

## The Rift - Fimm

Daealla could see Abel's forces marching their way to her camp from atop the tree she was perched. They were to meet days ago to embark on their journey towards Harald and the Nordic lands. Daealla had received news from one of her elves the day before that one of Abel's scouts had rode ahead to give the news. Apparently the human's armor weighed the carts down and that led to many becoming stuck in the soft, muddy grounds before The Shivering Valley. Daealla briskly climbed down the tree and set off to find her captains.

The Woodland Elves had a smaller army than most, but that never mattered. They were always regarded as the more adroit people, and even though no wars had been fought in ages they kept up their training all the same. The army comprised of three captains, each in charge of roughly twenty-five hundred men. Each of those captains then had sub-captains, and those sub-captains had others to serve them, and so on and so forth. Daealla's Captains were special though and had been with her for almost the entirety of her reign as queen. She was also lucky enough to have one of her own sons as a captain, and that was who she was searching for now.

It didn't take her long to find him. As she expected, he was in the war room with a few of his soldiers perusing the lands that both armies would soon be traversing.

"Hello, mother. My men have told me that Abel has finally arrived. Shall we begin packing our tents and set out tonight? Or would we be staying another night to allow them rest before this treacherous journey begins?"

"That is why I am here, Kieran. I would like you to ride with me to his caravan and see what he plans."

"Of course, mother. Saeval, fetch my horse... and grab your queen's mare as well." The man nodded and hastened himself out of the tent.

"Have you found anything new regarding the pass that lies at the end of the Shivering Valley?" Daealla quizzed her eldest son.

"Not much. It seems as if it is the only road we can travel on to reach Harald's army though. It is unwise for us to split our army here, but without doing so we leave ourselves open to attack. If we go high, we

risk the mages raining fire from above, or even destroying the ground beneath our feet and plummeting us to our death. But if we go low we are certainly asking for Harald's men to bombard us with arrows from above."

"I agree." Daealla could hear the neighing of her prized horse as it neared the war room. "Come, we must go now. Hopefully Abel has more that can be of use to us." The two made their way outside and mounted their Akhal-Teke. It was nothing for these horses to maneuver themselves through the camp, and before long the two were out in the open field. Daealla's breed was one of the rarest palomino's. It had an iridescent cream coat that shone gold in the sunlight, and a thick, pale smoke mane. Kieran's was a much more ordinary chestnut color, yet it possessed a magnificent mane of ivory that was speckled with muddy brown markings.

After a few minutes galloping, the mother and son had reached the fringes of Abel's now halted army. It was massive, over ten thousand troops if Abel's counts had been correct. *It will take us forever to find this man in a crowd so large. And none of his men are even acknowledging us.*

"You there, where can I find your leader?" Daealla blurted to the nearest soldier. But before he could stop and turn to answer, she noticed the massive man riding toward her. She quickly recognized him as Abel by the golden armor he was decorated with, and the massive longsword that was strapped to his back. The sword was a Rudland family heirloom, passed down from father to son every generation. *Night's Fate* was known as one of the oldest swords in Delahden, and received its name from the swordsman who crafted it. It was originally *Knight's Fate*, as it determined the fate of many knights in those ancient times. Yet as it was passed down the Rudland line, and as those Rudlands became keepers of peace across their lands, its name took on a different meaning from the eternal night it brought on to all of the evil fates its path crossed with.

"Daealla, my apologies for the delays. If you'd be so kind as to follow me, I have my quarters being set up now. We must discuss our plans moving forward, and with haste." The king quickly turned and rode off, giving Daealla no choice but to follow.

"Well I guess that is our answer then." Kieran muttered to his mother as they began trodding after Abel.

"Quiet, Kieran. We do not need to cause problems in our first meeting with the king's people. Keep silent and let me do the talking for now." Her son looked agitated, yet he knew she was right. Their horses

quickly caught up to the slower, bulkier horse the king rode, and within a few hundred yards they arrived at an already erect tent. Inside awaited Sage, the king's most loyal advisor, and six of his other highest ranking captains. The seven of them were seated around a makeshift table, and all were already engrossed with whatever books, scrolls, and maps had been laid in front of them.

"Sage, if you'd be so kind as to show Daealla and Kieran the notes from our scouts. I need them caught up as soon as possible." Sage stood immediately and began rummaging through the stack of scrolls on the table.

"Ahh, here it is." He turned and walked it over to Daella before handing the slightly charred rolled parchment to her. Daealla swiftly skimmed the notes and handed it back to king's advisor.

"So it is true then. There is no other way to pass and Harald's men are already setting up for an ambush?" Daealla asked the room.

"Theoretically... yes. It is our only reasonable option at this point." Abel stated.

"Reasonable? So there are other options? I will like to risk as few elven lives as possible in this journey to an unknown north, Abel. None of us know what we will face once we make our way through the pass, but I for one would like to have as many of my people alive when we do. Tell me, what is this unreasonable option."

"One of my men's families used to live near the pass. He said that he knows of a cave system that will lead us a few miles past the pass, but that it is incredibly dangerous and could lead to even more deaths than simply fighting off Harald's ambush."

"Ymir's Corridor... I have heard rumors of this in the past, but never thought them to be true. It was said that the monsters unfit to roam our world were cast there by Thor himself. But there is no way this can be true. Abel, we must explore this option. If we can save our people's lives than we MUST at least think about taking this route instead of the other."

"I do not like it, and honestly wish you would have not liked it either, but I agree. These caves could save countless lives, and it will all but ruin whatever Harald has planned."

“What makes you think that Harald won't have men waiting for us outside the entrance to these caverns on his side of the pass?” Kieran probed. Daealla's eyes shot to her son. *I told him to keep his mouth shut. He oversteps the king.*

“That is a great question, son. He very well could set an ambush there, and we could essentially be forced to retreat back into the caves. Yet, Harald is a stubborn man who thinks he knows best, and he knows this is something I would never willingly submit my people to. He will not guard our exit out of this corridor your mother speaks of, and this may be our chance to turn the tide in our favor before the war even begins.”

Kieran nodded in approval before gazing over to his mother. “When do we set out then, Abel?” Daealla asked.

“We leave now. Sage, have the men get their things packed and await my command to march. Hudson, split the lore we have on Ymir's Corridor with Daealla's men. We need to know as much about what may lie within before we reach the entrance. Return to your people Daealla, prepare them. What lies ahead may not be pretty.”

Daealla turned and exited the tent with Kieran on her heels.