what makes us better," Magma replies sadly.

"There are those who are so blinded by what they believe is right, that they cannot see any other way my love. And I am quite sure having a curse put on you pretty much takes out the ability to make logical sense out of anything you would have said to him," she tells him.

"I know,"

“Hey, head up my gloom flower. We will find out who he was and get these questions answered together, I promise,” Tenia says while placing her hands around his face and kissing his cheek.

As they make their way through the woods, the sun's rays cut through the trees with streaks of warm light. Inviting warm to be given to those that want it. The worn dirt path leads down the hill side and toward a small peaceful village in the distance. The grass lands before them open up wide, as far as the eye can see. Showing the beauty of this land. As they move forward, many thoughts enter Magma's mind. Meeting the Minotaur has opened up a lot of unknown questions for him. An uncertainty has been seeded into his mind, and uncertainty of what his future holds and what answers lie ahead for him about his past. Yet, as of now, he and his wife head home. Home, a place he thought he may not see again. She rescued him, but he will never let her rub this one in. Because he knows she will not ever let this one lie still.

The castle, now free of its unwanted curse, looks different. More light than ever forces its way inside. Inside on the once dark floors and hallways. Inside on the aged unused furniture. And on the dimly lit abandoned catacombs underneath the castle itself. The powerful curse has been lifted and many death traps that kept those from entering or leaving have been disabled due to the Minotaur's death. Deep inside, inside the octagonal room, the different material doors remain fully intact. None of them have been affected by the lifted curse, except for one. One that seems to have been affected. The wooden door on the far end is partially opened. Its' surface has also changed, it is not as dark or stained as before. The door itself, is broken its seal and opened just a bit, just enough to let the air from inside escape. Dust particles dance in the sunlight coming in through a small single vertical long window on the west wall. There is no immaculate treasure chest sitting waiting to be taken in the room, nor is there massive statues of gold lining the walls fascinating anyone who enters. The room itself is almost completely empty, except for a single, simple stone pedestal that sits in its' center. On the stone dust covered pedestal sits a plain tan robe. Undamaged by time, it sits neatly folded with a dark burgundy rope twirled in a tight spiral sitting on top of it. Just above the clothing sits an old gray book. The book and its' cover crafted from the finest of soft woods sits in perfect condition untouched for some time. This book is one of The Books of Testament. Spiritual books

that are mainly carried by the monks on Ketune, Magma's home land. They are transported with care and appreciation, and guarded by each monk who has placed a life time of studying the teachings that every page offers. Each book had his or her name engraved into the wood by a priest of their schooling. These books usually held information on the high priests or priestess that did there teachings. On its cover sits a symbol made from pure silver, the symbol of the dark arts. A crescent moon, with four large stars surrounding it. The name of the monk who the book belongs to name has been scratched out of the wood surface making it unreadable. The Book of Testament title is engraved in a thicker, much darker wording below the symbol. On its spine, is the engraved name of the dark arts priestess house, House of Las. Also known as Leela, Magma's mother.