

## The Long Night

Yirrel looked around at the gathering, Bera standing at her side. Leaders of all the great factions were present, aside from a few exceptions. But even those who didn't come themselves sent representatives. Vara Smokewing stood in a corner, here instead of the Awirren Goldenfeather, talking with a few representatives of other sects. It was probably a good thing that the Golden Phoenix hadn't come in person, she tended to bring trouble with her wherever she went.

Kithul of the Stars stood next to the big crafting factions, the one of the strongest Cthull in the Infinite Realm was obsessed with recreating the technology that his people used to have. Venges Darkhoof loomed nearby talking with Yirrel's sister Yerala. The two of them worked together often, as many people that focused on conquering dungeons usually started as adventurers.

The room was filled with High Rankers, although not all had come to the Tournament. Some had other obligations, others didn't really care. Yirrel herself understood the value of these gatherings, it was why she did them. It fostered peace among the ruling powers. Even the criminal elements were present. The Queen of Shadows sat on a couch, surrounded with men waiting on her every thought, their focus obviously sex related—she could feel their draw from across the room.

There were few people who were weak in this room, the staff that catered the event, a few attendants. Everyone else was in the rank of High Rankers.

Yirrel kept her eyes on the crowd searching. Zenker and Sigmund were late, as the two of them usually were. She resisted the urge to sigh, she should've forced Zenker to stay with her instead with Sig. Still, she knew that while Sig often indulged in Zenker in his fits of random ideas, he would get him here eventually.

At least Raela was present, Yirrel had seen her somewhere. Dracael had left with Eratemus and the Grey Horde, to bring her fleet

closer to the Frontier. They didn't have any information about the Third coming by sea, but they wanted to be ready regardless.

Someone approached her from her side and she glanced up to see Gemheart standing there. She smiled and inclined her head.

"Gemheart, I'm glad that you came," Yirrel said.

"Yirrel, Ms. Bera," he said, greeting both of them.

"You looking forward to the crafting tournament?" She asked. Gemheart supplied most of the materials and rewards for the crafting tournaments, and his faction did compete as well.

"Of course, mine are not the best crafters in the core, but I am thinking about pushing them to improve more."

"I am sure that they will," Yirrel said.

"How is your warden, Zacharia, been doing?" Gemheart asked. "His matches had been interesting."

Yirrel knew that the Ranker had gotten the large krecean's gratitude and trust by saving his daughter. It was one more reason why she wanted him to remain close to her. She needed people that would do the good thing even when they didn't need to. The Ranker was not quite where she wanted him to be, but she had time to mold him into something great. He had proven himself during the tournament, and that was enough for now.

"He is well, he is on patrol in the city," Yirrel said. Few of her wardens were present here, only the most powerful ones, and not even all of them. She needed powerful people out in the city, keeping the peace. This gathering was unlikely to spark into trouble, and if it did... well, a few guards weren't going to stop anyone.

She saw his mouth open to speak, and then her **|Perfect Danger Sense: Premonition of Disaster|** sparked. Her mind went into overdrive, she saw people all over the room move, but this was the most intense feeling of impending doom that she had ever felt. She didn't pull anything.

*—Abyssal Aegis—*

A glowing deep blue shield manifested in front of her, raising her defenses as she grabbed Bera on her right and pulled her close as armor manifested around her and a shield grew on her left hand.

**[Inspire: Area of Abyssal Defense], [Inspire: Shield of the Depths], [Inspire: Power of the Shield], True Link—Armor of the Depths, True Link—Overclock, Battle Roar, Inspiring Presence, Hastening Presence, Strengthen Defense.**

She boosted herself and those in her immediate surroundings.

**|I Held The Abyss|**

The world twisted around her as her will billowed out, defenses of everyone around her increased further.

**|My Will Is Law|**

Reality bowed to her will, everyone around her obeyed her will and burned their most powerful defensive abilities, those who had noticed something and those who hadn't. She only hoped that it would be enough.

Then the world turned white.

\* \* \*

Zenker looked at himself in the mirror, adjusting his suit and placing the special monocle over his eye. His fascination with old human fashion was still alive after all these years. He felt a tap on his shoulder and turned around to see Sigmund standing there signing with his hands.

“I know, I know,” he said and picked up a top hat from a chair nearby. “There, I’m ready.”

Sigmund rolled his eyes and walked away. Zenker followed after him. They walked out of his house at his faction compound and Zenker turned his eyes toward the cliffs where the Warden compound rested on top of it.

And then, the entire cliff was engulfed in white light.

\* \* \*

Zach patrolled the streets with Naha, who was now wearing her human-elf body and going by Lira Windfall. The two of them had been partnered together, and slowly they were leaving clues about their relationship. Zach had spent most of his time since on patrols and training his skills. He knew that in order to finish his Class Quest he would need every advantage that he could get.

They were walking down the street between North and East Districts as part of their route. He didn't know if it was on purpose or not, but all of his routes had kept him away from the Southern District. A part of him was offended, it was as if the Warden Commander didn't trust him to even get close to the sects. In the end it didn't matter, he had seen Ryun's fights, he knew.

A group of people across the street of them caught Zach's eyes. A group of three demasi and a human were surrounding a demasi woman. She was clearly in distress.

Zach gestured to Naha and they headed that way.

Then, the night turned into day. The ground shook and the air filled with noise making his ears hurt. He glanced to the side and saw the cliff where the Warden compound rested gone, dirt and debris flew through the air and was falling on the district below it.

He saw a big chunk of rock in his direction, and he moved. He blinked to the other side of the street, the four men were running away, but the girl was on the ground as she lost her balance from the ground shake.

He grabbed her just as a large rock hit the building above them, and he pulled her with him using **Old Heritage** to jump to the side.

He rolled as the rock crashed through and tumbled over the street, crushing the running men.

Naha stepped out of the shadows and both of them looked in the direction of the cliff as the air started filling up with cries.

\* \* \*

The attack on the High Rankers went without any issues. Erik watched the destruction from the opposite side of the city. Two people flanked him, his squad, he didn't need a lot of people for this, and they didn't want to risk capture.

But now that his part was done, they needed to return home. First, though, he needed to find his sister. He had been completely taken off back and surprised when he had seen her in the tournament. That hadn't been a part of any plan that he knew about. Nayra wasn't supposed to be anywhere near here, and he was really interested to hear how that happened. She had always had a rebellious streak; it was possible that she was here without anyone knowing. Regardless, he would find out soon enough.

Just as he was about to move, a voice echoed inside his head.

\* \* \*

Ryun turned his ears in the direction of the destruction in the distance. His eyes couldn't see anything but a rippling fog, and his sense didn't extend that far.

"Go to the sect now, call all our warriors," Erdania was giving orders to her and Selia's escort.

"Grandfather was there," Selia whispered.

Erdania turned to her. "He is strong he—"

"—You know what that was, the Reaction Engine. Anyone caught in that is dead for good, their souls scourged," Selia answered, her voice saddened.

Ryun glanced at his people behind him, but they were looking in the distance, where their eyes could see what was happening. Nayra's eyes were open wide, and Ryun figured that this had to have something to do with her people.

He was about to speak when he caught something at the edge of his sense. He turned his head and saw something in the center of the arena. A box made out of bright Essence.

"What is that?" Ryun pointed.

Selia and Erdania turned and looked at it. Anrosh stepped next to him and spoke.

"There is a protective barrier in the middle of the arena," she told him. "A see-through box."

Before anyone could say anything else a voice spoke inside his head.

**"People of the Infinite Realm,"**

Everyone around him froze and Ryun looked at Selia and Erdania.

"Do you hear it too?" Ryun asked.

Selia nodded, while Erdania had a strange look on her face.

**"Long have you kept your eyes closed, blind to the sins of those you follow. I speak to you now only to make you understand. You should've never allowed them to do this to you, to chain you and turn you into this weak thing you have become."**

"Kaeliss," Ryun heard Erdania whisper. Selia turned her head to look at her partner.

**"I am not here for you today. You are already lost. I am here for those who are yet to come. I do this to teach you all a lesson. You are too weak."**

Ryun saw the surge of essence and felt the space itself tremble with his sense. It was so powerful that his sense nearly made his head hurt from the intensity.

"Heavens," Anrosh whispered next to him.

"What is it, what do you see?" He asked.

"There is a line in space inside of the barrier," Anrosh answered.

\* \* \*

The sound of alarm blasted her awake. Reyla quickly got out of bed and dressed in her armor, they had drills about this, but this was the first time that an actual alarm had been sounded. She walked out of her room and out of the house, heading up the stairs and to the command room on top of it.

Once inside she saw her older sister, Vanessa and her brother Emrys were standing with their mother and father Olem.

All of them were looking at a table that had a map of their surrounding generated on it. The army and the sky palaces had pulled back behind the Great Swarm, since they were getting close to the Frontier of the Settled Territories. They were about a week out at their current pace, and they didn't want them to immediately know about the army. The more time it took them to gather a response, the better their attack would be. They would underestimate the swarm, no matter how many people told them that it was a great threat the High Rankers would inevitably assume that the people on the frontier were just weak.

Reyla walked up to Emrys and whispered. "What is happening?"

Emrys glanced at her, his expression unsure. "Don't know yet, we got the reports that the swarm is fighting something at the front."

"Another swarm?" Reyla asked.

"Unknown," Emrys answered.

Her mother was holding a Far-link orb in her hands and speaking with someone. Then, she turned suddenly, and her eyes landed on the three of them.

"You three, come with me," she walked off, and they hurried after her. She led them to a side room where the teleportation platform was placed into the floor, she stepped on, and the three of them followed.

A moment later they were teleported somewhere else.

This was a large room, with stone walls, their mother stepped off while people in armor stepped aside. Immediately Reyla recognized their full plate blue armor as that of the royal guards. They walked

through a long corridor until they reached a large command room. The Emperor stood in the center, looking over a large desk that showed the map of their surroundings with colored grains of sand creating the terrain. Both the army and the swarm were depicted too, with green and blue sand. On the front of the Great Swarm lines she saw a lot of red.

One of the people next to the Emperor leaned over and spoke. “We just received word from the front, one of our sky ships managed to get close. The swarm is fighting the undead.”

Reyla saw her mother walk over and speak. “Are you certain?”

The Emperor raised his head and looked at her. “We heard no word of him moving.”

Reyla sat in the background with her siblings, just watching as people yelled and tried to figure out what was happening.

“Move us forward,” the Emperor ordered. “Order all aerial assets over the swarm.”

Reyla looked at the table and saw hundreds of dots on the map moving toward the back side of the swarm. The army on the ground wouldn’t be able to keep up.

The generals and family heads around the Emperor spoke in hushed tones, several Far-link orbs were being used to communicate with the forward elements.

“We can’t lose the swarm,” the Emperor turned to Reyla’s mother.

Karya Ornn nodded, but before she could speak, an ear piercing shriek reached them from the outside.

Everyone raised their heads and exclamations came from the outside of the room. Quickly everyone shuffled out, almost running to the large balcony of the flying palace. Reyla caught up to her mother who was standing at the edge where large concave windows stood, magnifying the view. They all were looking out into the distance. She followed her mother’s gaze, and then just as she was about to ask what was happening, the clouds above where the windows were looking were broken by a massive shape. Vargar, the massive dragon that ruled the swarm tumbled down, blood spilling from his body.



Behind him another form split the clouds, larger and far more terrifying. A skeletal undead dragon followed after Vargar, its sockets blazing with orange fire, its bones carved with orange glowing formations. The skeletal wings were filled with fire and with every beat of them it sent blasts all around it, burning the smaller fliers that Vargar had called to defend him. More shapes broke through the clouds, skeletal drakes and birds, decaying flying zombies, even some karura wearing armor. They fell on the flying monsters from the swarm.

The palaces and sky ships were too far away to do anything, but she saw some try to fire at the undead in the distance.

The undead dragon caught up to Vargar, its claws sinking into the black scales. Then a green fog suddenly surrounded them, and she thought that she saw Vargar's scales sizzling. Everyone on the balcony watched in silence as the undead dragon ripped into the great beast's flesh, bit into its neck. Silver fire was blazing from Vargar's neck, but it wasn't enough. The undead dragon's bones weren't getting damaged no matter how much it tried.

With one last scream the great dragon floundered, and the undead beast ripped Vargar's throat out with its jaw while its claws ripped apart his wings. The great beast fell through the air, toward the ground and the middle of the swarm.

No one said anything as it hit the ground. Then, it was almost as a ripple went through the swarm, and it went wild. Their roars and howls filled the air, and she looked down to see total chaos. Some monsters were fighting each other, the swarm was ripping itself apart.

"We need to destroy the undead," Reyla heard her mother say to the Emperor. "There are still enough monsters that smaller swarms will form, they will continue forward no matter what."

The Emperor opened his mouth to respond, but then the two mountains in the distance that surrounded the swarm exploded outward. The debris reached far up into the air that it would've hit the palaces and sky ships, instead it landed on the core of the swarm.

Reyla leaned forward as the magnifying windows were turned to show the mountains. There were giant holes in them, and then she saw

shapes moving through them. A legion of undead monsters spilled out of the holes and fell upon the swarm.

“No,” Reyla heard the Emperor whisper in the silence on the balcony. No one had any words to express what they were seeing. They were still too far away, and even if they weren’t, the army was behind them. They could only sit there and watch as the swarm was taken apart.

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Eratemus, the Lord of Death, as he was called by some, pulled himself from the vessel of the undead dragon. He let it continue on his basic orders, killing any monster in its way. He grimaced at the discomfort of being compressed from such a large form to a vessel so much smaller.

“It is done?” the Grey Horde asked from his side.

Eratemus nodded his head, the demasi vessel still feeling stiff. “All that is left is for us to take care of the rest of the swarm.”

The two of them stood on top of a mountain that was straight in the path of the swarm. His undead were streaming through the cave openings at the base of the mountain, coming out of the tunnels that lead to the Under, swarming the valley where the front lines of the swarm were passing through. He felt the threads that he had attached to his control plates, but he didn’t need to control the undead much. Simple commands of *kill everything in your way* sufficed.

But the amount of undead that could come out were insufficient for the swarm. Thankfully, he had brought all of his armies. “I’m blowing the mountains,” he said.

The Grey Horde didn’t answer, instead she just watched, surrounded by two of her champions. In contrast, Eratemus had a squad of his death knights. His greatest creations, with anchored souls of people in his service.

Eratemus pulled out a formation trigger and activated it. Two mountains far in the distance exploded, the debris showering the

monster swarm. When the dust settled, Eratemus reached through his control plate and sent a single command—*Go*.

Undead surged from the underground caverns, first monsters, followed by his undead armies. Undead monsters were a great resource and he had been using them as shock troops. What he sent to attack now looked more like a lot more terrifying monster swarm.

The result was never in doubt. The swarm assembled here was great, but his undead horde was greater. He was losing undead at a fast rate, his armies would be wrecked for a long time until he had the time to replace them, but it was worth it.

“They are coming,” the Grey Horde said.

Eratemus noticed what she meant a moment later. Far in the distance he saw the flying palaces and sky ships of the Third Iteration. Their armies would be even further behind, but that was an opportunity in itself.

“Let’s go,” Eratemus said and turned, walking over to one of his revenant dragons that waited there. The blue scales of the dragon had gotten paler, but other than that, its body had been preserved perfectly by his art. He climbed up to the saddle and then commanded the beast to air. It beat its massive wings and took to the sky.

The Grey Horde followed quickly behind, catching up to fly alongside him with her own wings. Her champions flew slightly behind, trailing after them.

They flew over the back line of the swarm where the undead hadn’t yet reached. But he could see below that his armies were devastating the monsters. It was no contests really. His undead knew no fear, they knew no pain, each had been reinforced by his art, and all of them were organized, working for the same goal. The monsters were fighting both against the undead and themselves.

They were still outside the range of the Third Iteration, and Eratemus glanced at the Grey Horde. He saw her looking at him and nodded his head.

Immediately she dove, heading straight for the ground. Her form blurring and the air shaking by her passage. He watched as she neared

the ground and the space around her twisted as she slammed her fist into the ground. Everything rippled the ground cracked and parted, a blast of force expanded throwing monsters and debris in all directions. The back line of the monster swarm was decimated, and his undead moved in, finishing up the rest.

Monsters would escape, it was inevitable, but their monster swarm was no more.

The Grey Horde flew back up and rejoined him in the air. Then, with their power demonstrated the two of them moved forward, slowly.

There was no fire coming in their direction from the Third, everything was silent. Eratemus wondered if they would attack, or if they would suffer them long enough to listen. They flew to hover in front of the largest flying palace.

**“Erakael,”** Eratemus started, using a formation to amplify his voice. **“Your swarm is done, return to your Empire and we can have peace. Forget old grudges, nothing good can come of this.”**

The Emperor of a wronged people narrowed his eyes, and then spoke.

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Reyla saw the Emperor’s eyes narrow in anger. Her mother put a hand on his shoulder and spoke.

“Erakael, without the swarm we can’t win against all of the Settled Territories.”

“We still have the army, and our people in the core will sow chaos. We can win. He broke his army against the swarm.”

“Erakael—” her mother started, but the Emperor shook his head.

**“How dare you!”** He yelled at the two beings hovering in front of them. **“You massacred us, and now you want us to retreat with our tails between our legs?”**

The pale demasi sitting on top of an undead dragon, the Lord of Death, shook his head. **“You cannot win Erakael, every dead**

**monster from your swarm will join my army. But even had I no undead left, you could not win. I am not here alone.”**

At that, Reyla saw the Emperor glance at the other person in the air. A white skreen, her wings stretched wide. She looked slightly different than the ordinary skreen, her wings were thicker and wider, and she had a tuft of white fur around her neck. She was a command queen, not a breeder one. Reyla knew who she was, of course, the stories about the only skreen command queen that had ever gained control of a hive was often talked about in the Empire. Skreen followed their breeder queens, command queens only controlled skreen on behalf of them. But not this one, the Grey Horde was unique among the skreens.

She hadn't been a part of the war that happened long ago, only because she fought the kracean who hadn't joined with the rest of the Third.

**“Why are you here Grey Horde?”** The Emperor asked.  
**“You care nothing for them or us.”**

**“I've learned my lessons well. I will not have war weaken us all. Go back to your lands, this world is infinite, grow strong and prosper, we need not ever meet one another again.”**

**“So, you side with them?”**

**“I side with my hive.”**

**“You are powerful, but you cannot stand against my army alone,”** Erakael said.

“Erakael,” Reyla's mother whispered. “What are you doing? You want to fight her?”

“We can take her, if we bait her into using her ideal... she can fall just like anybody else can,” the Emperor whispered back.

**“You should know better than that Erakael, skreen serve in your army. A skreen Queen goes nowhere without her army.”**

At that the ground rumbled again, and Reyla looked down from the edge. More black shapes were coming out of the two holes made in

the mountains, and then some even took to the sky. It took her a moment to recognize them as skreen.

“We can’t fight the undead and her army too,” Reyla’s mother whispered to the Emperor.

She saw Erakael Darkwing, the Emperor of Sands, look down at the undead that were cleaning up the stragglers of the once Great Swarm and the skreen army moving behind them. His expression was conflicted, he closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

“I—” the Emperor started, but then a loud chime sounded in Reyla’s head.

A notification unlike anything that she had ever seen blazed in front of her eyes, a red screen. She read through it, but didn’t understand anything that was written on it.

“This is impossible,” Reyla heard her mother say, her voice shaking.

The Emperor and some of the generals around them had terrified looks on their faces.

**“What did you do?”** The Emperor yelled at the two, but Reyla saw that they too were shocked.

**“This was not our doing,”** the Lord of Death said even his undead voice shaken.

**“You’ve killed us all.”**

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Kaeliss Cloudwrought stood in the middle of the arena, his people standing at the edges of the glowing barrier that now surrounded them. The four pillars of light were high quality barrier arrays, powerful enough to buy them time should anyone decide to interfere. With his speech to the people of the city done, there was only one thing left to do.

“Berion,” Kael said to the most important person on his team. “Do it now.”

The minotaur nodded his head, his Qi had already been moving through his body in a controlled fashion that would've put even Kael's teacher to shame. Then, the reality around Berion twisted as he pushed his skill and then released his technique.

The space in front of Berion twisted and then ripped open, a gash split the air and parted, opening up a portal, anchoring two different locations together. Berion collapsed to his knees and Kael dashed forward, catching him before he hit the ground. His nose and eyes were bleeding, but he was smiling.

"I did it Kael," Berion rasped out.

"Yes," Kael said as he glanced at the permanent portal that his friend had created. "Yes, you did."

"Go," Berion whispered. "Do it for all of us."

Kael made sure that Berion was solid, and then he stood up. With resolute steps he walked through the gash in space. One moment he was in the arena and in the next he stepped on the scorching sand, a massive dome filled the vision in front of him. He heard thunder and looked to the side to see an army charging from a fort built on a rock nearby, they were there to protect the dome, but they were too far away—they would not reach him in time.

He spread his wings and flew over to the dome. He saw the creatures that filled it, twisted monsters and horrors unlike anything he had ever seen or imagined. They clawed at the dome, trying to get out. The dome itself was massive, larger than entire territories, filling the sky and everything in between. There were so many monsters inside that he couldn't even begin to guess at a number, some flying others crawling over each other on the ground. There were grotesque buildings that he could only glimpse at moments when the monsters moved in the right way. As he got closer, the monsters at the front stilled and then moved aside. A figure wearing a yellow robe with a hood that covered their whole body walked up to the edge of the dome, it had a wooden mask on their face, but as Kael met the eyes behind it he felt his entire body shudder.

He turned his head and took a big breath, for a moment he hesitated, but then he remembered. He steeled himself and placed his hand on the surface of the dome.

**11th Dome of the Reckoning - Dome of Hastur the King in Yellow**

**Time until release — *unknown* (Counter will start upon arrival of the Ninth Iteration Rankers)**

**Do you wish to release the dome early?  
Y/N**

Kael took a deep breath, and then he made his choice.

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Berion had regained some of his strength by the time when Kael stumbled through the portal. His expression was shaky and he immediately yelled out to everyone.

“Quick, it is time for us to go!”

The others gathered to him and Berion started his technique.

“Did you do it?” Fethum asked.

“I did, and we need to get away from here before those things get through,” Kael said, glancing over his shoulder at the portal filled with light.

“I’m ready,” Berion said, breathing heavily.

“Take us away from here,” Kael said, and Berion released his technique.