

Tears welled up in his eyes. “Of course... of course I have. I’m sorry... I’m so-”

“Please do not speak aloud. It disturbs the others,” Octavia sent.

Her voice was so beautiful. A voice he could now hear, though she could not speak aloud. His lips quivered, a smile on his face as his emotions warred. He wanted to say everything at once, but her request had grounded him. The others. Mind Weavers.

“Your voice,” he sent.

The woman moved closer, hovering, the fur she was dressed in flowing, giving the movement an almost ethereal quality. His daughter. She had changed. Lost weight, the hair on her head, gone, the joy in her eyes replaced by something else. Calculation? Knowledge? He felt small before her, uncertain and lost in the wild lands of Kohr while she was floating amidst Mind Weavers as if she were one of them.

[Divination Mage – lvl ???]

“You are the Teacher of Kasak Uruun,” he said, more to himself. She had contacted him, from another realm, to seek help. But the person he saw did not require his help. What could he offer to someone as powerful as her? A three mark human. His daughter. *“I’m proud of you.”*

“I have become what I am not thanks to you, father,” she spoke. Her tone wasn’t harsh. Playful in a way, dismissive. A fact more than anything. *“I can see you have sacrificed much to come here. More than I would have imagined.”*

‘ding’ ‘Divination Magic Resistance reaches lvl 16’

His eyes opened wide. *“Ravenhall... I...”*

Her eyes widened before a shiver went through her. A hand grasped her brow, the mind weavers nearby looking her way though they did not move beyond that.

“What have I done...” Octavia spoke before she looked up, a pulse of magic flowing out from her. She took in a deep breath before she focused back on him. *“The love of a father. I had hoped it would bring you here, despite the time, despite our past.”*

He didn’t dare speak. She knew. Though he didn’t know how much. Whatever he could say, it would not change what he had done. She knew why he had done it, knew he would have stopped at nothing to find her.

“I had hoped it would be less.” She shook her head ever so slightly. *“But what is done, is done. Let their sacrifice not be in vain. You are here now, and I need your help. Walk with me.”* She landed on the cold salt stone before she walked towards Rosie. A sad smile tugged on her lips when she touched the spirit of fire. The flames did not hurt her. Octavia moved past the summoned being and towards a tunnel beyond.

Adam followed, glancing at the Mind Weavers as he fidgeted with his hands. He had found her. Finally. Though he felt conflicted. A part of him was glad, knew he would do everything to help.

And yet the guilt he felt now that she knew, was worse than anything he had felt before. His cause had been just up until now, though his conviction had wavered.

“You said you hoped it would be less...”

She turned her head back towards him as she walked. A glance, one blue eye. *“The ashes you feel cannot be redeemed. Nothing I tell you would bring redemption. It is I who called you here. A selfish request perhaps, but a necessary one. What happened to the peoples of Ravenhall, it is mine to bear, though you would not have it.”*

“Know that your actions now are everything that matters,” she spoke, leading him into a spacious dome like cavern, moonlight shining in from a small opening in the high ceiling. Runes drawn in blood covered the entirety of the ground and walls. Runes he did not know, interlinked and set up in intricate patterns, a magic circle more complex than most everything he had seen before. The work of years.

“Why?” he asked. The question had weighed him down. More as time had passed in Kohr. More as he had started to lose hope. Now that it was here, it was the only thing that kept him sane. *“I have killed... thousands...”*

“I know. And you will help save millions,” she answered. *“What do you know of the Ascended?”*

Hours had passed since Octavia had explained to him what she had learned. What had started in Eregar’s Haven, what had led her to the North, deep below the surface, into facilities long forgotten, and finally to Kohr. Adam believed her. For the first time he truly listened, all the memories of her childlike enthusiasm, her pleas to learn more about the past of the Shadow’s Hand, the secrets held deep in Dagon’s vaults, secrets only to be seen by the Elders themselves.

Of course he had checked, out of interest if anything. But he had found nothing. History past, boring sets of names and retold events that had nothing to do with what his daughter claimed. It was difficult to refuse her now. If only for her power, both the magic she wielded, and the position she held amongst the Mind Weavers giving credit to her claims.

It left a bitter taste. All of it.

He could help with what she needed, and he would. But to think he had not been aware of such a threat. His pride as an Elder of the Shadow’s Hand, thought shattered, suffered yet another blow. Oblivious, though he didn’t know who else would’ve known. About the Ascended, the ancient war, the missing sun. It was hard to believe, but he was in another realm. His daughter commanded mind magic creatures he had thought demons.

Perhaps he had sought judgment, but it was not judgment he had found in Kohr. What he had found was purpose. Something to cling to. Octavia was right. He could not change the past, but he would do all in his power to change the future. His influence in Ravenhall was gone, and in the Empire he would now be a fugitive. If the Hand had been defeated, he at least knew that Lys would’ve handled the demon threat. Perhaps his summoning had unwittingly prepared the Kingdoms and Empires of humanity for what was to come.

But while he was no Elder of the Shadow’s Hand no more, he had spent decades of his live traveling, had debts and favors owed to him. It would not be easy, but if he could navigate Octavia into a position where she could make her plea and wield her power, perhaps there was still time.

He looked at Arken, the young lightning elemental he had found long past in his travels through the southern mountain range of Kroll. Sparks arced around the being, some connecting to the runes within the cavern. "You will make this possible, old friend," he spoke, a slight smile on his face as he looked at the being still a few hundred levels above his own. Something told him that Arken understood, more than any other of his summons. He remembered that he had felt the same, even before coming to Kohr.

He turned his head when he felt something connect to his mind. Beings clad in dark leather approached through the tunnel.

It was time.

Octavia was among them, joining Adam's side as she looked at Arken.

"*You seem joyous,*" Adam remarked. Some of his own deep fatigue had faded, though he was tense.

She glanced at him, a smile on her face, the fangs she had not had visible. Likely caused by evolutions. "*How could I not be? My kin will know the touch of sunlight, will know the scent of earth, the sound of birdsong.*"

Kin, Adam thought as he watched dozens and dozens of Mind Weavers float into the hall, each taking up position on the runic circle, all without a word spoken, without a sound made. He thought the atmosphere serene. Divine even.

"*Are you sure it will work?*" he asked.

Octavia's smile didn't waver. "*I know your magic well. I trust in your abilities, father. I trust in mine, and theirs,*" she said, gesturing wide.

The motions stopped a few minutes later. The only sounds in the cave the lightning sparks of Arken. Adam knew there were over a hundred, close to two hundred. All of them the same mind magic wielders he had occasionally fought in Kohr. Their eyes like abysses, their forms thin and frail. They were monsters, looked like monsters, and yet Octavia floated amongst them, at the center of the magic circle. And he would help to bring them back.

His daughter. Himself. And everyone around them.

Summoning magic was complex, but what Octavia required was his ability to bring his allies along through teleportation. A skill any summoner at his level would surely possess, though few still practiced this rare school. Most preferred a more direct path to power. Body Enhancement or Elemental magics. But they would be limited by their own level, their stats, and the skills they wielded. All the while he could wield the power of half an army, as long as he managed to convince or force them into his control. The former he preferred. Companions instead of slaves, using less of his mana to command.

He formed the bonds. Temporary as he was not capable to hold so many for extended periods of time. All but his four remaining old companions he had let go. Demon spawn returned to continue their roaming of the unforgiving lands of Kohr, either that or corpses left to be eaten, no longer animated by his magic.

"*I am ready,*" he sent thought the established link.

"*As am I. Tell Arken to start,*" Octavia spoke as she cut the palm of her hand with a bone dagger. Blood dripped onto the runes below, her eyes closed as she started drawing into thin air with an outstretched finger, more runes appearing, glowing blue as they started to circle around her.

Adam gave the command, and Arken obeyed. The lightning being raised its two broad arms, bursts of blue light extending before a continuous stream of its magic flowed into the runes below. The blood neither burnt nor distorted but instead glowing in hues of red.

A thrum echoed through the caverns. Originating from Octavia. The sound reverberated in a strange harmony. Screeches resounded far in the distance above the cavern, demons feeling the magic taking hold. A chance to fill their bellies, to tread ground softer than the salt stone they had known for all their life.

Another pulse.

Lightning surged.

The runes trembled.

Adam opened his eyes, breathing hard. The air tasted different. Warmer. No longer did it smell of the sea. Instead it was dry. He smiled and fell, the connection to the beings all around snapping like splintered chains, only his four remained, Arken much smaller than he had been before, though he knew the elemental would recover.

They were in the cave where he had found him, high up in the southern mountains, territory either unclaimed or belonging to Kroll.

They had made it back.

To Elos.

Adam knelt down and touched the ground. Solid stone and bits of earth. He smiled as tears came to his eyes, sunlight entering the cave from a crack near the entrance. He scrambled up and jumped down, rushing to the light as movement came to the Mind Weavers around him. They followed him out. Out onto the steep slope descending down towards the Isanna desert.

He closed his eyes when he came outside, Rosie, and Arken catching up. The warmth made the hair on his arms and neck stand up. Reprieve at last, from the salt, the cold, and the darkness. What he had missed, the others had not ever known. Strange noises came from the creatures floating nearby, the dark abysses of their eyes staring towards the glowing orbs hanging on the distant horizon. The endless sea of sand expanding before them, mountains rising behind.

Laughter resounded and Adam turned, rushing to his daughter before he hugged her. He hesitated but she didn't reject his embrace. The sound had felt so familiar, like the girl that had wreaked havoc in his office, the girl who had sparred against Shadows despite his wishes for her to stay hidden, the girl that had spent much of her time in Viscera and the Haven, sitting in on classes meant for Shadows.

He held her, like he should have done ages past.

And soon she raised a hand to his chest, gently pushing him away.

She was not that girl anymore.

She was the Teacher. A three mark. A divination mage evolved to bear fangs, wearing furs, surviving in Kohr, and commanding creatures he had thought demons, monsters. Yet still, she remained his daughter, and when he had failed her time and time again, they were both here now.

"We are here," she sent.

He looked towards the suns, covering his eyes lightly. *"We are."*

"Alone. Lost. With the kin that will be branded demons, abominations. The same will be said about me," she spoke.

"I have destroyed my reputation. Few would even listen to me, but those few remain. Where do you plan to go?" Adam asked.

Octavia looked at him. There had been a time when she had shared everything with him. Her thoughts, her worries. That time had long past. He knew as much.

"The Golden Lily," she spoke. *"Though as I am now, I may be rejected, attacked even. But they are my best chance among humans."*

"The Lily," Adam mused. *"I hadn't known."*

"They contacted me after my time with the tribes of the northern plains," she said. *"You seem skeptical."*

Adam looked out onto the desert. *"I don't doubt their power. But those I know who are part of their Order... I don't know if they would listen."*

"Do you have any alternatives? It's been a long while since I left," Octavia spoke, looking to the south.

"The world does not change in a few short years," Adam said and smiled. *"There is an old friend that lives in this desert. Perhaps he would be willing to listen, despite everything I've done."*

"Who?" Octavia asked.

"A librarian," Adam spoke and smiled. *"He might know more about the Ascended."*

"The Foundation," Octavia said, a slight smile tugging on her lips. *"I'm banned."*

"Of course you are," Adam said. *"Will you remain here with your... kin."*

She looked at him, her eyes a little softer. *"I shall wait for two days without venturing out. The Foundation will know about the current status in the Plains. Though after, I will... venture westwards."*

"West... what are you suggesting?" Adam asked.

"There are a people, living in a desert far from here. They will help," she said. *"But we need everyone we can convince."*

"Humans?" he asked, but a part of him knew the answer already.

She shook her head, ever so slightly.

"What are they?" he couldn't help but ask.

"Mava. Tailed beings of fur and claw. Teachers once, friends, and kin," she spoke.

Adam couldn't help but sigh. He had expected something worse, though he ignored the demons floating all around them. *"If you trust them."*

"That I do, though they will be less concerned about this threat. Their way of life is... different," she said.

“I will go to the Foundation. Wait for me,” he spoke.

“I will. For two days,” she answered. *“I promise.”*

Adam nodded. He touched her shoulder, gently. *She promised. She won't leave again. She is here now. In this realm. Our home.*

He gave her a light nod and turned, summoning his allies before he flew out towards the desert. Towards the Foundation of Glass.

The flight took hours, the suns unforgiving. How long had he longed for their presence? And already he wished again for shade. His wish was granted as the suns set, his journey continuing for another few hours, the sea of stars above reminding him that he was not in Kohr. Not in the lands of demons and horrors.

He used the stars to find what he sought, finally seeing the mountains in the distance. Adam summoned a thick armored coat. He covered his face and put up his hood. Nobody had seen him in years, let alone the Seekers would not recognize him in the first place. Few had ever seen him. He did not try to hide on his approach, though he made his summons vanish, lest they be recognized.

He landed in the sands, waiting for the group of defenders to approach. Sand mages all of them, gliding on the desert grounds as if they had been born in it. He would not challenge them, even now after he had faced Kohr. Most were in the two hundreds and though he had reached the three hundreds himself while in the Great Salt, his summons were exhausted, most of them destroyed in the past years. Perhaps he could fight his way through, but facing the Seekers in their desert was not a wise thing to do. And he was glad he didn't have to.

“Traveler,” one of the Seekers spoke, approaching with purpose. “Speak your name, and your reason for approaching the Foundation.”

Adam summoned a small trinket, one he had gotten decades past. An inscribed silver plate, enchanted and stored within his ring. He held it up and placed it on the tray of sand that formed before him.

The Seeker inspected the plate for two seconds. “Come with us.”

He didn't reply, following in silence, into the Foundation and up the many stairs. Adam found the library far more impressive at night, the starlight dancing on the glass surface. He sighed, entering past the large doors with the same Seeker leading him deeper into the structure. Past stairs and corridors. Soon he reached a single door, made of dark treated wood, the handle made of silver.

The Seeker knocked and entered, returning half a minute later. “You may enter, stranger.”

Adam looked at the armored man, his face obscured just like his own. He entered, closing the door behind himself.

The office looked the same as he had remembered. Shelves full of books from ground to ceiling, simple tapestries of deep red and yellow colors, a single painting that depicted nothing he could understand but made him feel longing, for what he did not know. The wooden desk was modest, as was everything else, more so considering the power of the man he sought.

The same simple sand colored robes. Black skin and hair. He looked young, but Adam knew better. Deep green eyes took him in.

“Evan. It’s been a while, old friend,” Adam spoke.