

# Elemental Rhapsody - Revolution's Symphony

## Prologue...? - A Land that holds two Truths

Eleron, the central continent known for its modernity, teachings, and being the land of golden opportunity, that is what someone probably would have said seventy-five years ago.

“Gather around children, tell me, when was the last time you have heard of the tale of our nation? The origin of the great land of Eleron, and those who have brought it to its golden age?” said an elder, standing on the stage while ringing his golden bell.

*Golden age huh... that's what they call it now?*

“Oh you haven't heard of it? Worry not, that's why I'm here today after all.”

“A hundred years ago, there lived a young boy in the far west, no more than the age of fifteenth, his name was Sylon, Sylon Warlekath. Sylon was a man of ambition, his goals were as clear as the skies that reside above us, eyes sharper than the blade he wielded. As you all know, the land once descended into chaos, the greatest war fought on Eleron soil; The Remnant War. Who are these *Remnants* you ask? Well they believed that they were the only ones who remained truthful to Eleron's ideologies, which of course, was not the case. Together, founder Ecidicus and Sylon fought fiercely in battle, pushing the enemy back with every fight.”

“What happened next?” said one of the children, their eyes filled with the purity of innocence. If only I could have done something then.

“Well young one, the leader of the Remnants, Kronix planned something that could turn the battle around in their favour, it was risky, but if successful could retaliate against our heroes’ advances,” continued the elder.

The children hung up expressions of shock and fear, what could possibly happen to the great hero Sylon? They must have thought.

“Haha.. There’s no need to fear, nothing would ever stop the great Sylon Warlekath, not even the tallest of hurdles, nor the deepest of oceans. The Remnants decided the only way to win was to capture the capital, and split the country into two, depleting one half’s resources. A quarter of the way through their operation, Sylon saw through their plans, and decided the best way to counter their attack was to wear the enemy out first, evacuate the capital, and once they think they’ve won, circle the empty stronghold and finish what has to be done.

Our hero went ahead with his plan, and successfully baited Kronix into his trap. As for the finishing blow, Sylon and Kronix duelled among the flames of battle, but despite his best efforts, the Remnant leader was simply no match for Sylon. Kronix was defeated.”

Children awed in excitement and fascination, some even cheered and clapped, celebrating Warlekath’s great *achievement*.

“As the great war concluded, Sylon and Ecidicus parted ways, one venturing back to his home of Synoria, and the later to continue and rule Eleron. Twelve years later, Ecidicus passed at the age of sixty-seven due to a terminal illness. Unfortunately for him, his followers did not go along with what he had planned. His son Johann took the throne, and became corrupt with his new found power, plunging the empire in an era of clouded darkness. Sylon, now at the ripe age of twenty-seven, made sure his old friend’s death was not in vain. He led the great revolution we now know today as the Synorian Revolution. This heroic act gained

major support from Eleron and Synoria's people, and together with careful and precise decision making, they finally overthrew the wicked emperor, forcing those whose heart was filled with nothing but treachery out of Eleron, while even cleansing those who have been blinded by his tyrannical reign. Eleron was free once more. Because of Sylon Warlekath's actions, we now see Eleron under a new light, the Great Synorian Empire, one that will make sure no such evil can ever make a stand on this land of peace and prosperity ever again."

As the elder finished, the children cheered gleefully once more.

At that time, I stood in the distance, just far enough to hear the entire story of "Great hero Sylon Warlekath".

Honestly, that would've been a good telling of the story...

If it wasn't completely wrong.

Every so often, I hark back to that day, the day where I witnessed the fall of a generation. Would doing anything then change anything? I make myself believe so, at least. Nevertheless, I know whatever I said there would've lead to my demise anyway, but the feeling of seeing children being preached with such false information, while the elder stood so high above, as if he was some kind of prophet for a god who's will can be shaken by the dullest of words.

The real story went along the lines of something like this.

Eleron is a continent located on the centre of this world, founded by the expeditionist Ecidicus; this was the only part kept true, along with the name of the Remnant's leader Kronix. Speaking of which, the Remnants did not believe they were what remained of Eleron's true ideologies, but believed that the central government had become weak and foolish. The Remnants believed that they were the only ones who had the power to turn things around for the better, this obviously was not

the case. In the true story, Warlekath took no part in this war, this could originally be proven by any veterans who actually fought back then... if there were any left to tell the tale that is. Most of them had either been exiled from Eleron by Warlekath himself, followed Johann or had been prosecuted by Synorian officials in fear of a new uprising against their fragile reign.

The story makes it sound like the Remnants never had much of a chance to begin with, contrary to what actually happened. Under the leadership of Kronix, Remnant forces occupied the entire North-Eastern coast, however this was not the fault of the Eleron forces. Kronix had wielded a weapon which could wipe out entire army divisions without effort. The actual name of the sword was never disclosed, presuming that it did have one to begin with. The thing that was certain though, is its strength.

There was one very important thing Synoria's version of the story had left out entirely, that was the involvement of elemental essence, the same that had granted Kronix such immense power. It is reasonable for Synoria to hide the existence of such material, its capability exceeds anyone's imagination after all. Legend has it that it could destroy a country with a single swing, which although is obviously an exaggeration, does go to tell how much of an impact it had caused. Despite the matter at hand, Ecidicus still managed to weaken the Remnants with two decisive victories at Boreon and Eterneo, this would proceed to buy them enough time for what is to come.

Having gained the upper hand, the Remnants' morale had a significant increase, giving them enough confidence to unleash 'The Severation Plan' in full force. The plan, as the name suggests, was one that would split Eleron in half. Unlike what is told in Synoria's story, the Remnants were originally going to push on anyway, their way of phrasing it was simply to give Warlekath more credit for Ecidicus' victory.

Kronix and his forces pushed onwards, so much to the point where the imperials were forced to retreat from the capital, but not before Ecidicus and his four generals could finish their plan of retaliation. A third party, now known as the empire of Avalanchia approached the baffled emperor, providing their old ally with enough elemental essence to combat the incoming threat. Because of the previously mentioned key victories, Ecidicus managed to finish forging his new blade before what is to come.

The imperial forces travelled downwards to the South-east city of Jadeite, taking advantage of the oceans which would prevent any form of incirculation. Days of preparation pass, just in time for the enemy's arrival. The Remnants unleash havoc upon the Beryl region, where ruins of the tremendous battle would remain today. The two sides clash on the city borders, recorded as a bloodbath below the moon that shines high across the field. Ecidicus and Kronix duelled among the soldiers who each fought fiercely themselves. The reaction of elemental essence brought the world a battle which scale it has yet to experience. The fighting lasted till the sky faded bright orange, below the yellow sun that had replaced the crimson tainted moon, the battle came to its conclusion. Kronix, kneeling on the stone bridge, right arm lashing with blood as his severed hand now rests before Ecidicus' leg, Within the matter of seconds of his defeat, Kronix falls to the ground, as the Remnants truly become what remains of their past. Not a cheer was released despite this glorified victory, but mourns of agony for the countless who have fallen. A legend-like tale that would be seen as the stepping stones of a new Eleron, but was the truth really as prestiges as Synoria's version today? Or a victorious tragedy which has left more scarred than honoured, that is a question left debated by historians for the years to come, until it eventually strays further away after Warlekath's reformation.

After the war, the outskirts of Eleron is reduced to wastelands of different scales, some left more ruined than others. The central and

Southern regions became the symbol of prosperity and education, which naturally, became Synoria's first target. Once Ecidicus came to pass, Warlekath took advantage of the mainland's weakened state, easily reforming it to his image from manipulating the people whose life became a burden from war.

As time snaps back to where it stands today, I honestly wish the person to break this cycle of depression would be myself... if only it was as simple as the stories make it out to be.

## Chapter 1 - Dragoness

“Ah forget it,” I cried, as the bamboo fell one after the other from the strike of my steel blade.

I lay flat on the floor, sword pierced through the grass field beside my right hand. Leaves fell from the trees of spring, frocklicking in the wind before finding itself onto my face. I rested my arms and my eyes, feeling the breeze through my hair and clothing. All that thinking has left me tired yet conflicted. Is this what we must helplessly witness today while false history unfolds before us? This single question has gone through my head more times than I can count.

“Really does feel impossible doesn’t it,” I sighed, as if the air surrounding me was filled with strands of melancholy.

If change is something you yearn for, then you must do whatever you can to grasp onto it; that’s a line I would’ve looked up to in moments like these a few years ago. Unfortunately, such pure blooded innocence has no place in a world that forbids so called change.

Eventually, the contemplation caught up to me, my vision began to dim, looks like I’m falling asleep whether I liked it or not.

But of course, before anything could happen, I was interrupted by a vivid murmur coming from the afar.

“Is that a person over there?”

“Probably another one of those adventurers ” another followed shortly

“Worth a shot, might as well try asking.”

Just as my head was finally able to get some rest, I could feel a nudge upon my shoulder, what came after was an unfamiliar voice.

Was I hallucinating? Or is this some kind of lucid dream people back at the village have been talking about? No wait, this felt real.

I wearily opened my eyes. What appeared before me was two figures, one dressed in gray and desaturated silver, with a head of long brown hair held up by a gray hair band. The only vibrant colours which stood out on this man was the aqua-cyan cloth on his arm and waist, the rest could be easily mistaken for something crafted straight out of junkyard scrap... maybe that was an overstatement, but the damage it has seemingly sustained certainly doesn't happen overnight. The other, or well, the one nudging me at the moment was slightly less armoured, but still nowhere short in accessories. His shorter sleeves revealed a muscular pair of arms, presumably trained as a farmer or hunter since a young age; this assumption can be further backed up by the trainee braid growing along his shoulder.

One thing the both of them have in common however is an odd piece of cloth they wear on their backs, seems to be covering something.

“Hey, sorry to bother you,” said the one who approached in a surprisingly soothing tone. “Does there happen to be a village nearby? My friend and I would like to find a place to stay for the night.”

Could have been from shared coincidence, but the last thing I'd have expected was them knowing about any form of settlement around these parts.

“I—” as I was about to tell them about our village, I couldn't help but hesitate. Our village was by no means much of a secret, but I still can't help but feeling a bit skeptical about the current situation, and the fact that our family is always on high alert when there are guests doesn't help. Again, I could be overthinking all of this, but best off inquiring more as we walk.



“Yes, there is one,” I answered, slowly getting up from the field I layed on. “Haven’t seen anyone new around these parts in a while though, are the two of you from the southern or northern parts?”

“Ah, yes that’s correct... We’ve accepted a friend’s commission to come here, didn’t expect to get lost though,” he laughed while scratching the back of his head. “Oh right, almost forgot to introduce ourselves; I’m Ryu, the one back there is Zanis, nice to meet you.”

“Jeriah Areus, nice to meet you too.”

We ventured down the path I originally got here from. Now that I think about it, I don't think I've ever walked through here as the Sun's setting. These parts are fairly peaceful, which means training till midnight isn't particularly a concern.

“Hope you don’t mind me asking, but what was the commission about?”

Ryu seemingly paused, whatever they were about to say, should probably take it with a grain of salt. Unexpectedly, he let out a relieving chuckle before proceeding with what he had to say.

“We’re sent here to find someone,” he explained while glancing towards Zanis. “Does the name Ron Verrha happen to ring a bell?”

Verrha...

A sudden wave of realisation pierced through my head, these people aren't average adventurers are they. Surprised he could bring up that name while smiling. I nodded, which even more unexpectedly, they didn't have much of a reaction for.

“I think the points connect pretty well, don't they? And from what it looks like, we're not the only ones keeping secrets... are we?”

“To have resided all the way out here, it'd seem you're no ordinary person either,” Zanis finally spoke from the back. Unlike Ryu, his earnest voice and tone is beginning to shift my original perception.

“Perhaps such secrets will be revealed sooner than we’d expect,” I replied.



We arrived at the village after a long walk, which felt much longer with the surrounding tension. As we entered the gates, we received countless stares from residents, some of them being my relatives, who would’ve normally waved towards our direction. Although this certainly feels unwelcoming, I can’t really blame them, Zanis and Ryu are outlanders from who knows where, and we haven’t been accepting any guests in years. If I recall correctly, the location of our village isn’t even marked on half of Eleron’s maps, not something everyone would notice, especially if you didn’t pay close enough attention.

I took a quick glance at our surroundings, and I don't think their gazes have necessarily faded yet. Good, I can use that to my advantage.

“Feel free to take a seat for now, I’ll talk to my father quickly so he can arrange a place for the two of you to stay,” I announced. “Don’t mind the stares, they haven’t seen any new faces in a while, I assure you they mean no harm.”

They both nodded and began downing some water. I went towards the main hall so I could discuss the state I’ve gotten myself into with the village leader, also known as my father. Two knocks later, I pushed open the door.

“Father, are you there?”

“Jeriah! You’re home early today. Has something happened?”

“Nothing can escape your senses can they?”

“What kind of village head and father would I be without them,” said the gracious old man while letting out an alleviating laugh, which I joined into.

“I’ve encountered two outlanders today, they claim to be adventurers, I sense that there’s more than what meets the eye... But I doubt they’re spies from Synoria.”

“Reassuring, but what makes you say that?”

“They brought up the name Ron Verrha, and were seeking his assistance. If they were one of those bounty hunters, I doubt they’d seek help in such an upright manner.”

“Verrha? The renowned sanctioned author you mean?” father’s expression fell into sorrow.

“I’m curious though, the fact that they stated that they were seeking the help of a Synorian war criminal so directly... Could they have found out about our family’s identity?” I queried.

“Synoria claimed that they have already dealt with all that remained from the past, which includes three of the four households. Therefore there’s a chance our location has been leaked by the one left... *alive*. Approach them with necessary caution, though, if they are attempting to spark a new fire, that can be used to our advantage.”

“I’m guessing shelter for the night has been permitted then?”

“Yes... Meet me in our front yard tomorrow morning. I think now is the appropriate time for a certain ceremony.”

“I understand, farewell father.”

I swiftly made my exit and ran back to where I had left Zanis and Ryu.

Father spoke of a new flame, could this be a chance? I thought. That however, was when my brain decided to snap.

## Chapter 2 - Chivalry of a Shattered Blade

*“Jeriah!”*

*“What... have you done?!”*

I paused. Shivers sent down my spine. Head began to ache immensely, as if it was about to crack open.

I open my eyes to a sea of scarlet flames. Intimate surroundings all smouldered to the ground, where not even ashes would remain. Vision blurred, pain continues to be inflicted upon my mind.

It's happening again isn't it. A non-existent curse that I've laid upon myself. If this is what my mind succumbs to, then just how weak has my determination become...

*“Jeriah!”*

I scanned the environment around me, whilst I was thrown back to reality by a familiar voice. As expected, everything was fine as they always were, apart from the attention we got from neighbours alike.

“You alright? Looked like you were about to break and faint there,” Zanis consoled, something not even I saw coming.

“I'm... fine, I think. Probably just a bit tired,” I answered with my left hand resting on my forehead, still attempting to hold down the already fading headache. “Forget about that, the head of the village has granted permission for your stays, let's get you two over there.”

As much as I'm trying to pass it off, I still can't help but ponder why such an imagery appears in my head. The burning of our village, the cries of those in vain... *Sigh*, what am I on about? I very well know the reason, yet simply refuse to face it, at least not for now. Not sure if I've convinced them, but better not let that distract me now, I need to stay optimistic for tomorrow.



The call of roosters acted as my alarm. Me who was barely awake almost knocked over the silver pocket watch resting on the desk beside instead of grabbing it. The opening of the watch's hatch shows the time to be almost seven, whereas the ceremony father spoke of starts at nine. Why couldn't you have cawed an hour later...

I made my way towards where the ceremony should take place. To my surprise, there were only three figures I could see, that being Father, who was sitting on the stone bench, Zanis, and Ryu, who waved as I approached.

“Jeriah, Over here!”

Contradicting Ryu's greeting, the tension felt uneasy for a ceremony; not to the point where you'd imagine people mourning like at a funeral, but more so similar to when a parent has found the vase their toddler had just broken.

Beside father was a brown rectangular case, which he rested his veiny hand on

“Ah, Jeriah, you've arrived,” the village leader spoke in a soft yet rest assuring tone.

“This isn't exactly what I expected, is everything alright father?”

He reached for the case with his left arm, placing it on his lap before revealing the dust laden interiors. Father swiftly pulled over the purple cloth that covers its contents. The three of us who stood around were left in utter shock. What was uncovered in that moment, was the blade forged from the original remnant queller, the Sword of Dragons.

As much as that's what I want to say however, if not for the infamous dragon head pommel on the end of its handle, I'd definitely have mistaken it for a very long rock.

“Doesn't look much like what you had imagined does it?” father tittered, “The form of this blade you see here has worsened since its

prime a few dozens of years ago. We've tried uncountable ways to refine it, but see no success, as it requires something more to rekindle its flame. Unfortunately it is far too late for me to do anything now, which is why I now bestow this to you, my son."

"I thought you wanted Josiah to have it?"

"It's been at least ten years, no one has been able to contact your brother ever since his departure. I trust that he has found his own ambition by now, which is why I want you to find your's along with our ancestor's weapon."

Once again, I was at a complete loss for words.

"As for the two of you... young adventurers"

"I don't understand, why show this to us, outlanders?" Zanis questioned.

"As you can already tell, Areus was but a decoy to lower suspicion. Our ancestors had received orders from Ecidicus himself, to disperse and protect these mythical weapons, and as for house Dragoness... This is the path we chose to take for the past seventy-five years, which as you can see has done its part, but times like this calls for more doesn't it?"

"Aren't you afraid of us being spies from Synoria?"

"If trust is what you're worried about, then why not we ask the blade itself?"

The Sword of Dragons gave off a golden aura, which startled the few of us. I glanced over to Zanis and Ryu, who shifted their attention to the brown cloth they wore on their back. Father on the other hand didn't seem surprised at all.

"Haha, is that so..." Ryu muttered.

"What you need from now on has already been prepared for the three of you. Let this day be remembered as the beginning of your new journey."

"And, if I were to fail?"

"Then perhaps that is decided by fate." father laughed.

That's rest assuring.

“But not to worry, I'm certain that these two gentlemen wouldn't let you fail even if you wanted to.” he continued as he looked towards the duo. Guess there's far more to learn after all.

### Chapter 3 - An Adventurer's Long Haul

“Hey Jeriah, judging from your reaction yesterday, you do know of Verrha right?”

“‘Know’ is one way of putting it. My father became acquainted with him soon after the great resistance uprising. From what I’ve heard, he sent himself into exile and somehow continued to publish his work through an unknown party, which as we know, Synoria’s ministries are doing its best to find the source of. Oh and, he told us his general location before leaving; somewhere down south of the Beryl region.”

“Southern Beryl, how convenient. Perhaps his exile wasn’t much of an exile after all.”

“You do have a point there, coincident or not, it’s possible that he’s been keeping touch with the Prothonius rebels.”

“Prothonius rebels?” Having grown up in such a rural area, our sources of outside information are fairly limited, but of course that’s proven to come in handy from time to time, especially when nothing is certain. Unfortunately, Prothonius isn’t a name you’d hear much of anymore.

“I’m sure you’ve heard of the notorious event that ended the uprising right?” said Ryu while barely holding onto a grin. I’m genuinely impressed that he could still look so optimistic, which I say because the event that ended the uprising wasn’t the brightest. In fact, it would be a far stretch to say that it ended well for the resistance forces at all.

“Unfortunately so.”

“No. As we know, the final crackdown was gruesome, but knowing of it is far from being unfortunate,” Zanis broke in. “You won’t hear a single word about it anywhere else nowadays— As if it was erased from history.”



Erased...? As much I know of Synoria's ways of twisting old events, that's about as far as it goes right? For an event as big as the Remnant War... This makes no sense at all.

"I'm guessing you haven't heard about what's been going on out there." Ryu stated as his smile finally dropped. "As much as it sounds exaggerated, a single mention of the Prothonius Crackdown can possibly have you detained for spreading what Synoria calls 'false information'. And with that, those who witnessed it had their mouths forcefully shut, same treatments old war veterans received from the Remnant War. Those who didn't, however, went and became a part of the Prothonius rebels, with their encampment located on a distant island on the southern coast, which of course, Synoria has created a heavy blockade to counter."

"So you're saying that Ron might have a way to bypass the blockade?"

"Possibly, and that's what we'll need to count on if we want to get anything done," Ryu continued. "*Sigh*, sometimes I really do wonder how much Prothonius has changed since I left. Can't help but reminisce occasionally."

"Is that where you're from?"

"Yes, I've witnessed a lot that happened there, for better and for worse, yet the crackdown was the one thing I didn't see myself, for I had left a year earlier. What something certain people would consider lucky... felt more like a guilt trip to me. Afterall, I did abandon a lot of people I knew, including my family, who I haven't had a chance to visit ever since."

For someone who's managed to keep up such an optimistic attitude, it's hard to imagine what Ryu had gone through before all this. Ever since the crackdown, there's even a chance that those people he once knew aren't even around anymore.

“Apologies for interrupting again, but I suggest we keep our voices down. It’s another one of those bounty hunters, I’ll scout ahead for now, stay hidden for the time being.”

Zanis swiftly moved towards the bushes up front before crouching down and peeking through. He turned his head towards us and lifted his index finger, letting us know how many we’re facing. From what he’s seen, there seems to only be one of them. Ryu and I made our way towards the trees and bushes near Zanis in order to listen in.

“What kind of gear does he have?” Ryu whispered.

“Metal chestplate under his clothes, silver waste armour similar to what you have. Seems to be armed with a hunting crossbow, loaded as well. They are wearing a bamboo hat and cowl though, can’t make out what they look like.”

“No worries, that’s more than enough information.”

“We barely defeated the last one we fought, brute forcing might not be the best plan.”

“Well I certainly do have something in mind.” said Ryu, who shot a wink at Zanis. “Well then Jeriah, why not show us whatcha got.”

“Wait wh—?!”

Both of them leapt backwards and up the trees, leaving me behind without a single notice, instead, it seemed to have alerted the hunter.

You’ve got to be kidding me.

Concentrate. A situation like this is no joke afterall. I rested my hand on my sword’s handle which had been resting on my waist this entire time. In order to maximise efficiency, I layed down the out of function Sword of Dragons which I had been carrying on my back next to me. I have my doubts, but if those two were to betray me now I’m almost certain I can catch up to them. Using a pebble I’ve found, I tossed it towards the shrubs next to me, diverting the enemy’s attention. As the hunter got closer, I took my chance.

(This will be illustration page)

Withdrawing my silver blade, I leapt towards the nearest tree, with my heart rate now accelerating much faster than before. My vision was slowly blurring due to the racing, but was clear enough to see the bounty hunter still searching for the source of my pebble's noise. With a second leap of faith, I rebounded off the tree and drew my full attention towards the target.

*Art of Dragons, Spark of Dawn!*

Those words echoed through my head. Although it was nothing like what our ancestors had performed with elemental essence, the tensing and release of my leg muscles was enough to make my body attack at a lightning-like speed. The slash had caused the bounty hunter screaming in agony, both their blood gushing right arm and fired arrow was severed at the blink of an eye. Just like so, the hunter fell onto their knees, as both the broken limb and their body now lie flat on the emerald grass floor. I quickly looked back expecting any form of retaliation, but all I found was a figure now collapsed on the field. I now begin to understand why Zanis and Ryu struggled so much before; they're reflexes are much faster than the average human, a second slower and the arrow would've pierced through my head.

"What a performance!"

"Thanks for ditching me without extra warning back there." I said while sheathing my weapon.

"Sorry sorry, but this was something Zanis and I agreed upon back at the village. We didn't want it to seem like we didn't trust you, so I figured the best way to test your skills is by an actual fight. Life and death situations are where people unleash their full potential afterall."

“What he meant to say was: congratulations, you’ve passed the test,” Zanis mocked sarcastically as he threw the Sword of Dragons towards me.

“Whelp, at least the two of you didn’t run off with this thing.”

“C’mon now, what kind of people do you think we are? It’s not like anyone on the black market will believe this old piece of metal is a mythical weapon anyway.” Ryu laughed while Zanis placed his hand over his face, visibly sighing. “Alright for real though, if not even your brother’s able to get that thing working, what chances do we have?”

He does raise a good point, in fact I don’t even know if the sword will work in my favour at all.

“Anyways, is that guy dead or?” Ryu asked.

“I intentionally aimed for the arm to keep them alive, looks like they’ve just passed out from blood loss.”

“I’m surprised, you were merciless when dismembering them.”

“To say I felt no remorse during that would be a lie, otherwise I would’ve aimed for the head or heart instead,” I said as I began bandaging the hunter’s wound from cloth in their bag. “Oh, would you look at that?”

While scouring through their belongings like any victor would, I managed to find a Synorian insignia and contract, looks like they were hired by officials after all.

“These are gonna come in handy later on, essentially a free pass when bypassing military encampments,” I stated before giving both to Zanis.

“I’m honoured you’d trust me with something so important, but I might not be the best person to keep hold of these kinds of things, plus this bag’s already full from all the food and supplies we brought. Ryu, you still got any space?”

“Yea sure I can take care of that,” Ryu replied. “Just let me know when we need it.”

Odd, wasn’t Ryu the one carrying all the food. All well, not that it matters really.

I pulled out the pocket watch located on my waist strap to check on our timing. Despite being a quick fight, it looks like we only have another hour left until nightfall. Better hurry up.

## Chapter 4 - Marionettes

According to Zanis, we should be a quarter of the way there now. If our estimations are correct, we could probably get to our designated location within another one and a half days.

“We’re better off resting for the night, better off travelling energised than exhausted.” he said. “This place looks good enough, let’s set up here.”

I did a quick scan through our surroundings while checking on the time. Small plain field surrounded by trees so tall they seem to reach the sky, yet just enough space for the moonlight to shine through. There were some wood scraps and broken ropes around, for such a good location I wouldn’t be surprised if soldiers or adventurers once had the same idea we had. The place was surprisingly bug free as well, definitely signs of previous human activity.

“I’ll go collect some wood for a fire,” I announced.

“Take this with you as well, it’d be hard to find your way back in such a dark area otherwise,” said Ryu as he tossed me a palm sized copper compass.

“Thanks, I’ll make it quick.”

I decided to explore a bit ahead while I’m off, getting yourself familiar with your environment is certainly more important than most people believe it to be nowadays. The wood scraps from before seems to still be visible all the way out here, as if there had been some kind of conflict here, or if the person who settled in our area was constantly on the run. I continued to advance forward while picking up fallen sticks and smaller logs along the way, while using both the compass and the scraps as a guide to my way back. Slowly, the sticks around gradually began to increase, which as I examined them, a pattern of clean cut ends can be found off of each one, some of the trees nearby even having vivid sword cuts left on them. Now proceeding forward with caution, a clear repetition of such marks can be barely seen on each one due to the

forest's dim surroundings, just as I was about to further examine them, an unfamiliar sound sparked from the foreground.

Swordwind, breezing through the near silent atmosphere. A blade so sharp led to an attack I did not anticipate at all. The slash came by seemingly faster than the sound itself, leaving a small cut on my forehead, which would've likely taken my life if I didn't react fast enough. I immediately fell back and attempted to reach for my sword, but the opposing side had no intention to wait any longer. I forced my legs to push the upper half of my body back as the enemy darted towards me. With not a proper light source I had no way to see the form of what I'm facing, all I know is that it's not planning to stop anytime soon. Another strike comes by which I successfully hurdled over. It's sword cleanly cuts off the tree beside me, demanding that I dodge towards the right if I didn't want to be crushed. The same sound from before played and echoed through the woods, allowing me to unsheathe my weapon before another strike.

Seems like it's some kind of machine which performs consistent attacks before having to pause. I sprinted towards the direction where the noise had come from, but my decisive blow was deflected by its blade before I could leave a mark. The automaton released a high pitched gear whining sound before swiftly rebooting into position. Despite my consistent efforts, the machine still managed to repel my attacks. I began to hop between trees, hoping to find a good position to land my strike from, but the speed of the environment around me collapsing was much faster than I can comprehend. Eventually, the machine's attacking pattern repeated, once again stopping in its footsteps, like a tired barbarian trying to lift his giant axe. I took my chance and made a run for it, towards automaton.

*Art of Dragons, Rend of the Soaring Dragon!*

Like leaves in autumn wind, my figure felt lissome, the weight of my sword vanishing along with the execution. I sprinted and leapt, both hands gripping tightly onto my weapon as sweat lingered on my forearms. A single slash upwards later, a giant mark had been left on the machine, with its components inside flashing white, illuminating the gloomy woods. I quickly turned elsewhere before the shining glow dealt any more damage to my already worn out vision. I landed as the machinery broke down into two pieces, its right hand and sword dropping onto the floor like the bounty hunter's.

I panted for a solid minute before moving towards the destroyed machine. I had used my dented sword as a cane, barely holding on the entire time. Approaching the shining mechanism, I am welcomed by a horde of dust and rusted parts, meaning this thing has been in action longer than I had expected, and probably would've killed me if it was brand new.

*A scroll?*

Unwinding the forsaken scroll, I started sweeping off whatever dirt was on the stained paper while trying to make out its contents. The printing has slightly faded, but enough for me to understand the message behind. A map of our region slowly makes its appearance, along with a smaller piece of folded paper, seeming to be a letter, which I unwrapped while holding up the map:

*Greetings, warriors who have defeated my invention.*

*To have reached this far into the woods, you must be someone searching for my residence. Unfortunately, I have no way to know whether or not you bring forth good intention, therefore I shall give you an opportunity to achieve whatever you have, whether it's to find, or kill me.*

*The map that comes with this letter will lead you closer to my location, however, another challenge awaits, marked by the spot drawn with green ink.*



*Defeat what is to come, and you are worthy of my praise. What are you waiting for? Come forth and strike down those standing in your path.*

*Sincerely*

*Ron Verrha*

A quick scan through the map would show the same marking mentioned in the letter, its position nearing the Trapiche River further south. I wrapped up the map and letter before stuffing it on my belt. I took another look at the time, around another two hours till midnight, best I hurry back if I want to survive tomorrow's battle.



“You're back! Certainly it took longer than expected though, did something happen? Related to the sudden flash of light perhaps?”

“Ran into a bit of trouble back there, fought an automaton that was meant to be one of Verrha's inventions, here's the map and signed letter to prove it,” I said while panting, not hesitating to finally sit down once all the wood was set up for a campfire.

“A challenge near the Trapiche River, and you spoke of an automaton... Judging from how tired and sweaty you look, it wasn't an easy fight was it?” Zanis inquired while analysing the two items.

“Chances are I probably would've died against any more close calls.” I answered while bandaging bruises.

“I'd expect something of equal size or strength then, if not more difficult than what you've faced,” he continued, hand clenching onto the mysterious cloak they wore. If I play my cards right, I might be able to have them reveal their capabilities, like what they did earlier on with the hunter.

“Is there any way around it? Or is it our only option for more clues?” asked Ryu.

“As much as that’d be ideal, wandering aimlessly down south wouldn’t do us any good either,” Zanis replied.

“Would there be a way to take advantage of the surroundings? Say, the river water?” I suggested.

“Not impossible, I’ll keep that in mind when we get there.”

“It’s settled then, we head off tomorrow morning,” said Ryu. “Let us enjoy this feast before the day of reckoning!”

We’re not even there and this man’s already setting up death flags, concerning, but I’m confident... I think.

And so we lit up the fire and drank to the night, something I never would’ve imagined myself doing, especially while trying to overthrow an empire. I wonder how many chances there will be for moments like this further in the future, and how many more companions will be here sitting with us.

We were woken up by raging sunlight at approximately seven in the morning. Before opening the pocket watch as usual, I could just about see my messy reflection on the thing. I must have slept in especially well last night.

“Morning already? Aghh, wake me up in another five minutes,” Ryu groaned before immediately collapsing back onto the floor.

“And who was it that said we’d head off in the morning,” laughed Zanis sarcastically. “Come on, we have a place to be.”

I observed from the side as the child like Ryu gets pushed around by Zanis as he packs up our equipment. I can’t help but chuckle after seeing such a scene, it really makes me wonder how long they have been travelling together.

After a while of hustling around, the three of us got our things together before proceeding onwards down the path. While making our

move, we arrived at the chaotic battlefield from last night, the ray of sunlight revealing the destruction caused by Verrha's machine. Scattered piles of leaves and sticks now became apparent, most trees had only their stumps and roots left behind.

"Was this where you fought last night?"

"I figured we'd see it for ourselves, but jeez this was not what I expected."

"How do you feel about fighting the more powerful one now?" I said jokingly.

"I... I'm sure we'll be fine... Isn't that right Zanis?"

"Don't know 'bout you, I feel fairly confident."

"Didn't the both of you struggle against a single bounty hunter earlier on?"

"In my defence, Ryu was forcing me to hold back the entire time."

"What do you mean forcing you to hold back? You were the one missing all your attacks!"

"Yeah that's because a certain someone kept standing in the way."

"Come on now you have yourself to blame for that one, I was actively moving out the way for you."

Sounds to me that these two don't have the best coordination.

"Alright alright, let's calm down a little, from what I'm hearing we're best off going with some kind of actual attack strategy."

"Don't worry about us, we'll just play support again now that you're here."

"I'm definitely luring whatever we're facing towards you two if that happens."

Again, this is the perfect opportunity for them to reveal their skills, I can't let it become a repeat of last time. In addition, in case my plan of getting them to fight fails, I still have a few extra tricks up my sleeve.

"Fineee, we'll help out here and there."

"Ryu I—"

We're here.

The ground began shaking immensely, strikingly clear thumps erupted from afar, one which the previous machine was nowhere close to rivalling. We hid behind the thicker trees, while I climbed upwards to get a better view. One opponent looks to be at least three times our height. Weapons, a massive battle axe, stained near it's blade. I shifted my attention towards its back. Are those swords on the back of it? A single purple feather attached to the end of the handles, all dented and somewhat rusted, no doubt once belonged to Synorian soldiers. From what I can piece out from all this, it looks like officials had sent soldiers and bounty hunters to eliminate Verrha, but unfortunately for them, this thing swepted them all clean, their bodies flowing down the red tinted river water, never to be seen again. Alright, maybe that was too dramatic, but it's the most likely scenario of what happened, as well as why this machine stands till this day.

Now Jeriah, what's the plan? The river water is just about too shallow for it to have an effect on it, unlike a person of average height who would be rushed out of sight within the matter of seconds. I peaked towards Ryu and Zanis, they seem to also be making their observations. Zanis clenched onto his cloak even harder this time, but it doesn't look like they'd be making a move anytime soon. I carefully took out my weapon, any louder and the machine might hear me. Each breath I take causes my heart to beat faster, louder, knowing a single mistake can send me down the same fate as those who challenged it before.

Form two; spark of dawn, alone, would have little effect on what looks to be a titanium body, with certain parts having deteriorated more than others, specifically the right arm and the leg joints, worth a shot. I took another glance at the two, who exchanged eyesights with me. Zanis pointed outwards, first pointing at the machine, then to the river, all before pointing to himself. Lure the machine to the river? But the final

self-gesturing is what raises my curiosity. Nevermind that, I'm best off trusting him for this one.

I took in a deep breath, closing my eyes to focus my mind on the situation at hand.

*Art of Dragons: Spark of Dawn!*

The wind blew against my face, the same feeling of going full speed on a steed or a boat. Everything fell silent, everything blurred up apart from my target, which felt crystal clear. *Spark of Dawn* itself won't be enough to break through the arm's joint, I'll need to think of something else, quick.

*Art of Dragons: Dragon Slash!*

*Dragon Slash* is the most basic form in the Art of Dragons, henceforth being known as form one. Despite that if executed correctly it'd be more than enough for me. Down went the blade as I focused all my strength into both arms. The clashing of the metal blade and the machine's metal skin caused the sound of a stricken bell, fortunately, the rusted joint cracked. I used the automaton's body as a stepping board, pushing off of it to gain some distance. I turned to look back at the impact my strike had caused, only to notice something more concerning; the blade of my sword had broken off. The weapon had already sustained some serious damage over the past few days, I suppose it was only a matter of time until it resulted in this situation. That little mistake on my part seems to have slightly ruined my momentum, my bounce off of it only pushed it a little, nevertheless, the strike disabled its attacking arm, which should alleviate a bit of our burden.

The machine did not hesitate to pick up its fallen weapon and fight back, immediately sending the massive battle axe flying my way with the swing of its left arm. The axe glided across the shallow river bed, like when children would throw stones across the vast ocean, except now it's a

life threatening mechanism throwing a weapon that could sweep a forest clean. My legs were already dreading a break at this point, but thankfully the last of my survival instincts kicked in and got me out of there before I could be split in half. As it flew by, I could feel the wind that followed, almost knocking me back even further while the swelling of water raged harder than the billowy waves.

“Don’t think we’re seeing that anytime soon. Now then, fighting it disarmed should be easier,” I mumbled as I attempted to lock my eyes onto the sliced open gap. “But... This will be a problem wouldn’t it...” I continued, glancing at the bladeless sword.

I stuffed the handle back into my sheath, and now gripped my right hand on the Sword of Dragons resting on my back. If I act carefully here, I just might be able to land a hit strong enough to disarm it entirely, creating an opening to destroy whatever core it has on the inside. The machine began to move forward once more, closer and closer to the river. The thought snapped back to me, all that fighting for my life has pushed it all the way to the back of my head. This is exactly what Zanis wanted wasn’t it? Well, I better create an opening for him. I drew the Sword of Dragons and sprinted towards the approaching automaton, it’s metal foot now making its first steps onto the water.

*Art of Dragons: Rend of the Soaring Dragon!*

My moves now mirrored the fight I had with the first mechanic, as those words once again echoed through my head. I focused my remaining energy into the jump, before throwing my arms over my head, as I arrived at a height in which the red line of fate connects my wrist and the machine’s weak point. The sensation of hair clashing against my forearm could be felt, before a gushing of air that follows my blade being thrown forward. Just like thunder and the rain, crashing down on the emerald floor, the sword met the gap, sending the detached

silver blade flying, as the Sword of Dragons began cracking its exposed joints. The robot's inner skeleton started flashing yellow, as I pushed the dull blade harder onto the weak point. The inner components began fluctuating, clanging onto one another, before finally, falling to the floor as the arm breaks off from the main body. I fell into the rushing torrent currents, barely holding on to my sword that impaled me into the ground.

All of a sudden, an arrow, as if it was infused with the wind, flew by, faster than the waves that attempted to rush me down stream. The piercing arrow shot right into its core and caused the machine to release an agonising sound of its breakdown, falling on its knees, while I was just far enough to not be crushed.

“Congrats Jeriah, now here's my regards!”

Zanis dashed out from the woods, the cloak he always wears now nowhere to be seen. This revealed a pair of light cyan capes, flown through the wind from his shoulders. His right hand wields a aqua tasselled silver blue spear which slowly glows frost blue, unlike any I have seen before.

“Shards of glaciers, dowse upon the weeping flames!”

With the swing of his spear, the machine began freezing inside out, and didn't take long until it was completely frozen, like a statue in the center of a moat. The ever flowing stream slowly began to drain, as the only path to advance has now been turned completely solid. I gazed in awe, and some degree of disbelief, but as Ryu walked out from the trees, the answer was clear. They too were ones who wield elemental essence.

## Chapter 5 - Ron Verrha

A clean pearl like bow, sharded with turquoise gems and golden highlights. The string glows green, most likely channeled with elemental energy. Behind his cloak revealed a quiver, with its arrow's fletchers looking as sharp as the arrowhead which pierced the machine's core.

I sat on the ground in exhaustion and confusion, the world around me moving so quickly to the point where I still process what's going on. Zanis approached and lent me a hand, the previously luminous silver polearm being held on his other. Now that I have taken a closer look however, it feels incomplete or damaged, much like the Sword of Dragons.

"We're sorry for keeping this a secret for so long, I wanted to make sure the time is right before revealing these," he said. "Afterall, there's not a lot of people you can trust in a day and time like this."

My head still felt nauseous, and was barely able to focus on anything in particular apart from the weapon. I wanted to respond, but simply couldn't let out another word.

"You've probably noticed when we first met, but our backgrounds aren't necessarily what you'd expect for an adventurer," stated Ryu, who sounded much more open than before.

"An elemental insurgence has not appeared ever since Synoria took control... how...?"

"Again, a bit complicated, think of these as some kind of refurbished family heirloom," he replied. "Although nowhere as powerful as the four mythical weapons, they can certainly hold their own, just not enough against Warlekath and Synoria."

"Which then leads you to your conquest of finding one of those mythical weapons."

"Supposedly yes, but we didn't go around searching for any, it was the Sword of Dragons we were after specifically."



“And why’s that?”

“The Sword of Dragons was said to be the queller of calamities and suffering, the embodiment of freedom and liberty,” Zanis interrupted. “We’ve considered all the options, whether it's the kirin's peace, the phoenix’s perpetuity, or the black tortoise’s tenacity. To seek the truth behind what was hidden from us, we mustn’t fight for the sake of fighting, but instead to bring forth an era of freedom we can protect, and to destroy Warlekath’s barrier of false liberation.”

The setting sun dawned upon us, as if it was fuelling the flame within them, the ever sparking fire burning through their hearts and souls. It sounds incredibly cliché, like something you’d hear from a fairy tale, but in a world like this, that’s the first and only thing I could think of now.

“Interesting...” I chuckled, it’d seem that our adventure here has become more fascinating than I could ever imagine.

Zanis reached out his hand once more, before throwing my arm over his back and around his neck as I reached out to accept his gesturing of help. Ryu pushed open the fallen mechanism, revealing its frozen compartments and a second scroll, this time held together by a green ribbon looking almost identical to the last one. He just barely unrolled the rock solid chilling paper without accidentally ripping any parts, which looked more blue than its original sandy yellow.

From top to bottom, the letter reads:

*We meet again, courageous warriors.*

*Before I had turned them into trials, these automatons used to be models for my ongoing narratives, a work of fiction which I hoped could rekindle the flame Eleron once had, before the days of Synoria. As someone who has observed these machines in action before writing this letter, I must say, it is very impressive for anyone to have reached this point, in fact, not even one of the 7 Synorian generals were able to take this down.*

*Now that you've passed two of my challenges, it is time for you to face the third, and the final; Myself. Behind the letter is a map to my current location, so come forth and show me what those who have defeated my greatest inventions have to offer. I will be looking forward to our meeting.*

*Sincerely*

*Ron Verrha.*

The final trial, is Ron Verrha himself... something tells me there's more to what the paper says.

"The map marks the coastal areas, close to where the Battle of Jadeite took place. The thing I don't understand is how he's remained hidden in such a location for so long?" Ryu began questioning the possibilities.

"Might have something to do with the environment," stated Zanis as he pointed towards the drained and frozen stream. "The easiest way of getting there would be to follow the river, well... whatever's left of it anyway."

"Wouldn't it be funny if we took the remains of this thing down?"

"You can't be serious."

"Hey now, it'd be efficient wouldn't it?"

There they go off to their own world again. I must say though, using the massive body of an automaton to our advantage might not be a bad idea.

I walked towards the edge of the mountain where the former waterfall was located. The drop was surprisingly shallow, I'm guessing it was the rapids that dealt the most damage to soldiers back then. I attempted to calculate the speed we would accelerate and fly off at, but looks like time isn't on my side this round. Zanis' ice began cracking, catching the arguing duo and my attention within the first snap.

"Zanis what the hell's going on down there?!"

“It would seem that the raging tides from the other side is breaking through the ice... I should still have enough energy left to repair—”

Before Zanis could finish his sentence, Ryu leapt forward towards the unstable mechanic without hesitation, throwing Zanis onboard while climbing up himself.

“Sorry to interrupt, but I’m not letting this chance slip!” Ryu exclaimed while drawing his bow backwards, firing another wind infused arrow at the shattering ice.

“What are you... guess there really is no persuading you,” Zanis sighed. “You steer this thing, I’ll make sure we survive.”

The fallen machine began rushing down the river. Zanis’ held his spear against the water, slowing down the rushing acceleration just ever so slightly. After all, a legendary weapon is no different to any others without elemental essence, and is perhaps the best thing about it... But now’s probably not the time to ponder.

“Jeriah! I can pull you up, just jump for it!”

This isn’t going to end well is it.

The closer the machine got the faster it felt, till the point that it was about to pass me. I ran towards the ledge, awaiting the time where the machine goes below my feet, and that moment... is now!

I took the leap of faith as we all plummet down the seemingly bottomless waterfall, a single act that got my heart pounding louder than the entirety of the fight just now. Due to its weight, the duo and machine gradually fell faster, and I knew that it’d eventually get to an unreachable point, but not like I can reach Ryu’s hand now either. I forced myself to think fast, and fast it was; I detached the sheathe I wear from my waist as the cape and cloths flustered through the wind.

“Grab onto the sheathe!”

Ryu attempted to reach once more, this time easily grabbing onto the leather accessory.

“Gotcha!”

I was just barely pulled onboard as the bottom of the great waterfall can be seen. We all instinctively held on to whatever the machine could provide, desperately trying not to get thrown off into the tides. Finally, after what felt like an eternity of heart racing, we reached the end of the great fall. The splash we caused had water flying all over, where not a single bit of our clothing was left dry, but that's the least of what could've happened. The body of the machine slowly began to resurface, running through the stream during the wonderful sunset... is what I would say if we could see anything.



“We are never doing that again,” Zanis remarked.

“Come on now, that was great! Wouldn't you say so, Jeriah?”

“I want a bed to collapse on...” I exhaustedly stated while drying all the clothes that got soaked.

He's not wrong though, that could make for an interesting game or event sometime in the future, less extreme of course.

“How close are we exactly? If the map managed to survive that is.”

“I kid you not, it actually did! Well it's become incredibly fragile, but as long as it works!” Ryu exclaimed. “Anyways, we're not very far away now, just a bit further west and we'll be there.”

“Just glad that trip was worth it...” Zanis mumbled as he laid his armour on the floor. Speaking of which, his white undercloak is much cleaner than Ryu's desaturated brown ones, not what I would expect from a travelling adventurer.

I gazed afar the sunlit path ahead and made my move as Ryu and Zanis began setting up camp again. I held out Ryu's copper compass and made my way south-west, while not forgetting to think back to everything that's happened today. If I were to have told my experiences today to myself a year ago...

“Would’ve probably found it ridiculous wouldn’t I...? Yet all it took was to grasp onto the opportunities that appear before me,” I tilted my head down mumbling, before starting to laugh at my novel protagonist like discourse.

“Ridiculous indeed.”

I looked back thinking one of them had tried sneaking up on me, yet not one person could be found. As I looked back and opened my confused eyes...

“Welcome, warrior. Here for an afternoon fish?” said a smiling man dressed in robes downed in white. He had messy black hair with dark green highlights growing down to his hips which almost covered his bright azure eyes. The fuzzed up hair was held together by an open top bamboo kasa, its shadow giving an oddly ominous feeling. He held a wooden fishing rod on his right, carrying a bucket on the other.

Warrior... why does the way he speaks feel so famili—

“You’re Ron Verrha!” I exclaimed as the realisation caught up to me.

“A pleasure meeting you too, Son of Dragones.”

“You know who I am?”

“I could just about make out the dragon pommel on your back... Is what I would say if I wasn’t sent a letter by your father.”

“Were the trials set up for us specifically then?” an unlikely scenario, but a good way to confirm what he’s capable of.

“Sounds like something I would do, doesn't it? As you’ve probably noticed from the second trial, it was set up there long enough for Synorian soldiers to have tried taking it down. Now that you’re here, it must mean it held its own for another while since I checked on it.”

So both machines have been there and survived waves of attacks from properly trained soldiers, I wonder what kind of other things he’s able to make.

“I’m sorry to disappoint, but those machines were not my creation,” Ron added, as if he read through my mind. “They were former machines of war used by civilisations in an era preceding Eleron, the one we would now know as The Expedition.”

“Ecidicus’ conquest of Eleron?”

“Exactly, they were left by the southern warlords later defeated by Ecidicus.”

That would explain their unique appearance and fighting style. I feel like I’ve seen it before, but can’t seem to recall where.

“Now that you’re here I no longer need to kill time by fishing, care to join me for some tea instead?”

I silently nodded and followed along.

Ron guided me down a surprisingly soothing path where there were no other sounds but the blowing wind whooshing between trees, complementing the dawning sky.

“How long have you been living here?”

“At least five years, can’t say for certain though, days start blending together once you’ve lived alone for long enough.”

Five years ago was exactly when the second uprising against Synoria occurred, a united front against the central government which led to the Prothonius crackdown.

“Do you happen to have any firsthand experiences during the second uprising then? I recall your self-exile only happened after the events at Prothonius.”

Ron paused, his footsteps falling silent becoming more apparent in our soundless surroundings, not sure if it's a good or bad thing, but it'd seem that my anchor has hit something in his ocean bed of emotions.

“To an extent, I have indeed,” he mumbled, letting out a quiet chuckle, possibly even a sigh. “How ‘bout we make a deal; I will tell you everything I have to offer, under the condition that you clear my third trial.”

His tone changed, sounding almost nothing like the delighted man I've encountered. Judging from that however, looks like it's a yes.

## Chapter 6 - Beryl sharded Revolution

I was invited by Ron into his abode, offering freshly brewed tea as I tiredly sat down on the cushion laid out on the oak floor, letting out a sigh of relief. The living room was compact but comfortable, slightly larger than the average bedroom, yet certainly in much better condition than what I expected from a man in exile. He proceeds to hang his bamboo kasa on a hook stuck to the wall, revealing even more of his long and messy hair.

“Now, for the final trial—” Ron announced. “How about a simple game of classic chess?”

Chess? Certainly does sound fitting for a trial against someone who’s main game is strategy. After what we’ve gone through during the first and second trials, something that requires less physical movement is always welcomed. I thought while knowing very well that making my brain work against the likes of Ron could somehow get harder than fighting automatons.

“As you can see, this is a special chess set designed after Avalachian and classic Eleronian culture, nothing too special,” Ron explained. “Well, maybe apart from the slight modifications I made.”

I observed the wooden set, attempting to find said modifications made by Ron, hoping I could use it to my advantage. Unbeknownst to me however, the chess board began emanating an unsettling aura, triggering some kind of unpleasant reaction within my head. I shifted my attention to Ron, who sent a friendly smirk my way, real reassuring there—

The feeling continued to wear on me, so much to the point where I began feeling nauseous.

*Eh, what the hell’s going on? Ron?! Was this some kind of trap? Nono, must be a part of the trial right? But what even was it to begin with?*

My eyelids came down on their own as my head slowly began to ache, much like— no, exactly like what happened back at the village. My



vision declined, slowly starting to fade white as my body started feeling numb, next thing I knew, I had collapsed on the hard wooden flooring.

“Jeriah... Jeriah?!”

“Is he alright...?”

“We have to get him out of here.”

“Sir Dragoness what do we do?”

“Evacuate any survivors and set course for Jadeite, anyone who can fight joins me, we’ll hold the soldiers off before they can hurt anyone else.”

Voices I could vividly hear, as I helplessly lie below the maroon sky. I adjusted myself to a posture where I could see, while those around me seemed to be urging me to rest. Surrounded by panicking screams and crackling thunder that burnt trees and houses to crisps, I began to realise what was going on.

“Argh!!” screamed a man who fought fiercely against a soldier dressed in purple, his sword falling to the ground before the rest of him followed.

“Not a single one of these counter-revolutionaries is to be left alive! Must not let them be a burden to lord Warlekath’s glorious ideals for any longer!” a faceless army general of tall stature exclaimed brutally, aiming his bloodstained battle axe towards the fleeing civilians.

“Father!”

“No stop! It’s too dangerous to go!”

“But... he’s still out there... calling to us!”

A short conversation exchanged between a mother and her son as they fled the scene before anyone could spot them. It was as if the words of the son had been taken straight out of my mouth, from I who had seen this scenario play out so many times, I had become desensitised to the horror. Despite all odds, I still yearn for that little chance of hope, where I

could actually get up and help, yet every step I take feels like a thousand others pulling me back.

While the child had fled, I couldn't help but notice his tearing glare, his eyes painted red from bloodshed and fear, murmuring these very words.

“Jeriah... What have you done?”

The words spoken by him were as if they came from a younger version of myself, questioning me in the present... and the answer? Nothing. All this time I had done nothing but watch, avoiding anything that may lead up to the likes of this.

*You're not special*

*Just focus on other things*

Sentences I've used as an excuse to not do anything, hoping that if I simply don't do anything stupid nothing will happen. Now the day I feared the most finally came, and not doing anything was exactly what caused it, yet here I still am, fearing the possibilities of failure, of losing everything I ever had, so helplessly watching as the voices of those who shriek agony upon this crimson bath of terror becomes ever so apparent, their expressions revealed, crying out to me the Dragon's descendent who sat in fear. It was then I finally acknowledged the meaning of the war torn world that I have been shown; it was a catastrophe caused by me, and if I wanted to change it, I'll have to act no matter the consequences.

I watched as my father fought against the incoming general, constantly putting on the defence against his opponent's heavy blows, one such knocking the Sword of Dragons from his grip while putting him off balance. The general ran for the blade, but before he could snatch it, the rusted handle fell into my hands as I brought it down to waist level, ready to challenge.

I dashed forward, catching the enemy off guard, before their weapon could reach me, I had decapitated him from behind, swiftly ending the duel.

The world around me crumbled down, the sky flashing white while the damage the environment around me sustained vanished along with it. I looked back at the fleeing child, who moved his mouth ever so slightly, didn't hear what it was, but he was happy. From that mutual smile we shared, a part of my past seemingly felt whole again, meaning I've made my first step in conquering the fear that has held me back.



“Welcome back, did you have fun?”

I slowly got up from the wooden floor I collapsed on, rubbing my eyes while trying to wake myself up.

“So... care to explain what in the world that was?”

“My apologies for not giving you a heads up beforehand, but I figured it would be the best way to test your skills.”

That certainly sounds familiar.

“This chess board here is embedded with sprinkles of elemental essence, which triggers something simply named False Vision. In short, Falscher's vision is an event that first occurred to Kuriah Dragoness,” Ron explained. “Your father mentioned the headache you received after he first mentioned his plan, so I took my chances and did a little experiment to see the similarities for myself. In conclusion, you may have inherited a part of your grandfather's traits, more than anyone else in your family.”

“I... what?”

“Oh that expression is truly priceless. One thing to keep in mind, none of this would matter if you don't work towards it, but from what I've seen so far, it definitely looks like you are. Congratulations, you have

passed the three trials, and from here on out I shall assist you in your conquest. I look forward to working with you, Jeriah.”

We exchanged a handshake as a symbol of agreement, also marking the end of our long first quest, as well as marking the beginning to a new chapter.

## **Chapter 7 - Prothonius**

dsifho;js'

## **Chapter 8 - Essence**

Skdhfjlk

## **Chapter 9 - In search of Forsaken Glory (Preparation/first steps)**

saykhuflij

## **Chapter 10 - Golden Daybreak (heliodor - Ryu, Zanis)**

Slfjh

## **Chapter 11 - Crimson Thorns (Bixite - Jeriah, Edwin)**

**Chapter 12 -**

**Chapter 13 -**

**Chapter 14 -**

**Chapter 15 -**

**Chapter 16 -**

**Chapter 17 -**

**Chapter 18**

**Chapter 19 -**

**Chapter 20 -**

**(Maybe)**

**Chapter 21 -**

**Chapter 22 -**

**Chapter 23 -**

