

Storyboard-38

(Quick note, at this point I think the Amazon fighter will have to be added in the second draft because without having her in the previous Chapter I'm finding it tough to just drop her in here)

Not outright winning proved harder than Paul expected.

He'd explained Grant's plan to get inside the forcefield to Joseph as they ran toward the fighting, and the buffalo had reluctantly admitted it, explained the seeming incompetence of the Steel Link men. They hit the fight, pulling their punches; despite Paul's burning desire to cave in the head of every Chamber people he came across.

The problem Paul noticed was just how weak the Chamber seemed to be. They had conventional weapons and were proficient in using them, but except for the occasional talisman, they had no magical heavy hitters. So even if the three to four times the number of people stood between his side and the Wassal-looking Grant decoy than Paul had, not overpowering them took effort.

It seemed to support Wassal's claim that all staves would be needed for this, and the very few would still be floating outside the mansion.

God Wolf had said half an hour. Paul thought they'd passed that time frame a while back, so he had to consider the ploy had failed.

He kept fighting, pulling back enough not to send anyone into unconsciousness and back away when the others behaved as if they were overwhelmed. Whoever had been left in charge still believed this could work.

A cry came from the Chamber. Someone pointed to the distant mansion, but it was the people Paul could make out that interested him. God, Wolf with two others.

"Remember what we're here for!" an ocelot in the black and gray body armor of Steel Link yelled, and ran at the Chamber.

Paul wasn't sure what their reasons were beyond maintaining the illusion Grant was Wassal but Wanted a chance to get on the other side of the forcefield. He wasn't leaving Grant alone if he could help it.

He was two dozen feet from the seal when he could make out neither of the men with God Wolf had an obvious staff. One spoke on a radio, and Paul pushed forward, shouldering and elbowing Chamber aside, effectively cutting himself off from his allies. He ignored the blows and stopped pulling back his.

The other person with God Wolf pointed to the fighting, maybe at Paul himself, and the wolf barked an order to the one with the phone.

Paul stopped hitting them, shoving people aside and pulling any grabbing on to him along. When the seal stepped through the gated entrance, Paul jumped after her, landing on the ground beside her, stepping away from him, along with the three chambers he'd dragged

along.

In his periphery, he saw a rat blink into existence and then vanish.

More people, Chamber, Steel Link, as well as the wolf(I know, I should name him), made it through the gate before the forcefield blocked the way again.

“Stand down!” God Wolf ordered, and Paul first fought, then gave in to the order and stopped trying to pull the Chamber off him.

The last one to stop fighting was the wolf, who whined plaintively when he dropped to his knees.

God Wolf stopped before Wassa, looking her up and down, frowning. “You’re not as much of a stranger as I expected you to be.”

“I shall take it as a compliment,” the seal replied, then looked around at the forcefield and the Chamber trying to push through. She stepped aside as God Wolf reached for her, or rather, Paul realized, Excalibur.

“You said it’s mine,” God Wolf growled.

“Of course, my apologies. It is simply that I have been attacked from so many sides today.” She gave him a smile Paul thought was devoid of warmth, but God Wolf only had eyes for the scabbarded sword she held. “I will be honored to give you what you so rightly deserve.” She stepped forward, but instead of presenting the sword to him, she swung it up and between his legs.

Paul winced in sympathy at the impact, but pushed through the weak compulsion and struck the closest Chamber as God Wolf dropped to his knees, one hand to his crotch the other reached for Wassa, but only grabbing her robe, which shimmered back into the blanket of mirror pieces as it ripped off Grant’s shoulder.

God Wolf’s confusion turned to anger. Then the Kangaroo had a boot to his head, sending the wolf down for the count.

Paul lunged for the man with the radio, tackling him down, then taking it out of his hand and crushing in. When he stood with Grant, two Steel Link people, and the wolf, were the only ones standing.

On the other side of the forcefield, Steel Link was subduing the last of the Chamber.

Grant only spared them a look before heading toward the mansion. Paul hurried to fall into steps with him, the three others right behind him.

“You should get back with the others,” Grant said.

“The plan had a bunch of men getting in with you. I’m not letting you do this alone.”

“If anyone sees me walk away from him,” the wolf said, “it’s my ass that’s going to pay.”

“So you’re going to do it when no one’s looking?” the Steel Link jaguars asked.

“Now isn’t the time,” Paul said. “I saw Thomas on this side, but he didn’t seem to have anyone with him.”

Grants kept glaring at Paul but didn’t comment on him not leaving. “Him and Denton had to use the men they were planning on bringing in to make my role believable when the Chamber showed up out of nowhere and converged on me.”

“How long is God Wolf going to be down for?”

“Nowhere near long enough,” Grant growled.

“Whatever happened in Monaco must have left a mark,” Paul said and was glared at again.

When they were halfway to the mansion, a form on the path resolved into that of a man and Grant growled. He was two-thirds of the way, and alone, which made Paul suspicious, and he reached for his gun, only to find his holster empty.

The wolf noticed the gesture. “Jo’s going to be pissed you lost his firearm”

No less pissed than Paul was. The next one, he was taping to his hand.

“I told them you’d find a way to get in,” Kingsley said. The vole held his staff, made of magnets before him with both hands, and had a satisfied smirk on his muzzle.

Grant unsheathed Excalibur. “You’re taking on more than you can handle this time, Kingsley. So walk away.”

“Really? When have I ever known me to underestimate you, Grant?”

“You think you can take me on?” the kangaroo replied, surprised. “With your staff when I have Excalibur?”

The vole shook his head. “I’m also not an idiot. It’s why you only think I’m standing in your way alone.” The air on the left and the right of the Vole shimmered and people became visible. The shimmering continued to expand and more people appeared. By the time it ended, at least a hundred people stood in a semi-circle between them and the house. A quarter of which held staves.

“Now,” Kingsley said. “How about you reconsider your position, hand me Excalibur, and come along quietly? I’d rather have you alive to see what we’re about to accomplish than dead.”

Grant looked around, then at Paul. “I told you to stay back.”

“And I told you I was sticking around.”

The wolf grinned at the Steel Link men. “You two can feel free to run off with your tail between your legs. We’ve got this.” He pulled a long knife from his back.”

“If you’re not scared of this,” the jaguar said, “just imagine how unimpressed we are with them.” He wracked his gun. His companion didn’t look as confident, but he checked the magazine on his machine gun and nodded.

“Idiots,” Grant whispered, then fixed his gaze on the vole.

“You really are suicidal, aren’t you, Grant?”

“What I am,” the kangaroo replied, “is utterly fed up with you and what you’ve done, let alone are planning on doing. I’d rather die, trying to stop you, than watch it happen.”

The vole shrugged. “If that’s how you want to go, we’ll be happy to make it happen.” With a quick motion of his staff, the Steel Link beaver was jerked forward by the machine gun until the strap broke.

“Links and their big guns,” the wolf chuckled.

Kingsley didn’t look at the beaver who hurried to his feet; instead, glaring at Grant, who hadn’t seemed to feel even a tug on Excalibur.

“Do you want to reconsider, Kingsley?”

“Just kill the lot of them,” the vole replied.

Paul rushed those on his right, jumping aside when one pointed a thin wand in his direction. The edge of the shock wave that caught him came with the sound of hundreds of people talking and music playing. He was up and had punched her before she could try again.

A gunshot coincided with the man closest to Paul staggering back, a bloody hole in the left side of his chest, then falling.

He kicked the wand behind him and struck the woman who tried to get around him.

“Down,” the wolf said and Paul ducked, felt the weight on his shoulder as the wolf used him to launch himself up. He landed in the middle of the Chamber, knife in one hand and whipping something thin in the other. The wand, Paul realized, as he threw himself into the fight. The wand did nothing magical in the wolf’s hand, but it still left cuts on anyone who was slashed with it.

Paul punched, kicked, and kneed anyone within reach. He broke skulls and arms and legs, but there were too many of them. He shouldered one aside, caught his breath, and had to deal with six more. His body armor took most of the impacts, he still felt too many of them.

He shoved them away, panting, and they didn’t move as far as he’d like. And they were already—

He was on the other side of the battlefield before the arms around him registered.

“It’s in the basement,” Thomas said. “It’s fucking impressive, whatever it is. Denton brought the forcefield down, but the Chamber has more of their people between ours and the mansion, so don’t expect help. Tell Grant.”

Then his best friend was gone, and Paul realized he’d left him a gift. He’d handed him a revolver. It was old and only had six shots, but it was a gun, and with that in his hand, Paul could handle anything.

He turned and found himself looking at someone pointing the massive end of a fire hose in his direction. The opening glowed as Paul leveled his gun. Then there was someone in a pale blue robe before him as the fire hit the water, turning to steam, then her, pushing her into him.

As they fell back, Paul lined the shot and fired. The staff holder’s head exploded.

As quickly and as gently as he could, he moved out from under her. A glance around told him everyone else was busy.

“Why?” He asked Wassa. She was badly hurt. Her entire front was burned beyond third degree, the ash cracking as she struggled to breathe.

“You were the one I could reach,” she wheezed.

“I’ll get you someone.” Paul tried to stand, but she pulled him down.

“I do not matter, Paul.” Her voice was weak. “Grant is the one. You must convince him of his power.”

“He already knows how to use Excalibur”

“His power,” she insisted. “The power in him.”

“But Practitioners need a staff.”

“Not him. Remind him he is the brightest at the bleakest. It is him, not—”

She was still, no longer breathing.

Paul gently removed her hand from his arm and ran into the fray. What she'd said didn't make a lot of sense, but this was magic. When did it ever? One thing was sure, if this wasn't the bleakest moment, Paul wasn't sure what would be.

He grabbed the Jaguar in passing. "I need you to keep them off me and Grant."

"Are you fucking insane?"

"I'm here. What does that tell you?"

The response was interrupted by Paul's gun, taking down a woman with what Paul thought was a wiper in her hand. A staff? What fucking concept did a wiper represent?

Grant was keeping an area around him clear by expertly wielding Excalibur to block blasts of magic and cut down anyone who got too close. Paul fired at the biggest person; then, reluctantly, handed the gun to the jaguar.

"We need time," he ordered, then ran at the kangaroo, who nearly cut him down.

"Are you fucking insane?" Grant demanded.

"We need a storm!"

"We need a fucking miracle," Grant replied, swiping a bolt of lightning into two, shattering it completely. Paul stayed at his back.

"You're the miracle, Grant. Wassa said this is when you're the strongest."

"Wassa's fucking more insane than you are! I haven't had my staff for years!"

"And neither did Wassa!"

Paul nearly staggered as the realization hit. Before he could tell Grant, a roar resounded, bringing the fighting to a stop as everyone turned to stare at God Wolf, running toward them.

"Oh, you have got to be fucking kidding me," Grant muttered.

Paul grabbed the kangaroo by the shoulder. "You're like them. They keep saying it."

"I am nothing—"

"Shut up and listen. Where are their staves? How did Wassa control water? How does God Wolf order people around? Where are their staves?"

Grant tried to speak as confusion filled his eyes. "I'm not," He finally managed, then looked around them and finally up at the clear blue sky.

God Wolf was fifty feet away and there was no doubt who he was running for now.

"Fuck, I hope you're right," Grant whispered. "Hold on to me."

Paul did as told, and before he was done tightening his grip, the light vanished behind clouds so thick he couldn't see anything.

In the darkness, the silence felt heavy, waiting, stalking.

Then, it broke into a blinding shattering of his eardrums.