

The Lightning Scroll

Character Backgrounds

Dexpa (Main Character):

Born: 1E 2899

Race: Khajiit

Appearance: White fur, black stripes

Class: Mage

Weapons: None

Spells: Destruction, Mysticism, (???)

Specialty: Lightning

Jo'navir (Brother):

Born: 1E 2897

Race: Khajiit

Appearance: Grey fur, black stripes

Class: Battlemage

Weapons: One-handed sword

Spells: Destruction, Alteration

Specialty: Sword/Fire, (???) / Fire

Mo'nazar (Best Friend):

Born: 1E 2899

Race: Khajiit

Appearance: Leopard pattern fur

Class: Mage

Weapons: None

Spells: Destruction, Mysticism, (???)

Specialty: (???), (???)

Za'vanir (Father):

Born: 1E 2861

Race: Khajiit

Appearance: Black fur

Class: Warrior

Weapons: Two-handed sword

Spells: None

Specialty: Greatsword

Ko'zura (Mother):

Born: 1E 2860

Race: Khajiit

Appearance: White fur, black stripes

Class: Healer

Weapons: None

Spells: Restoration, Alteration

Specialty: Healing Magic

Ra'zita (Younger sister of best friend):

Born: 1E 2908

Race: Khajiit

Appearance: Leopard pattern fur

Class: Alchemist

Weapons: None

Spells: None

Specialty: Alchemy

Prologue

1E 2916

A flash of lightning shook the waters of the swamp followed by the scream of a baliwog, quickly silenced by a wet slash.

The three boys were out doing their usual adventuring, slaying the creatures of the swamp bordering their village. The swamp was as repulsive as ever and shrouded in a thick fog, but this only made exploring it even more exciting for them. They lived in the Shivering Isles, a realm belonging to the Daedric Prince Sheogorath. Their village rested in the northern half of the island known as the Mania region.

Dexpa, a young, shy khajiit mage was just beginning to learn about how to use Mysticism spells thanks to his best friend Mo'nazar, another khajiit mage who showed him some of what he knew. And in exchange he was able to teach Mo'nazar what he knew of shock spells. They were born on the same day making them both the same age, 17. The spell books lying around Mo'nazars house taught them most of the spells that they knew. They also both wore the same grey mage robes tailored by Dexpa's father.

Dexpa's brother Jo'navir, being two years older than him, was an experienced battle mage who was already adept at both fire magic and a one-handed sword. As such, he took on the role of leader in their little adventuring group. He wanted to be strong to protect everyone in the village, but most of all to protect his younger brother, Dexpa. He wore steel armor and wielded a steel sword, (both crafted by his father) to support his role as battlemage of the group of boys.

Jo'navir sheathed his sword and picked up the dead baliwog, leaving its severed head behind.

"Let's get going," Jo'navir beckoned the others.

"That was awesome!" Dexpa shouted jumping up and down, making splashes in the swamp water.

"Neither of you even break a sweat," Mo'nazar said admiringly.

Jo'navir took the complement and started heading back to the village beckoning the others to follow. "Mother and father and waiting. Come on already."

They treaded back through the swamp until they reached the village and saw Ko'zura waiting outside of her front door. Dexpa and Jo'navir walked in, as Mo'nazar gave their mother a begging look.

"Of course, Mo'nazar. You're always welcome in our home," she said with a motherly smile.

The boy threw his fist in the air out of joy, then preceded to follow the others inside.

Za'vanir, the father of the two khajit brothers was sitting inside the kitchen, eagerly awaiting to see what his sons were able to catch in the swamp.

Making their way into the kitchen, Jo'navir handed the baliwog over to his younger brother to share the glory. "Show it to him," he said.

Dexpa's eyes beamed with excitement as he proceeded to show his catch to his father.

"That's my boy! Look at the size of this one!" Za'vanir shouted, giving Dexpa a congratulating pat on the back. Dexpa's ears perked up as a cheerful smile took over his face. Jo'navir smiled contently in his direction.

Ko'zura entered the kitchen. "We're so proud of you boys. Being able to hunt on your own now. You've all grown to be very capable warriors," she said looking at the three of them equally.

Ko'zura was a passionate mother, bent on protecting her children with her restoration and alteration magic. She always wore her Amulet of Mara to show her loyalty to her husband and dedication to restoration magic. She knew plenty of healing spells, which she used to use all the time to heal the boys after their adventures. But recently, she didn't have to worry about using them on the cubs as much as she used to. She would often read the boys stories about the daedra of Oblivion, as well as tales about the Daedric Lords (including the Mad God Sheogorath). She would warn them of dangerous places to avoid, such as the Fringe, which sat on the western part of the Shivering Isles separate from the Mania or Dementia regions. She wore a golden priest-like robe to signify her loyalty to restoration magic.

Za'vanir, the father of the two khajiit brothers was an incredibly powerful swordsman who always kept a close watch on the boys during their adventures, even if they didn't know it. Luckily, he hasn't had to get too involved, since they were now at an age where they could fight on their own. He wore steel armor just like his son Jo'navir, and wielded a steel greatsword. He acted as the blacksmith for the village people, crafting their armor and weapons when they needed it.

A polite knock came from the front door, one which Ko'zura quickly answered, letting in the surprise guest.

"Boo!" yelled a young khajiit girl jumping out from the door the second it opened.

It was Mo'nazar's little sister, Ra'zita. While only 8 years old right now, she was a clever girl who had a strong passion for the flora of the Shivering Isles. She was especially fond of the red kelp found in the swamp, which she often wore in her hair. She was too young to be out exploring with the boys, so her parents limited her exploring the border of the swamp. There were still plenty of mushrooms and ingredients to gather there. She was already becoming an excellent alchemist, thanks to the books her parents had for her in their house.

"Oh no!" Ko'zura yelled, jumping back making her amulet shake side to side as she played along. She gave a sigh of relief putting a hand on her chest. "You scared me little one." She opened the door wide allowing Ra'zita inside. The little girl came in, hugged Ko'zura's leg and began swaying back and forth with a grin, then proceeded to join the boys inside. Za'vanir cooked up the baliwog meat and prepared it for everyone, and then the six of them sat at the dinner table and dug into the hearty meal together.

Unfortunately for the boys (but luckily for their parents) the swamplands were mostly uneventful, despite being vast and filled with a seemingly infinite number of paths to explore. They would usually only come across one monster at a time on their adventures, but even for the boys, that was enough adventure to keep them busy for the years to come.

Though nobody was aware of it, a new era was approaching. The atmosphere of the swamps began to change slowly. There were earthquakes, which became more prevalent and continued to increase in strength as the days went by. The swamp wasn't as quiet as it used to be either. The monsters living there started acting more aggressively than usual, attacking the boys on their explorations more often than they normally would.

It was the last day of the Evening Star, and to conclude the year, the boys wanted to finally explore some ruins they've had their eyes on for a while located somewhere deep in the swamp.

Meanwhile, Ko'zura was now bed-ridden with Swamp Fever. She laid in bed with Za'vanir sitting by her side as the three boys entered the room. On the desk next to her sat some herbs.

Za'vanir explained, "Ra'zita brought those for your mother. She's a very caring young girl." He smiled at Ko'zura. "I'm sorry she couldn't stick around to say hello to you boys. She left in a hurry saying something about her parents wanting to make her stronger." His face began to look concerned. "It was a little worrying to hear, seeing as she's only twelve."

Ko'zura interrupted with a sincere look, "Her parents have always been a little distant, but I'm sure they're doing it to protect her in the future." She paused and continued to another subject. "As for you boys," she said in a weak voice turning to Jo'navir, "I heard about your little adventure. Those ruins are off limits."

"What!?" Jo'navir yelled. "We've been looking forward to this forever!"

Ko'zura continued, "No, Jo'navir. Besides, if one of you gets hurt, I won't be able to heal you in my condition."

"No one is going to get hurt! I promise I'll be able to protect them, please mother!" Jo'navir begged.

Ko'zura put on a serious tone. "My word is final."

Jo'navir scowled, breaking eye contact with his mother and marching out of the room. Ko'zura sighed and began resting her eyes, while Dexpa and Mo'nazar nervously followed Jo'navir out of the room.

The boys left the house wondering what to do now, but they could see Jo'navir had already made up his mind.

"We're going," he said walking out into the swamp.

“But she said...” Dexpa started to say.

Jo’navir interrupted. “She’s sick. She probably doesn’t know what she’s saying Dexpa,” he claimed, stepping towards his brother behind him, looking directly at him. “We’ll be fine. We always have been.”

Dexpa trusted his Jo’navir’s confidence, remembering he’s never let him down before. He nodded and looked towards Mo’nazar who gave the same gesture back, bringing the three of them to an agreement. They would proceed into the swamp.

The swamp was a foggy maze, with paths spreading out in every direction, tangled with lively vines, and loaded with red kelp where the water was shallow. The water was a tainted green, with an occasional splotch of baliwog feces floating on top. After treading the swamp for a few minutes, they came to their destination.

Facing the entrance to the ruins, they saw broken stone walls covered in moss and vines, and a cloud of fog that was thicker than the other parts of the swamp. In the middle of it all sat a large stone door hidden behind some vines which the boys promptly took care of with their hands and teeth.

“Step back,” Jo’navir said to the other boys, as he stood in front of the door, clenching his fist, and casting the alteration spell stone flesh. His hand began to visibly resemble a rock as he preceded to punch the stone doors repeatedly until it finally collapsed with a huge thud. There was no fun in trying to open it normally.

“Nice!” Dexpa yelled admiring his brother’s power.

Inside, there were several mossy stone doors and rooms, but the one that appeared to be the most interesting to the boys was the one straight ahead that was glowing purple through the cracks in its walls.

Mo’nazar cast the spell detect pulse to check for monsters nearby but saw none. “We’re alone,” Mo’nazar added with a sigh of relief.

“Really?” Dexpa questioned looking around. “You’d expect a few swamp monsters or something to be hiding in a place like this. Maybe even some undead. Why is it so quiet in here?”

“I don’t know,” Mo’nazar replied.

Suddenly, the purple glow from the room began to flicker. Concerned, the boys approached the door until they could partly see inside through the cracks in the wall. Jo’navir lifted his fist to cast an alteration spell again, but Dexpa pushed his hand down, lifting his own arm instead.

"I've got this one," he said as he pointed his hand at a broken part of the wall and cast the spell telekinesis. Out of the crack came a key floating towards Dexpa which he grabbed out of the air with a smirk and put into the door slot. The door began to creak open as Dexpa pushed open one side and Jo'navir pushed the other, slowly revealing the source of the purple glow.

Standing only several feet in front of the boys sat a silver crystal several times their size floating above a purple light, which sat on top of another bed of crystals.

The moment the boys took a step into the room, it began to flash again, and something started to come out of it. A leg starting to make its way out of the portal quickly followed by the rest. It had the appearance of a knight but was made of the same silver material as the crystal it came out of.

It began walking towards the boys slowly, raising its sword in the air. They could tell right away that it was not friendly.

In a panic, Jo'navir threw a fireball at the creature, but it raised its other hand and blocked the attack, barely pushing it backwards and leaving a small burn mark in its palm. It continued to approach Jo'navir preparing to swing its sword at him. Jo'navir stood in shock and embarrassment at how weak his spell was against this creature, leaving him wide open to its attack.

Suddenly, another body came from behind the boys, swiftly shoving Jo'navir aside and blocking the swing with a shining steel greatsword.

"Za'vanir?" Mo'nazar said.

"Stand back boys, let me handle this!" Za'vanir said as his weapon clashed with the sword of the crystal knight. He quickly overwhelmed the creature pushing it back with his greatsword making it trip to the floor. He stepped over the creature, now laying on its back, and thrust his greatsword into its chest. Its limbs fell flat, and its entire body stopped moving.

He turned around to the boys and began to scold them. "What were you thinking!? This is exactly why your mother told you to stay in the village! If I didn't get here when I did, you'd be in pieces on the floor," he yelled pointing to the crystal knight lying dead behind him.

"We're capable of taking care of ourselves!" Jo'navir argued back. "You let us go out into the swamp all the time, what makes this place any different?"

"What do you think?" Za'vanir questioned back gesturing at the portal. He sighed and continued, "Look, let's just head back to the village. We can discuss this when we get back okay?"

Dexpa and Mo'nazar felt guilty, nodding their heads in agreement with Za'vanir, while Jo'navir looked away annoyed.

"Whatever," Jo'navir said.

Za'vanir brought on a relieved smile, ready to head back.

But the moment he started to walk forward; the portal began to flash again. And before Za'vanir even had time to turn around to see what it was, a silver sword was plunged through his chest, spraying blood on the boys who stood on the other side of it. Za'vanir stood there, unable to speak or move. His eyes laid wide open while blood began to escape out of his mouth, dripping onto the ground below. He fell to the floor flinging his greatsword to Jo'navir's feet. While his body fell, it revealed a new crystal knight behind where he stood, lifting its last leg out of the portal. As Za'vanir's body reached the floor, the creature used his weight to pull its sword free.

Dexpa and Mo'nazar were speechless and terrified, but Jo'navir glared at the creature with fury in his eyes. "No!!!" he screamed.

He dashed straight for the monster, sword in one hand and the other preparing a fireball spell. As the ball of flame shot out, the crystal enemy raised a hand to its face to block the attack, allowing Jo'navir the opportunity to follow up with a successful slash through its neck. Its head landed on the ground along with Jo'navir's steel sword.

Quick to act, Jo'navir kneeled next to his father holding his head in his hands. He shook his head screaming, "Wake up! Wake up! Please!" as tears rolled out of his eyes and onto his father's body.

Dexpa soon joined him leaning over his father's corpse looking for signs of a reaction, but his father's face sat empty and expressionless, looking ahead at nothing. Dexpa couldn't build the strength to say anything. The tightness of his chest was too extreme, and tears began rushing out of his eyes too as he tried to comprehend the reality of this situation.

Mo'nazar also stood in horror behind the two brothers but came to his senses first. "We need to go. Now! More of those things are probably about to come out. We don't have any time to sit here!"

Out of nowhere, a violent earthquake shook the ruins, breaking several of its ancient walls apart, and sending dust flying in every direction.

After the quake silenced, the boys could hear screaming coming from the village, which finally snapped Jo'navir and Dexpa out of it. They wiped their tears, got up, and ran back to the entrance with Mo'nazar. Arriving at the door they came in from, they saw rubble now blocking their path likely due to the earthquake.

They all began looking around for another escape route. Soon, Dexpa called out “Look up!” as they all looked at the ceiling, seeing a hole big enough for the three of them to fit through. “Hold onto me,” Dexpa commanded as he cast the spell levitate taking them out of there. Luckily, the hole was at just the right height for Dexpa to barely get them over and into the swamps again.

They treaded back through the swamp until they could see the village again, but when they got there, it was in terrible shape.

“No...no no no no,” Jo’navir mumbled beginning to panic as he observed the damage.

Another crystal obelisk sat in the center of the village with crystal knights flooding out of it. The homes of the village were coated in sparks and smashed to the ground floor; wood scraps scattered across the mud along the village streets.

Suddenly, a holy white light came out of the second floor of the house where Ko’zura was resting, immediately followed by a huge explosion which shook the ground generating waves in the swamp water.

Mo’nazar looked to the other side of the village where his house sat, but his legs were beginning to shake. It’s as if his body was refusing to leave the swamp and witness something he doesn’t want to see.

Dexpa and Jo’navir, on the other hand went straight to their own house to find their mother. There were crystal knights dead on the floor and signs of shock magic coating the walls.

The boys could hear footsteps coming from the kitchen. Jo’navir stood himself in front of his brother. “I’ll take care of whatever is in there. Go check on mother upstairs,” he demanded.

Dexpa listened, dashing up the stairs heading straight to Ko’zura’s room where she was recovering from her sickness. He barged through the door frame but froze in place after seeing the inside. “Mother...” he whispered to himself taking in the sight.

In front of him sat his mother’s body lying on the left side of the room covered in deadly lightning, while the right side of the room was coated in holy white flames. Her body was almost unrecognizable; a black silhouette of what she used to look like, with her amulet of Mara resting in her hand.

On the other side of the room laid an even more unrecognizable site, but whatever it was, it was burned to a crisp. Dexpa hesitantly walked up to his mother’s corpse to get a closer look. He looked in her eyes for signs of life, but there were no eyes left in her sockets. Dexpa shook in place as he turned towards the right side of the room to try to understand what was going on.

On the other corpse sat a silver mask with a red glow, along with a golden staff in the shape of a dragon's head. Dexpa walked over, picked them up and stared at them trying to put two-and-two together, but he was left even more confused.

Suddenly, Dexpa could hear footsteps coming up the stairs and making their way to the room. A silver hand crept around the opening of the door frame, soon revealing a damaged crystal knight. Dexpa stepped back, tripping over his mother's desecrated body, falling backwards and dropping the mask and staff. The knight took its first step towards him but was instantly sent flying down the hallway with an unexpected fireball.

"Dexpa!" Jo'navir called from the hallway barging through the doorway. He paused for a second, now seeing the scene which Dexpa had already witnessed. "We were too late," Jo'navir said running out of breath.

"Come on!" he said grabbing Dexpa by the shoulders and giving him a shake to bring him back to reality.

Dexpa quickly came to, reaching to the ground, picking up the staff and the mask once again, and attaching it to his robes.

"There's no time for that, let's go!" Jo'navir repeated, pulling his brother away from the scene. They darted down the stairs and out the front door back into the chaos outside.

"Where's Mo'nazar?" Dexpa asked his brother in a fearful voice.

Jo'navir scouted the area, but it was tough to see past the hordes of crystal knights. "His house!" he said running towards Mo'nazar's house on the other side. The door was already sitting outside in pieces on the floor, leaving black marks of shock magic lining the frame where it once stood.

Jo'navir and Dexpa went inside, only to find Mo'nazar kneeling over his parents, (or what was left of them). The mother's body sat propped up against the furthest wall from the door; desecrated the same way Ko'zura's was. While, the father's laid next to her as another burnt corpse. His hand was holding onto a strange amulet with a green skull. There were still traces of sparks lining the walls, and many of the books on the bookshelves were disintegrated.

Dexpa came over to Mo'nazar placing a hand on his shoulder and kneeling next to him. "I'm sorry Mo'nazar."

Mo'nazar said nothing back. He was truly traumatized at the sight.

Jo'navir's first thought was to secure the house, so he proceeded past the corpses and to a hatch on the floor in the corner of the room. It was blasted open the same way the front door was, leaving black markings on the rim.

Curious, Jo'navir jumped down the hatch to see what was inside and saw something horrid. Blood covered the stone walls and the floor, and in the center of the room was a daedric summoning circle. He also noticed a bunch of dark purple crystal gems laying around along with a bookshelf full of strange spell books. "What the..." Jo'navir whispered to himself trying to put the pieces together, but he didn't have a lot of time to do so.

"Jo'navir!" Dexpa anxiously called from the other room.

Reacting to his brother's shout, Jo'navir climbed out of the hatch and came back to the two of them.

"They're close, I can hear them," Dexpa added.

They could hear footsteps coming from outside getting louder and louder. Without a second thought, Jo'navir grabbed Dexpa and ran for the door, signaling Mo'nazar to follow. "Come on!"

As they stepped out the front door, Jo'navir and Dexpa began searching for an escape route, but looking back into the house, they saw Mo'nazar still sitting over his mother's body.

"Mo'nazar! What are you doing!?" Jo'navir yelled at him. He came back over to Mo'nazar and tugged on his arm, desperately pleading that they leave together, but his body wouldn't budge. Mo'nazar's face sat in shock and his jaw wide open, trying to look for a reaction in his mother's lifeless body, as tears ran from his eyes spilling out onto her corpse. Dexpa ran inside, trying to help him pull Mo'nazar along, but he wasn't able to move him either.

"Please Mo'nazar! We have to get out of here now, come on!" Dexpa screamed.

Hearing footsteps now shuffling right outside the door, Jo'navir was pushed to a rash decision. "Fine! If you'd rather stay behind and perish, who am I to stop you huh!? Let's go Dexpa." He let go of Mo'nazar and began tugging Dexpa away once again, pulling him apart from Mo'nazar.

Dexpa, now being forced out the front door, called out "No we can still save him! Let go of me!" he screamed struggling to get out of his brothers grip.

But Jo'navir did not let go. He held on even tighter to his brother's arm, as they made it out the front door passing dangerously close to the crystal knights.

"Mo'nazar!!!" Dexpa yelled out again. His attempts to reach out were hopeless.

Before he knew it, Dexpa and his brother were hundreds of feet away from the village, and all they could see looking back was a swarm of shining silver marching over ashes and mud.

The brothers continued as far west as they could go on the Isles, giving Dexpa some time to regain his senses. They found themselves at a giant stone wall with an entrance to a long dark hallway. It was the entrance to the Fringe. They wanted to obey their mother's words and stay away from the place, but right now they had no choice.

The brothers looked at each other worried, but soon found the courage to continue forward blindly through the hallway. Eventually, they came out into a large stone plaza. After taking a couple steps forward they were met again with another earthquake almost tripping them over. As they recovered from the violent shaking, they noticed a massive creature sitting in the corner on the plaza.

It sat at twice their height and was bleeding from several parts of its fleshy body. It had patches of ripped leopard fur across its back and a bundle of red kelp leaves sticking out of the cracks in its head. It was an abomination. But to their luck, it didn't notice the boys, as it was too busy whimpering in the corner.

Jo'navir raised his finger to his lips hinting for Dexpa to be silent, which he quickly understood. They snuck past the monster, eyeing it closely as they kept on their path towards whatever else was on this part of the island.

Once they got past it, they spotted an open field flourishing with beautiful fungal plant life. They went out into the middle of the field of mushrooms and spotted a man in the distance.

"I see someone," Dexpa said pointing Jo'navir towards a man only a short walk away, dressed in butler attire.

"Approach cautiously," Jo'navir added signaling his brother to follow his lead.

Once they were within talking distance of the butler, Jo'navir asked, "Who are you?"

"Can you help us?" Dexpa added.

"Hello boys. My name is Haskill. I am the Chamerlain of the Mad God." He looked at them with a strange stare that was both polite and annoyed.

"Sheogorath!?" Dexpa inquired.

"That is correct," Haskill said. "It appears you are familiar with my lord. How lucky for you." His eyes retained a bored look to match the sarcastic tone of his voice.

The boys began to look visibly uncomfortable. They had heard about Sheogorath in their mother's stories, though they weren't exactly nice ones. They were entertaining at best.

A flash came from beside Haskill forcing the boys to cover their eyes. When the flash faded, another man appeared on the scene in colorful attire. It was the legendary Mad God himself, Sheogorath.

"Did someone say my name!?" he said.

Haskill sighed, "Welcome back sir."

"Hello Haskill! I have missed you so much," Sheogorath said.

"It's only been a few minutes sir. A pleasure to see you again," he sighed again, "As always."

"Ah lovely. And who are these two boys," Sheogorath asked.

"We're looking for a way off this island, please!" Dexpa begged.

"And miss out on all the fun!?" Sheogorath jested. "The Greymarch is just getting started, why not stick around?"

The boys had no idea what that was, but they assumed it had something to do with the crystal knights invading their village.

Jo'navir contributed to the begging, desperately trying to find a way out for him and his brother. Knowing what the Mad God would want, he said "We'll do anything! Just help us."

Sheogorath rubbed his chin deep in thought. "Well, there is something that's been on my mind for a while. I've been holding on to something with incredible untold power, but to use it would be a gamble."

He pulled a scroll out of thin air and showed it to the boys. It was a large gold-plated scroll with a lightning bolt engraved on the seal in the center.

Sheogorath continued his explanation. "This scroll could be your ticket off the island. I still don't understand what the lightning bolt on it means, but perhaps it has something to do with shock magic. Either way," he looked disgusted with the scroll holding it out with only two fingers, dangling it away from his face, "I'm not opening this thing. I hear it can really mess with your senses if you know what I mean," he said with a wink preparing to drop the scroll into Dexpa's hands.

Jo'navir looked worried as the scroll made its way towards Dexpa. He knew after hearing Sheogorath mention shock magic that Dexpa would be the one to try using the scroll, but it was too risky.

Dexpa reached his hand out to take the scroll, but Jo'navir stood between the two of them, pausing the exchange.

"We'll find another way," Jo'navir said hesitantly.

"Oh really, and what will that be?" Sheogorath questioned with an eyebrow raised.

"We'll swim," Jo'navir replied.

"The slaughter fish would love that," Sheogorath added.

"Then we'll make a boat," Jo'navir remarked, clearly showing his desperation.

Sheogorath laughed at his proposition hysterically. "With what time!?" he joked, pointing towards the plaza behind them.

Out of the dark hallways came a horde of crystal knights making their way towards the boys standing in front of their view of the abomination.

"It would appear you have none left," Sheogorath said. His smirk transformed into a frown. "And frankly, neither do I. Make your choice now before I take it away. I'm getting bored."

Jo'navir started urgently looking around the island for another way out, but the younger khajiit grabbed his shirt and tugged on it, snapping him out of it.

Dexpa looked at his brother in the eyes with intense confidence and said, "I can do this."

Jo'navir stared back for several seconds, finally giving in to his determination. "Okay," he sighed, feeling defeated.

Dexpa reached forward once again and took the scroll out of the Mad God's hands. He began to open it up, which made him feel slightly dizzy. Soon his heart rate began to rise exponentially. But he continued to unravel the scroll, slowly revealing its blinding light and symbols that he couldn't make sense of. He attempted to look away from the scroll, but it felt like his eyes were now glued to it.

Jo'navir, realizing Dexpa was in trouble, asked the Mad God, "What's going on?" He grabbed onto his brother and the scroll trying to separate the two of them but had no luck. "Dexpa! Let go of the scroll!" He screamed continuing his attempt to pull his brother away from it.

The Mad God was watching intently, trying to analyze what was happening.

Dexpa was beginning to feel mesmerized by the scroll after embracing its power. Sparks of lightning started shooting out of his hands and into the scroll making it glow even brighter than before. And then suddenly, Dexpa was teleported away in a white flash, followed by Jo'navir in another.

There was silence as Sheogorath stood with Haskill by his side observing the place where the two brothers vanished. The scroll sat on the ground in their place now sealed. "Well, that doesn't tell me anything. No matter. We will find a use for this scroll someday," Sheogorath declared.

He looked back towards the plaza again seeing the crystal knights continuing their approach towards him and his Chamberlain.

He handed the scroll to Haskill. "Hold onto this for me dear friend. I believe it is my time," Sheogorath said with a smile that hid loneliness behind it.

Haskill, taking the scroll in hand replied sincerely, "I will protect it with my life, sir. Until we meet again."

Chapter 1

Dexpa: Madness

2E 583

For a few seconds, Dexpa's body went numb and all he could see was pure white light, but he soon regained his senses.

"What happened?" he asked himself, looking at his claws and everything else that stood in front of his field of vision. He noticed that the staff and mask he found remained with him, but no scroll and no Jo'navir.

He looked around himself, seeing grass and dirt behind himself, and in front, he saw snow covered mountains and paths carved with gravel roads. One path straight ahead of him lead directly into a town made of stone and wood. As he made his way towards the town, he spotted a sign outside the gates.

"Orsinium."

Admiring the sturdy architecture of the city, Dexpa walked around for several minutes, noticing people with green skin and sharp under-biting teeth lining the city streets. There were Braziers at every corner, and complex wooden structures that he had never seen before attached to every other stone structure. It was massive compared to the village that he grew up in.

Eventually he found himself at an inn labeled "The King's Cornerclub." Walking inside, he noticed the place was filled with tough green-skinned men and women all wearing silver, rocky armor with green tinted weapons holstered at their sides.

Though he was fearful of this new environment, his thoughts of looking for Jo'navir kept him determined. Enduring the judgmental stares at his frail mage body from the others around him, he continued towards the inside, where a woman sat behind a counter.

"Welcome to the King's Cornerclub! Can I get you anything to drink? Maybe a bed to sleep in?" asked the woman.

Dexpa paused in place for a second thinking he just walked into someone's house, wondering why the woman was being so suspiciously hospitable to him.

“You alright kid?” she asked, quickly realizing he looked lost. “I’m guessing you’re not from these parts. If there’s anything I can get you, just let me know. My name’s Roxanne.” She pointed to the tables around the inn, “Make yourself comfortable, there’s plenty of seats.”

After feeling slightly reassured, Dexpa sat down at a stool placed at the counter. “Actually, there is something,” he added nervously.

Trying to think of what to ask, Dexpa began pondering what would be the best way to find his brother. He thought maybe finding the scroll would lead him to Jo’navir. It was a weak start, but he had to try. The young khajit continued from where he left off.

“I’m looking for my brother, but we got separated after using some scroll that teleported us away. I’m not even sure what to ask at this point.” He sat for a second looking down at the floor but brought his gaze back up to the Roxanne. “Do you know any rumors about a scroll with the ability to teleport?”

Multiple chairs began to audibly move and Dexpa could feel the stares again on the back of his neck. Roxanne looked surprised but concerned for Dexpa.

“None that I’ve heard of. But are you sure you should be meddling with that kind of stuff?” she said as politely as possible.

Dexpa, looking offended and confused began to speak again but was interrupted by a hand slamming on the counter next to him.

“I might know what you’re looking for pal,” said a voice practically breathing into Dexpa’s ear as an arm reached around his shoulder to rest on it.

It was a man with green skin and huge biceps, along with his green-skinned goons who stood behind him each with their own unique smirk.

Roxanne looked annoyed at the men interrupting her conversation.

“Do you know where I could find it!?” Dexpa begged. “It was gold, with a lightning bolt engraved on the seal.”

“Oh I’ve seen it. We orcs know everything that goes on around here, cat,” the burly man continued. “Would you like to know a little more?”

Of course, Dexpa agreed without hesitation, with the thought of getting back to his brother sitting at the front of his mind.

The orc's goons began to laugh at Dexpa's desperation.

"That's what I like to hear! What you're looking for is the Maelstrom Arena. They just recently got their hands on a new scroll exactly like the one you're talking about and they're giving it away as their prize for conquering the arena. It'll be a piece a cake for a mage like you I'm sure," he mocked.

Roxanne finally intervened out of sympathy. "Leave the kid alone, would you? You're just sending this boy to his death. Go find someone else to toy with."

Dexpa began to look discouraged.

The orc replied, "Ah come on cub, you're not going to let a few daedra scare you off are you?"

Dexpa sensed his demeaning tone but was still considering the opportunity left before him. This was his only lead, and he didn't have much of a choice anyways. He got up and went straight for the door.

Roxanne yelled out before Dexpa could leave, "Wait! Kid, what are you..." but she was interrupted by the orc.

"Look for the ruins in the northeast to find the portal! Have fun cat!" he jested.

Dexpa made his way northeast, up some snowy mountains, and after a few minutes came across some ruins that could be what he was looking for. The subtle orange glow coming out of the entrance confirmed his suspicions. As he made his way inside, past some sketchy cages and webs, he found the massive orange portal sitting at the end of the ruins encompassed by rocks. Without a second thought, he walked right in.

Next thing the khajiit knew, he was in a desert with what appeared to be a village just down a short road. Entering the village, he found himself surrounded by several stone huts and a small shrine with a blue glow. The largest of the huts stood center stage near the back of the village. Approaching it, Dexpa spotted two daedra standing inside. He cupped one of his hands, preparing a shock spell, but stopped himself when he heard a voice.

"Woah woah easy! Keep that spirit for what's the come. I assume you're here to try your might at the legendary Maelstrom Arena!?" the dremora asked.

"I'm looking for a scroll," Dexpa inquired, ignoring the question. "Do you have it?"

"I'm so glad you asked. It just so happens that we do have one!" A small portal opened next to him, revealing another dremora holding a scroll. They flashed it towards Dexpa, revealing the lightning bolt symbol sitting on the seal in the center, and then teleported away. It was the real deal.

Dexpa's eyes grew wide. He didn't think the orcs were telling the truth, but he was glad that he took the chance. Maybe that group wasn't so bad.

Dexpa looked back at the dremora and asked, "What do I have to do?"

"Good question!" he announced. "To start, my name is Fa-Nuit-Hen, and this is my servant Tutor Riparius. The two of us will act as the announcers for this challenge." He directed his hand towards Tutor, hinting for him to help describe the rest.

"The challenge will consist of nine different stages, each with multiple rounds, as well as their own environments and enemies. Kill everything and you win!" Tutor finished. The two dremora were full of energy and excitement. Far from what Dexpa was feeling.

"Challenger, are you ready!?" Fa-Nuit-Hen asked.

Dexpa nodded his head and looked behind the two dremora.

"Then let's get it started! Challenger, enter the portal!"

An orange flash appeared inside the open doors behind them, revealing a new portal. Dexpa proceeded inside the room and stepped through it.

He recognized the environment of first arena from his mother's stories about Coldharbour. The whole world was a shade of blue. The arena was a dimly lit mixture of grass and stone and held the shape of a circle surrounded by spiked metal fencing, with an occasional closed metal gate. Standing outside of the gates were the two dremora announcers cheering alongside many other dremora. In the center of the arena sat a tree layered with dead skeletons and surrounded by a suspicious purple liquid. And outside of the arena lurked a dense fog covering blue mountains and massive sharp rocks piercing into the ground far below. Most importantly, though, sat four glowing blue sigils in each corner of the arena, all floating above a small light. Dexpa made out the shapes: a chalice, an axe, a shield, and wings.

"Alright, let's see how well our new contestant does!" Fa-Nuit-Hen's voice echoed.

"Will he succeed? Or end up like our last challenger?" Tutor added.

It only took seconds for things to get started. Multiple yellow flashes came from different parts of the arena. Dexpa began preparing a shock spell in his hand and was confronted by a dremora mage with a clannfear sitting in front of them coming straight for him. He shot out his strongest spell, lightning bolt, and damaged the clannfear badly, but it continued walking forward. The mage shot a powerful fireball his way, and Dexpa reacted by using telekinesis to lift the clannfear up blocking the spell with its body and turning it to ashes. He now had the opening he needed to shoot out another lightning bolt, one-shotting the mage.

It wasn't as bad as Dexpa was first expecting. He flew through the rounds with ease bringing him to the final enemy of stage one.

"Let's see how the challenger does against the legendary 'Maxus the Many'" Fa-Nuit-Hen added as the last daedra appeared through a portal in the center of the arena. It was another dremora mage, wielding a staff.

Dexpa readied himself once more, giving him the chance to shoot a lightning bolt at out before the enemy even had a chance to open its eyes. It knocked the daedra back with noticeable force. His spells had a much heavier impact than he remembered them having.

The daedra was damaged, but it wasn't enough. Dexpa began throwing out lightning bolts like crazy alternating hands, each hitting harder than the previous. It only took seconds for the barrage to put an end to the daedra. Dexpa looked down at his claws amazed with his own strength.

"That was incredible! This challenger is a lot tougher than he looks! It's time to proceed to the next stage!" Fa-Nuit-Hen announced.

An orange flash revealed a portal in front of one of the gate doors. Dexpa took a few seconds to breathe and he proceeded through.

Dexpa flew through the first 8 stages at a surprising rate. He fought Dwemer automotons, trolls, frost giants, spiders, bugs, and many other creatures and daedra alike, none of which were able to withstand his lightning bolt. It wasn't until the ninth and final stage that Dexpa began to have trouble.

Stepping through the portal taking him to the final room, Dexpa was filled with confidence. Walking to the center of the final stage, he stood with his guard up, ready for whatever was coming.

The final stage had the same environment as the first stage, but this one had a moat of lava bordering the inside of the metal fence, the center of the stage was flat and empty,

and above it stood a huge ring made of Coldharbour rock. And then in the four corners of the stage, the blue sigils sat ready.

“This is it! The final stage. Will this rookie competitor be able to conquer the arena?!” the announcer cried.

The familiar yellow glow began to spawn enemies from multiple different directions. Dexpa began charging his first lightning bolt, looking for what type of enemy it should be used on first. Out came two dremora archers followed by a dremora knight that came charging at Dexpa immediately. He released the spell striking the knight with powerful lightning, incinerating him in an instant.

Dexpa turned to the archers but was thrown off by something he wasn't paying attention to. There were now multiple blue ghosts traversing the arena in unpredictable patterns. One came from behind Dexpa and grazed his shoulder, leaving a severe burning sensation behind. Flinching from the pain, he was distracted now, allowing an archer to land an arrow into his shin.

“Crap!” Dexpa yelled as his arm and leg began to pulse viciously.

“Bet you didn't see that one coming!” Fa-Nuit-Hen called out followed by a laugh.

“Will he be able to keep up?” pondered Tutor.

Dexpa looking around, predicted the paths of the ghosts and found a spot where he could focus on casting spells for a bit. Before the other archer could shoot anything his way, he charged up two lightning bolts, one in each hand, and focused them on both archers knocking them into the lava behind.

Dexpa took this moment of pause to try grabbing the arrow out of his leg. The moment he started pulling, his leg began pulsing more intensely bringing tears to his eyes and blood dripping down to his toes. Soon growing impatient, he ripped the arrow out quickly, drawing more blood and shedding slabs of skin on the ground.

He gritted his teeth, shook his leg, and looked around for ghosts and portals. To his expectations, more enemies began to spawn.

This time it was two mages, and before Dexpa could react, he found himself colliding with another ghost, but this one was different. It had a golden glow and when it ran into him, he felt a hidden power surging through his body beginning to swell up inside of him, instead of pain. He continued fighting, blowing away the two mages with lightning bolts.

More flashes came, spawning a Daedroth and an Ogrim, two massive Daedric creatures which were sure to pose a threat. Soon after, came even more dremora mages. Though these ones were more focused on walking towards the center of the stage, than attacking Dexpa.

Dexpa began feeling overwhelmed by the number of enemies and ghosts he now had to keep track of. His lightning bolt was only meant to take out one target at a time.

In a panic, he reached for the staff clipped to his clothes, pointed it towards the daedroth and began charging his energy into it. To his delight, the staff began shooting streams of lightning on the Daedroth, landing on the floor creating a path of lightning, cutting off the route of the Ogrim next to it. The daedroth did not stop though. Despite being in physical pain, it walked right through the wall of lightning making its way towards Dexpa. Luckily it was weakened now, and one more lightning bolt was all it took to finish the job, killing the daedroth.

The Ogrim began making its way around the wall of lighting and approaching Dexpa who was now feeling cornered. Meanwhile, the mages continued to ignore him, casting some sort of spell in the middle of the arena.

Dexpa, now bordering the lava at the edge of the arena had nowhere else to run, so he began charging another barrage of lightning bolts, each causing visible damage to the Ogrim, until it finally fell to the ground. Taking a breath, Dexpa began to feel the pulsing again in his arm and leg, almost forgetting he were still injured, but there was no time to grovel in pain.

It was now time to focus on the mages, but before Dexpa could land another shock spell, something appeared from of the mages' spells. The mark of a summoning circle took up the center of the arena, followed by a blue pillar of light and a batch of orange flames. Climbing out it was a huge Bone Colossus, smashing the mages who summoned it into the ground with its hands.

Taking a few steps back, Dexpa looked startled.

"Uh oh! This doesn't look too good!" Fa-Nuit-Hen yelled.

He began limping in circles around the arena to avoid being smacked into the lava by the undead creature, while he shot lines of lightning out of the staff behind himself. The creature continued moving through the wall of lightning without hesitation dealing damage to itself. Dexpa seeing the colossus now weakened stood still shooting out another barrage of lightning bolts, but it took the bolts and proceeded to get closer and closer until it was finally close enough to land a powerful blow.

With a swing of its arm smacking Dexpa across his already-injured shoulder, the khajiit went flying to another side of the arena. Now crawling on the ground with his bad arm limping lifeless to the side, he put up his good arm and pointed it towards the colossus. As it made its way towards him again, Dexpa, began charging up his strongest spell with the only thought on his mind being to survive.

With a determined look in his eyes, Dexpa's hand began to glow the usual purple as he prepared a lightning bolt, but then began glowing even brighter as he continued charging it more and more. His determined face turned into a desperate scowl, as a massive bolt launched itself out of his palm, slamming into the colossus and knocking it back with so much force that you could hear its body cutting through the wind. It soared outside of the arena and into the fog, followed by a single booming echo in the distance. It was not coming back.

Dexpa, now fueled with adrenaline got up and clenched his fist, realizing he had just learned a new spell, thunderbolt. His confidence was coming back to him now, even with his injuries.

Looking around the arena, he spotted the blue sigil in the shape of a chalice floating right next to him. He limped over and put his hand into the light. Immediately, he began feeling a sense of relief as the blood stopped flowing out of his leg, and his bad arm started gaining feeling again. To make it even better, another one of the gold phantoms made its way into his body, once again fueling him with an unknown power that was now on the verge of releasing from his body.

"Alright! That's what we like to see. What an exciting round, but get ready, because we're just getting started!" shouted Fa-Nuit-Hen.

Dexpa made it past the next three rounds without too much trouble.

"It's time for the semi-final round!" announced Fa-Nuit-Hen.

"You're almost there, challenger! Let's see if you can hold out to the end!" Tutor said.

A daedroth appeared out of a portal proving no threat to Dexpa's new spell. But once the creature was defeated it got uncomfortably quiet. Dexpa looked around trying to find his next target, but there weren't any more portals spawning. He began to hear a faint whistling sound coming from a distance and looked up only to see a gigantic titan falling out of the sky, landing with the impact of a meteor in the center of the arena. Its black skin was layered with orange spots as if his body was a volcano ready to erupt. Its wingspan was twice its already overwhelming height, and the five horns surrounding its head gave it an intimidating stare.

“Here it is folks, the challenger versus the mighty Ash Titan! Who will come out on top?” Fa-Nuit-Hen questioned.

The titan let out a roar and held up one of its claws which became coated in flames. As it began swinging for Dexpa, the khajiit jumped back, using the staff to spray a line of sparks between him and the creature. Unfortunately, the distance Dexpa had established did him no good.

The titan began charging up a fireball out of its mouth, while its face began to glow a bright orange, launching the attack at Dexpa with high velocity. Dexpa, preparing to dodge, was not ready for the insane speed behind of the ball of flame. He realized dodging wasn't an option and resorted to quick thinking, raising his staff in front of him to block the attack. The staff was able to take the brunt of the blow, breaking in two, but still sent Dexpa flying back a good distance.

He stowed the pieces of the staff back on his robes and began shooting lightning bolts back and forth attempting to weaken the titan, but it didn't have much effect. Realizing he needed his new spell, Dexpa held his hand out and began charging as much energy as he could, but the titan was unrelentless. It followed up quickly, raising its claws in the air, and slamming them to the ground, summoning multiple walls of flames moving in every direction.

Dexpa canceled his spell, stepped back, and looked for an escape. Luckily there was a crack between two of the walls, which Dexpa managed to dive through unscathed. The titan now sat trying to gather its breath. This was Dexpa's chance.

Dexpa began charging another thunderbolt pointing it straight at the daedra's torso. After a second, he released the spell piercing it through the chest of the daedra, but it would not fall that easily. He gathered enough energy to shoot another thunderbolt, this time pointed at its stomach. This time the creature fell back a few steps and began spitting out flames on the ground out of pain.

All he needed was one more shot. He aimed another thunderbolt at the Ash Titan's skull, piercing it all the way through. The titan roared as half of its face was now missing, but the roar soon faded as it collapsed to the ground, shooting out dust in every direction.

Dexpa sighed with relief and exhaustion. He looked around the arena seeing the remaining sigils and attuned himself with the shield which spawned a visible barrier around his body.

“Wow that was something else! But what else to expect from such a contestant!” cried out Fa-Nuit-Hen.

“It’s all come to this moment! Will he be able to survive the final round?” called out Tutor.

A flash came from the center of the arena. Dexpa’s eyes were focused on that point and that point alone.

“Presenting, the fabled Xivkyn: Voriak Solkyn!” announced Fa-Nuit-Hen.

Out of the flash came a tall daedric mage with a skull for a face and glowing blue eyes. It looked towards Dexpa expressionless and Dexpa stared back. The final round of the survival match had begun.

Voriak shot out multiple blue flames at Dexpa, but to his surprise the barrier around his body began reflecting the flames right back at the Skeleton.

Dexpa, now confident in his new spell, cast a thunderbolt towards Voriak, but the blow only did minor damage. He knew he’d need a lot more of those, but before getting the chance to cast them, more enemies spawned around the arena quickly surrounding Dexpa.

He dealt with the other enemies with ease, and watched as Voriak began meditating in the center, then teleported above the ring. A glowing blue clannfear appeared out of nowhere, along with a glowing rune which spawned below it. Dexpa took care of the clannfear with a simple lightning bolt, making the rune glow brighter.

Walking up to the rune, he put his hand on it, transporting him to the ring above where he met Voriak Solkyn once more. He was levitating in the middle of the ring and was protected by a phantasmal tornado spinning around him. Seeing three pink crystals lying around the ring, Dexpa’s first instinct was to destroy them. Every crystal he destroyed seemed to make Voriak weaker.

Dexpa’s barrier was beginning to blink and fade away, forcing him to act more defensively. But after finally destroying the third crystal, he was sent flying off the edge of the ring, almost falling into the lava below.

He gathered himself and found Voriak now standing in the center of the bottom level with him again. Dexpa shot off multiple powerful thunderbolts, each landing against the Xivkyn, though they still weren’t hitting as hard as he wished they would.

Voriak began charging a fireball at the end of his staff. Dexpa, realizing his barrier was now gone, quickly found the closest sigil and interacted with it. It was the wing sigil which gave Dexpa a significant boost in speed. He took advantage of this and dodged

the heavy fireball, running in circles around the boss, until multiple other daedra began to spawn, blocking his path.

Out came an Ogrim, a Daedroth, two dremora archers and a dremora mage. Another blue ghost came from behind Dexpa, grazing his waist bringing him to his knee in pain. The daedra were now closing in to a tight circle around the khajiit.

“Could this be the end for our challenger?” screamed Fa-Nuit-Hen.

“This isn’t looking good! He’s cornered!” added Tutor

Dexpa recoiled in pain squeezing onto his waist. He began desperately looking around the stage for something he could use to get him out of this mess. He spotted the final sigil only meters away from him, but looking back towards the daedra, he knew wouldn’t make it before they would reach him. He fell back and started crawling away but was quickly met with the ring of lava behind him.

He began to panic now, imagining the idea of never getting to see his brother again. Thinking back to how in moments like these, Jo’navir would usually be the one to step in and cut down the monsters before them. But he was alone on this one.

Just as Dexpa was about to give up, a gold phantom appeared once again behind him fusing with his being. His whole body began to glow blue now and he could feel a resurgence of power and motivation.

The daedroth began preparing a fiery breath attack at point blank range, but Dexpa wasn’t going to let it finish.

He closed his eyes, channeled the power he was given from the gold phantoms and let out a powerful shout like an intense war cry.

He could feel the energy flooding out of his body, violently shaking the entire arena. Opening his eyes, the daedra, (including Voriak Solkyn) were all kneeling as if completed exhausted. Whatever he did, it didn’t finish the job, but it did give him the chance he needed. He raced for the final sigil with the axe symbol, and as soon as he touched it, he could feel his own magic powers being amplified.

Not wasting a second, he shot down all the enemies one by one leaving Voriak for last. Approaching the powerful Xivkyn, Dexpa placed his hand inches from Voriak’s skeletal face, and let loose with a supercharged thunderbolt.

Deadly lightning surged through the dremora's body, producing a blinding light in the space around him. And when the light faded, Voriak Solkyn was a mere pile of ashes on the ground with Dexpa standing over them intensely focused and breathing heavily.

The announcers paused for a second, amazed with Dexpa's display of magic.

"Looks like we have our winner! Step through the portal and claim your prize!" Fa-Nuit-Hen declared.

Going through the portal, Dexpa found himself back where he first met the two Daedra in the sand hut.

"Congratulation's challenger! You've given us all an enjoyable show today!" Tutor said.

Dexpa stood looking at them almost annoyed, waiting for his scroll.

Fa-Nuit-Hen, waiting for Dexpa to say something, decided to continue instead, "I'm guessing you're wanting your prize now!? Well, here it is." A dremora appeared out of another portal handing the scroll over to Fa-Nuit-Hen along with some gold coins. He handed them to Dexpa and waved him off. Dexpa looked at the scroll finally sitting in his hands and held it tightly to his chest. He left without another word.

Dexpa made his way back to the inn seeing only a few people inside. There was a man in robes, wearing a leather bag sitting on one side, and the orcs from earlier sitting on the other, while Roxanne remained at the counter.

He was exhausted and could barely walk at this point. He's never used up that much magicka in one day, let alone have that many near death experiences.

Approaching Roxanne he said, "I'll take you up on that offer. A room for a night please."

"How about some food first kid," she said. "This one's on the house."

She went into the kitchen and came out with a plate of meat. "Smoked bear haunch. I can guess you've probably never tried anything like this before. Go ahead, dig in."

Dexpa looked thankful and started eating, finishing the plate in only a few minutes.

"Thank you," he said nodding his head at Roxanne.

"No problem. I'm still charging you for that room though," she laughed.

Dexpa managed to gather enough energy to let out a breathless chuckle.

After taking his coin, she showed him to his room.

“Well, here you are. Have a good rest,” she said.

“Thanks again” Dexpa replied getting settled into his room.

Falling asleep would've been easy tonight, but seconds after hopping into his new bed, he heard a knock at the door. Assuming it might've been Roxanne, he answered, but the door was pushed open knocking Dexpa back to the ground. Looking up, he saw the Orc and his goons.

“What the...” Dexpa started to say, as he took a heavy kick to the jaw.

“Looks like you came back cat. Where's the scroll?” the Orc asked, sending his goons to search the room.

Dexpa was feeling dizzy, doing his best to recover from the blow of the kick, all while exhausted from his previous battles. Trying to fight like a cornered dog, he started charging up a shock spell, but couldn't even get halfway through the spell before taking another kick to the stomach. The impact forced his mouth open, and the Orc took advantage of this, slipping a green potion into Dexpa's mouth and forcing it down.

“Enjoy our little present, cub. We'll be taking over from here,” he said as his goons grabbed the rest of Dexpa's gear and began walking out.

Dexpa's vision was beginning to blur, as he watched the men leave. However, they didn't get very far. In his foggy vision, he could barely make out flares of blue and orange sending the orcs flying across the hallway.

Dexpa attempted to move to see what was going on, but he ended up coughing up blood instead. A stranger in blue robes entered the room and went straight for Dexpa, but before he could make out the stranger's face, he passed out in the pool of his own blood.

Suddenly, Dexpa was back in a hazy version of his old village, standing beside his brother while inside of Mo'nazar's house in complete silence. In front of them, Mo'nazar sat at a table chatting with his parents with a cheery smile on his face.

Blinking for only an instant, Dexpa saw the house now demolished and coated in sparks, as Mo'nazar laid crying over his parents' desecrated bodies. He couldn't feel anything physically except for the pull of his brother, bringing him away from his village, and away from his best friend.

As he was taken away, he could see thousands of crystal knights swarming the house, and all he could hear now was Mo'nazar's screams of pain. His vision blacked out and the world went silent again. Following the silence, Mo'nazar's voice began to whisper something in Dexpa's head.

"Don't leave me..."

Dexpa's chest ached intensely, forcing him to jolt up out of a bed he now found himself laying in. His could hear normally again, though his vision was limited to a small circle.

"Oh, you're up," an unfamiliar, but friendly voice called out. "Lemme take that mask you."

The man behind the voice grabbed the mask off Dexpa's face placing it on the bed, giving him his full field of vision back.

Standing in front of him was a middle-aged Imperial man in scholarly blue robes with short black hair, wearing a concerned smile on his face.

"I'm glad it worked. Listen, I know you're probably panicking right now, but don't worry you're safe." The man took a breath and continued. "My name is Salazar. I was watching you at the inn last night and the gear you had clipped to your waist caught my eye. After finishing my drink, I was going to follow you to your room to ask for a trade, but the orcs beat me to it. Though I guess they had something else in mind for you."

Dexpa looked down in shame and embarrassment.

Salazar continued, "I took care of them, but it looked like I was too late to help you. You were already laying in your own blood, and next to you sat an empty vial of poison. I thought you were done for. That was, until I spotted your mask in the hallway."

The two of them looked towards the mask sitting on the bed.

"That mask belonged to a Dragon Priest by the name of Havnoraak, a twisted mind-controlling necromancer who lived during the ancient times. He wielded a staff that could launch walls of lightning, and a mask that granted immunity to any disease or poison. Luckily, that was just what you needed!" Salazar remarked.

Remembering the blue and orange blasts that sent the orcs flying, Dexpa asked, "You're a mage?"

Salazar replied, "Well, not quite. I'm part of the mage's guild, which is why I wear these robes. But I cannot cast spells, so I depend on the artifacts I find in my journey to protect me. I'm a collector!" he proudly stated, pointing to the corner of the room.

Dexpa followed his finger, seeing two staves leaning against the wall.

"So those attacks you used to stop the orcs..." Dexpa began to ask.

"Yup! That would be the handy work of my trusty artifacts!" he said with a cheery smirk. "They each belonged to a dragon priest as well. While I do have other duties and interests, I've dedicated a large part of my life to finding those relics, so seeing you holding both a staff AND a mask excited me more than you could imagine!"

Dexpa, feeling relieved, moved his legs out of bed and onto the floor, analyzing the room he was in. The room was empty besides some leather bags, an armor stand, a few display stands, and a fully stocked bookshelf.

"Where are we?" he asked

"This is my house! Don't worry though, we're still in Orsinium. I doubt I could carry you any further than this anyways." Salazar jested. "Sorry for bringing you here without your permission."

Dexpa shook his head and stood up. "Please, don't be. You saved my life."

"It was my pleasure," Salazar called back. He paused for a moment in awkwardness and then added, "I know this might not be a good time, but would you still be willing to do that trade I had in mind?"

Dexpa looked back seeing his broken staff and coins laying under the bed, with the scroll sitting beside them.

"I'm not sure what kind of adventure you're going on, but maybe I have something here that can help you with it? I still don't even know who you are, or what you're looking for." Salazar questioned.

"My name is Dexpa. I'm looking for my brother. We were separated after using this scroll that reacts to shock magic, so I used it and now I'm lost," Dexpa said directing his hand towards the scroll on the ground.

Salazar's jaw dropped as he looked at Dexpa in shock. "You used the Elder Scroll!? How did you...what..." he couldn't believe what he heard. "And you can still see?" he asked.

Dexpa looked at Salazar confused.

“You don’t know what an Elder Scroll is, do you, my friend?” Salazar asked with a sigh.

Dexpa shook his head, awaiting an explanation.

“I thought you were crazy for carrying that thing around but hearing that you used it takes that to a whole other level,” Salazar declared.

He took a breath and continued in his scholarly voice, “No matter. I shall explain it to you. You see, the Elder Scrolls are artifacts with the ability to traverse time. No one knows their origins, but they are said to carry the power to see into the past and future. If you and your brother used this scroll, there’s no telling where he is. Only a moth priest could help you with something that. Honestly, he may not even be in the same timeline as you are anymore.”

Dexpa began to look worried, but taking advantage of this lead, asked, “What is a moth priest and where can I find one?”

“Eager to start the next step, are we? Well moth priests are not a common occurrence; I should have you know. I’ve heard word of some making an appearance at the White-Gold Tower in Cyrodiil, but with the place now overtaken by daedra, you likely won’t find one just walking around.”

After a moment of silence between the two, Salazar’s head perked up with an idea. “Although! If you can manage to make it into the Imperial City Prison, it’s possible there might be some locked up there. The moth priests are full of incredibly rare knowledge on the Elder Scrolls, so it’s still possible that even some daedra would keep them around for their secrets.”

“Where is that?” Dexpa asked, determined to move as quickly as possible.

“It’s all the way in Cyrodiil, which would take a while for you to walk to. You could make it there quickly using a wayshrine, but that would require you to have visited once before, and by the looks of it you don’t get around too often.”

Dexpa looked at the floor once again, slightly annoyed.

“I know!” Salazar shouted. “We could go together! Unlike you, I’ve been all over Tamriel, and yes that includes the region of Cyrodiil, so if you took the wayshrine with me, it should take us both there. I wouldn’t mind helping you out in your journey either if it

meant getting to add your artifacts to my collection. Besides I've got knowledge on all sorts of daedra, which is sure to help you out there. What do you say?"

Dexpa reached down, picking up the mask and the broken pieces of the staff handing them over to Salazar. "You've got a deal," he said with a glimmer of hope in his eyes. "Though I'm not sure how useful this broken staff will prove to be."

"No worries my friend. I'll find a use for it eventually," Salazar replied placing the artifacts into his leather bag. "I have one more thing for you though," he added walking to his bookshelf and grabbing something out. "You said before, you used shock magic, is that correct?"

Dexpa nodded

"Perhaps this could help the journey ahead," Salazar said handing Dexpa a book titled "Lightning Rune." "Consider it a token of our newfound friendship," he added smiling at his new companion.

Dexpa looked back contently, happy to have some comfort in all the chaos.

"Oh, and take this too," he said handing another leather bag over to Dexpa. "It should make it easier to carry all of your things."

Dexpa accepted the bag gratefully.

The two grabbed their gear and began heading out. As they made their way to the shrine, Dexpa studied the new spellbook to see what he could learn, while Salazar led the way.

"Here we are!" Salazar said pointing to the wayshrine.

It was a familiar sight for Dexpa, looking identical to the glowing blue shrine he saw before the Maelstrom Arena.

Salazar walked up the steps and placed a hand on the shrine, reaching the other back towards Dexpa. "Grab on when you're ready," he said.

Dexpa joined him up the steps and held onto his arm. The two were ported away in an instant, appearing at a new shrine in a place of chaos.

Looking around the city, Dexpa was shocked to see monsters dwelling among human architecture, with no people in sight. It looked uncomfortably close to Coldharbour.

The two managed to sneak past several daedra on their way to the prison, eventually finding the entrance.

“You ready?” Salazar asked.

“Ready,” Dexpa said staring at the large stone door ahead. They both picked a side of the door, shoving it wide open, and began their trek into the prison.

They made it past the first few hordes of daedra without too much trouble thanks to Dexpa’s skill in magic and the collector’s powerful dragon priest staves.

The hordes consisted of a variety of Xivkyn and their pets, as well as some unique creatures that Dexpa has never faced. Luckily, he had Salazar to share the information on them. There were harvesters, which were these snake-like daedra that would steal the life energy of those around them. Then there were the Xivkyn summons, such as the bone colossus or the flesh atronachs who packed a heavy punch.

Along the way, they passed a multitude of prison cells, though so far all of them were either empty or full of unresponsive corpses.

“I’ve got this one!” Salazar yelled, shooting both staves at the last harvester in the room. Out came an ice spike piercing the creature’s chest and freezing the surrounding pieces of flesh, followed by a large fireball breaking their frozen body into multiple pieces. It fell to the ground with a wet thud.

“Those staves are incredible,” Dexpa told Salazar staring at the daedra’s body.

Salazar smirked from the compliment. “Yes they are, but even magical artifacts have their limit,” he replied.

The only way forward now was a small hole in the center of the room between four pillars, so the two adventures jumped down and proceeded forward.

They found themselves wandering through a sewer hallway with flowing water out into a larger space. Continuing into the open space at the end, they saw support beams and stone walls creating paths in a few different directions. As they made their way past one of the walls, a flesh atronach appeared around the corner throwing the boys off guard. It let out a gargling scream attracting the attention of other creatures.

Suddenly, several large rats began to surround the two of them as the atronach approached closer, quickly overwhelming them.

Dexpa came up with a plan immediately, pulling Salazar aside, and rushing towards a stairway at the end of the open room. Pushing him forward he called out in a hurry “I have an idea, just keep running up those stairs, I’ll follow you in a sec.”

Salazar, trusting Dexpa’s word darted straight for the stairs, as Dexpa turned around and began casting a spell on the floor behind them. The floor began to light up and soon revealed a lightning rune engraved into it.

“I knew that would come in handy!” Salazar yelled looking back as he continued to run.

Dexpa came back to Salazar as the creatures continued to chase mindlessly. As one of the rats ran over the rune, it exploded, making their ears ring and sending sparks and blood flying in every direction. Dexpa, now walking up the stairs, looked behind himself to admire his handy work. There were no more creatures following them.

The stairs lead into a long hallway, which began dripping blood from the ceiling to the floor. The walls appeared to be a combination of flesh atronach skin, with bones and meat stuck together.

“Stop,” Salazar called out quietly putting a hand in front of Dexpa and pointing his other one forward.

Guarding the end of the hallway was a large creature in the shape of an eyeball with tendrils waving out in every direction. It was wandering around the end of the hall, oblivious to Dexpa and Salazar’s presence.

“It’s a watcher,” Salazar whispered. “I haven’t actually seen one in person before, but the description matches what I’ve read.”

Dexpa added, “I don’t really see any other way to go but forward. We should kill it before it reacts to us.”

Salazar hesitated for a moment. “Alright fine. We attack at the same time, got it?”

Dexpa nodded.

Salazar unsheathed both of his staves pointing them forward, as Dexpa aimed his hand towards the creature.

“Now!” Salazar yelled shooting the magic out of his staves while Dexpa shot a powerful thunderbolt into the daedra’s back. It flinched but did not fall to the ground. Instead, it turned around and immediately began shooting a beam of light down the hallway separating Dexpa from Salazar with a path of blue flames. It followed up by summoning

two Xivkyn warriors to defend it, sending them charging towards the two adventurers. Dexpa placed another rune in the hallway separating the two parties. These Xivkyn were a lot smarter than the rats though and decided to stay back avoiding the rune blocking their way. Dexpa and Salazar now had the range advantage. Dexpa wiped them both out with a couple of thunderbolts, shooting one more at the Watcher behind, finally forcing to the ground.

“That lightning is something else, Dexpa,” Salazar complimented.

“It’s the only destruction magic I know,” Dexpa added humbly.

“And the only one you’ll need,” Salazar joked.

Dexpa hinted Salazar to stand back as he shot a simple lightning bolt to activate the lightning rune on the ground, reopening the path for them to walk down the hall.

Moving past the corpses, they now found themselves in another large arena surrounded by prison cages. In the middle sat a tall Xivkyn with an axe, standing over a tainted puddle of liquid with tendrils coming out of it.

They started out the fight with their usual combo, followed up by multiple thunderbolts coming from Dexpa, taking out the Xivkyn in only a matter of seconds. It didn’t even have time to react to his spells.

They continued through the prison, entering through one of the cell doors that were now open for them.

Looking around the corner, they could see more prison cells being guarded by daedra, but to their surprise, these were filled with live prisoners. After wiping out the daedra guarding the cages, Dexpa pulled the lever releasing the prisoners from their cells.

As they left their cages, Dexpa began calling out, “Is anyone here a moth priest?”

There were no answers for a while until one man called back, “I overheard the Xivkyn with the axe talking about one. I think they have him held up somewhere deeper in the prison, being guarded by Lord Warden. That’s all I know,” he finished saying as he continued walking away searching for an exit with the other prisoners.

Dexpa looked towards Salazar with determination in his eyes, as the two of them continued forward through the prison.

The rest of the enemies in the prison went down with ease. Along the way they encountered a watcher and a flesh atronach who were three times their normal size, but

these creatures posed no threat to Dexpa and Salazar who were now beginning to master their teamwork.

Nearing the end of the prison, Dexpa and Salazar walked through a gate, revealing Lord Warden in a large fenced off arena.

"I'm guessing that's him?" Dexpa asked.

"Most likely. That's a grievous twilight. Their horns and wings are about as intimidating as a titan's. And this one is twice the normal size," Salazar explained.

"Greeting's insects! Are you here to entertain me?" Lord Warden called out.

"It speaks!?" Salazar yelled.

"Is that not normal?" Dexpa asked.

Salazar shook his head slightly, staring ahead with his jaw dropped. "Get ready," he added with a gulp, beckoning Dexpa to put his guard up.

Lord Warden started the fight off charging a blue shadow orb in his hands and sending it forward between the two of them. They dove in both directions, dodging the explosion that came with it. While Salazar was grabbing a staff out of his robes, Dexpa shot out his first thunderbolt hitting one of the warden's wings, making him flinch only slightly.

Salazar followed up shooting a fireball out of his staff, but the blow was weaker than it should've been. Lord warden took the hit without a problem and began treading towards Salazar, shaking the ground with every step. Salazar, now panicking shot out fireball after fireball, with each becoming weaker than the last. After the last fireball was sent out, the only thing coming out of the staff was a puff of smoke.

"I'm out of juice! Back me up!" Salazar yelled putting away his staff and exchanging it for the other.

Dexpa shot out multiple thunderbolts now bringing Lord Warden's attention back to him. Distracted again, Lord Warden tried making his way towards Dexpa, but he found himself being pushed further away from the impact of his thunderbolts. Salazar began joining the action, launching ice spikes at the daedra dealing low damage.

"How about I start with the weakest link!" Lord Warden called out.

Suddenly, he teleported right in front of Salazar, pulling an arm back for momentum and launching it forward, slamming his claws onto Salazar's chest and sending him flying

into the fence of the arena border. The fire staff he had stowed broke into multiple sharp pieces, and sat in the middle of the arena, now far away from him.

Salazar laid against the fence unable to move. But he was still conscious and able to see Lord Warden slowly walking towards him. He spotted his ice staff sitting only a few feet from him still in one piece, but he couldn't even move his arms to pick it up.

"Salazar!" Dexpa cried out.

Lord Warden let out a sinister laugh as he brought his claws together once again charging and even more powerful shadow orb spell.

Dexpa raced to Salazar as fast as he could fearing he wouldn't make it before the spell went off.

Salazar starting regaining feeling in his fingers and attempted to move, desperately trying to reach for the staff next to him so he could block the attack with it.

Lord Warden continued his laughing, blurting out "My shadows will tear your life away!" His spell began glowing brighter while he spent more time charging it up.

Salazar could move parts of his hand now, but it was not enough. He wasn't going to reach the staff in time.

Lord Warden's attack came out as a barrage of powerful shadow orbs making their way towards Salazar who sat helpless. It looked like the end, but then covering the flash, Dexpa stood between him and the daedra and began launching a barrage of his own.

Multiple thunderbolts began shooting out of both of Dexpa's fingertips, each colliding with a shadow orb creating an intense eruption of magic energy with every collision.

Dexpa felt a surge of power flowing through his body fueled by his intense emotions. It felt like his body was acting on its own now, trying desperately to protect the one solace he had in all the mayhem. Eventually the daedra's barrage ran out, but Dexpa's continued, blasting back the warden until he fell to his knees.

"I will not be conquered!" Lord Warden screamed slowly getting back on his feet.

But Dexpa moved forward before he could act, picking up a piece of the broken fire staff along the way. Lord Warden teleported once again, coming face to face with Dexpa, but Dexpa did not flinch. The daedra began pulling his arm back once again, expecting Dexpa to fall back in retreat, but instead he vaulted off the warden's knees bringing the two of them face to face, and lodged the shard of the staff deep into one of his eyes.

Lord Warden let out screams of pain and agony as blue liquid seeped out of his eye socket. He began stepping away from Dexpa, but the khajiit wasn't finished.

Dexpa brought both of his hands together mimicking the warden's method of spell casting, charging up vicious sparks between his palms. He grinded his teeth together as he charged the lightning in his hands until it grew brighter and brighter, finally launching a massive thunderbolt at the warden.

The bolt collided with the daedra's body in an instant, shredding him into multiple pieces, and spreading those pieces around the arena, covering Dexpa in the debris. Salazar's body sat behind Dexpa, untouched from the splash of blood and guts. It was over.

Dexpa ran over to Salazar immediately, worried about his condition.

"Hey! Look at me. Don't close your eyes!" Dexpa begged.

"P..." Salazar tried to make out a single word, struggling from the condition of his crushed chest. "Pot...tion," he said looking towards his bag of gear sitting on his robes.

Dexpa, now understanding what he meant, reached into his bag picking out a red potion and began feeding it to Salazar. He could see his condition immediately improving. With a breath of relief, Dexpa took a seat next to his new friend, staying with him for the time he needed to recover.

After a few minutes, he was able to speak again.

"Thank you, my friend," he said looking towards Dexpa with one eye still struggling to stay open. "I'd be dead if it wasn't for you."

Dexpa looked away with guilt in his eyes. "You also wouldn't have been in this mess in the first place if it weren't for me."

"Coming here was my choice. Don't punish yourself over it. Besides I turned out fine," Salazar replied with a chuckle.

The two paused for a few moments letting the silence fill the conversation for a bit.

Dexpa eventually broke the silence, flinging a rock towards the center of the arena and looking away from Salazar. "When you first told me your name, I was a little thrown off."

"And why would that be?" Salazar questioned.

“I had a friend,” Dexpa said barely able to get the words out. “Though he’s gone now. But you share part of his name, so it reminded me of him.”

“What was his name?” Salazar asked curiously.

Dexpa, looking back at Salazar with a sad look in his eye replied to his question. “Mo’nazar.”

“Did the scroll separate you two as well?”

Dexpa’s gloomy face turned even more miserable. “It wasn’t because of the scroll. It was because of me. I was too weak and scared to save him.”

“Listen my boy,” Salazar started. “First of all, I’m sorry. Sorry for whatever happened, I know it must’ve been so painful that even thinking about it makes your heart ache.”

The thought of that statement made Dexpa grab his chest, remembering his dream.

Salazar continued, “But if I’ve learned anything from my fair share of losses, it’s that if you spend too much time worrying about the past, you’ll miss out on the things you still have in the present. The things you can still protect.”

The two sat in silence again for several minutes, while Salazar recovered from his wounds, and Dexpa took time to contemplate what Salazar said to him.

“The present,” Dexpa thought to himself remembering he still had someone he wanted to protect.

Jo’navir.

Dexpa regaining his resolve, stood up and said, “The Moth Priest,” looking around the arena for the exit, spotting it through an open metal gate. Salazar grabbed his ice staff sitting beside him and stood up as well, grunting as he pushed himself off the ground. The two began heading through the gate reaching the climax of their search for the moth priest.

Walking up some stairs, they spotted a small cylindrical cage sitting by itself in the corner. Inside of it sat a man in robes with his legs curled up into his chest, barely fitting into the circumference of the tiny metal cell.

As the man heard them approaching, he grumbled “I told you, I don’t know where the scroll is. And even if I did, I would rather die before telling...” he interrupted himself as

he raised his head out of his knees and glanced up at Dexpa standing nearest to the cage. "...You," he finished. "Who are you?"

Salazar explained from a distance, "We're here to break you out."

"Oh, thank the gods!" the man yelled out.

Dexpa added, "You were talking about an elder scroll right? You're a moth priest aren't you?"

"That is correct," he added with confidence.

The moth priest appeared to be in his late years, noticeably older than Salazar. He wore brown robes, and had cuts on his face and hands. He had the look of a Breton and had long grey hair with a beard to match.

"There's a key on that table over there," the moth priest said, pointing across the way. "It should open my cage."

Salazar walked over to pick it up, seeing it surrounded by a variety of sharp metal tools covered in red blood. He picked up the key and tossed it towards Dexpa. Dexpa caught it with his hand and put it into the keyhole on the cage. With a "click" the cage creaked open allowing the moth priest to finally step out of it.

He stretched his legs in front of him as he stepped out of his cage, but they quickly began to wobble forcing him to his hands on the ground.

"Forgive me," the moth priest said. "I haven't eaten in days, let alone walk or stand."

Salazar reached into his pouch and pulled out a loaf of Cyrodiilic cornbread handing it to the priest.

"Thank you," he said with a bow of his head. He ate it in only a few seconds and continued to speak. "Let's get out of here before the torturer comes back."

Salazar walked over picking him off the ground and leaning the moth priest's arm over his shoulder. As they proceeded forward Salazar asked, "So what's your name?"

"Rokai."

"Oh. Where are you from?" Salazar added.

"The Imperial city," Rokai replied.

“You’re from here!?” Salazar yelled

The moth priest sighed. “Yes, but the Soulburst kicked us all out a few years ago. The lucky ones at least.”

“So why did you come back? Or were you forced back?” Salazar pursued.

“You sure ask a lot of questions mage,” Rokai replied, clearly annoyed.

“Collector, actually,” Salazar corrected.

The moth priest rolled his eyes and finished what he was saying. “I’m a nomad, though I find myself often homesick of the knowledge that remains here. I sneak back into the White-Gold Tower often searching for tomes on the Elder Scrolls. I was a fool this time and let myself get captured, and so they brought me here.” Rokai continued, “Now will you please let me rest my voice.”

“Right, sorry,” Salazar concluded.

They made it full circle through the prison with the entrance in sight. But in front of it sat a Xivkyn wearing robes covered in red blood who looked surprised to see the three of them nearing the exit.

“That’s the torturer!” Rokai shouted. “Get him before he escapes and sends more Xivkyn our way!”

They chased after the Xivkyn seeing him create a portal at the entrance door and jumping through it. Dexpa put an arm under Rokai and began carrying him from the other side of Salazar. They limped their way through the portal transporting them to the other side and closing behind them. They could see the torturer running up to a cliff to the right and screaming off it.

“Lord Bal! It’s the warden! He’s been...” but before he could finish Dexpa stepped away from his party and shot him with a thunderbolt leaving nothing behind but ash.

The new scenery was a familiar sight to both Dexpa and Salazar.

“We’re in Coldharbour,” Salazar declared admiring his surroundings.

Dexpa had never been here, though the environment was identical to the Maelstrom Arena. He was the first to turn his head, looking out to where the torturer was shouting,

and was met with a sight he couldn't believe. Joining him soon after, Salazar and Rokai looked out past the cliff seeing it too.

Out in the distance stood a massive horned figure looming over the horizon. It reached heights beyond the tallest tower they could find, practically reaching the clouds in the gloomy blue sky.

"Molag Bal!" Salazar shouted in fear with his gaze stuck on the scene.

He was shooting blue balls of fire at something in the distance but stopped once a tiny character appeared at his feet. He began lifting the character towards him with telekinesis grabbing them in one of his hands letting out a roar of dominance. Lifting his other hand back, he seemed like he was about to finish the job but was interrupted with a blinding golden beam of light piercing through his chest. He let out another echoing roar as his enormous body turned to stone and was broken into hundreds of pieces falling to the ground far below.

Dexpa couldn't even begin to comprehend what he was witnessing. But it looked like the Daedric Lord was losing to whatever character he was in battle with. He sat there observing the fight, but was cut off by his friend.

"Dexpa!" Salazar called out.

Checking back on his party, Dexpa noticed Salazar was carrying a now unconscious Rokai.

Dexpa proposed, "Give him a potion!"

"We used my last one on me," Salazar said turning his gaze in shame.

"He needs a healer then," Dexpa said.

Checking his surroundings, Salazar spotted something down the hill to their left. Pointing towards it, he called out, "The Hollow City! The Mages Guild there is sure to have a healer."

Dexpa returned to Salazar to help carry Rokai once again, and they went down the hill towards the city.

Entering the gate of the city, Dexpa was surprised to see it in such good condition. In a place like Coldharbour, he didn't expect something survive, yet the Hollow City did more than that. The stone walls were clearly not daedric, and the streets were lined with lights

and beautiful trees. He even saw another wayshrine sitting in the corner past some merchants and their stands, with a scenic bridge crossing over the pond next to it.

Salazar, leading the way brought the party to a large door. "Almost there now. This is the Mage's Guild District," he said pushing it open for Dexpa and Rokai to come through. "It's just up the hill."

Looking up the steep path, Dexpa saw a mansion sitting on top of daedric soil. They made their way up to it struggling to carry Rokai up such a steep slope, and finally walked inside.

"Hey you're back!" Salazar heard the second he went through the door. "How did it go!? Did you get anything interesting?" the voice continued.

"We can talk about that later Glendora," Salazar said looking to the moth priest. "We need a healer, urgently."

"Oh! I'm sorry, I'll go grab someone," she said running up the stairs.

Seconds later a Nordic mage with a long golden beard and blue robes began making his way down the stairs. Something was weird about his figure and his whole body was glowing purple. His presence emanated magic power almost to an intimidating degree.

"Is that your friend who needs healing?" the man said pointing to Rokai.

"Yes, we found him in a cage in the Imperial City Prison. The torturer there did a number on him." Salazar and Dexpa were led to the room by the door they entered through. The mage brought out a few mats to sleep on, laying one down for Rokai by the fireplace in the room. Rokai laid down now unconscious, but with a pain-stricken resting face.

"You must've been desperate for something to find yourselves in a place like that," he added casting a grand healing spell over Rokai where he laid.

"It was to save him, actually," Salazar said. "He's a moth priest. My new friend here has been looking for one to solve the mystery of his Elder Scroll."

"You're what!?" The man shouted turning his focus to Dexpa.

Dexpa pulled Scroll out showing it to the mage.

He was awestruck. "Is that really an Elder Scroll? This is almost hard to believe. It's not every day that you get to see one of these in person. What is your name, boy?" he asked.

"My name is Dexpa," he replied.

"Well, it is a pleasure to meet you," the Nord bowed. "My name is Shalidor."

"Shalidor!? Like the Legendary Arch-Mage Shalidor!? Creator of Shalidor's Maze, the ultimate proving grounds for Arch-Mages hidden deep within the Labyrinthian?" Salazar yelled. "I thought you were dead! I've read legends speaking of you during the first era."

Dexpa looked confused but interested at what Salazar was saying.

"You are correct to have believed so. I was brought back the mortal realm only recently by another adventurer. Though unfortunately, my time back in this world won't last much longer, for the body that I was gifted is slowly fading away."

The healing spell began to wear off, and Rokai's sleeping face took on a more relaxed expression as the wounds in his face and hands started to disappear. "Ah good. He's starting to look better already. You'll need to give him some time to rest, though. He should be better by tomorrow," Shalidor stated.

"That's a relief. Thank you, Arch-Mage!" Salazar called out.

Shalidor smiled with a nod of his head. "Now if I may ask, why is it you are searching for knowledge on your Elder Scroll? You don't intend to use it do you?"

Dexpa answered, "I already have, but the problem is..."

"You already used the scroll!?" Shalidor interrupted. "How have you not been driven mad? Or at least blind?"

Salazar chuckled loudly. "That was my reaction too."

Dexpa continued, "I don't know. My brother and I used it to escape our home in the Shivering Isles, but it ended up separating us instead, leaving me here. I'm just trying to figure out how to get back to him and so far, this scroll is my only clue. I was lucky to find it again so soon."

Shalidor mumbled to himself, pondering the situation. "May I see it?"

"Of course," Dexpa said laying the scroll in the Arch-Mage's hands.

Shalidor looked over the scroll analyzing every part of it. He turned it face up noticing the lightning bolt symbol sitting on the seal. "Are you a mage?" he asked Dexpa, still inspecting the scroll.

"Yes. I use lightning magic, mostly," Dexpa said, wondering if Shalidor was onto something.

He sat for another few seconds staring at the scroll. "It's possible the scroll has an attunement of sorts to lightning magic, judging from the symbol on the seal. But even with that I still don't know where the connection lies in nullifying the side effects of the scroll." He gave the scroll back to Dexpa with a proud smile, continuing to speak, "But what I do know, is you're a very special mage. The fact that you found the scroll so soon after losing it proves that you were fated to reunite with it."

Dexpa looked at the Arch-Mage with a glimmer of hope in his eyes. "Does that mean I'll be able to reunite with my brother as well?"

The Arch-Mage replied, "That part I'm not sure. But if you're trying to make your way back to the Shivering Isles, I believe I may be able to help." He sighed and continued speaking, "Or at least, I might know someone who can help you. But you're not going to like it."

"Please Arch-Mage! I need this lead," Dexpa begged.

Arch-Mage Shalidor stood for a moment hesitantly. "Very well. The man you're looking for," he paused letting out another breath. "His name is Sheogorath."

Dexpa's eyes grew wider in an instant. "I know him! The Mad God. He's the one who gave me and my brother the scroll in the first place."

"Then you are probably aware that he is not a man to be trusted," Shalidor responded.

Dexpa, realizing that he was probably speaking truth, broke eye contact with the Arch-Mage and began looking deterred. "We were trying to escape the Island. It seemed like there was no other way."

"Dear mage, there are plenty of ways to escape an Island, and an Elder Scroll should have been at the bottom of your list. He likely did it, not out of generosity, but for his own entertainment."

Salazar put his hand on Dexpa's shoulder to bring him some comfort. Dexpa sat still unreactive to his touch.

“Dexpa,” Rokai said now sitting upright on his resting mat. “Don’t let one minor setback stop you from reaching your goal. You want to find your brother, right? Well, you have the Elder Scroll, you have a mage willing to send you to the man who started this whole mess, and then you will have your answers.”

“Up already? That was a quick nap,” Salazar jested.

Ignoring his joke, Rokai continued, “You need to grab this opportunity, and hold onto it with a tight fist.”

Dexpa began finally snapping out of the thought of his embarrassing failure. He looked at Arch-Mage Shalidor and said with confidence “Alright, I’ll face him again. And then I’ll demand for passage back to the Shivering Isles.”

“That’s what I like to hear!” Shalidor said with a grin. “I will see you boys in the morning and send you on your way. Be sure to get some rest, you’ll need it if you’re going to be facing the Mad God.”

They got into their sleeping mats and doze the night away. Dexpa and Salazar were a lot more exhausted than they realized, thanks to the hardships they faced in the prison. But this made it much easier for them to fall asleep.

The sun began to show through the windows of the guild hall, waking up the adventurers in the process. They rubbed their eyes awake, ready for the task ahead of them.

A knock came from the doorway of the room, revealing Shalidor greeting the three of them with a serious expression. “Are you ready?”

They got up and grabbed their gear. The Arch-Mage pointed his hands towards the campfire and began charging a beam towards it, spawning a purple sphere of light. “Alright boys, walk in when you’re ready. This’ll take you to Cheesemonger’s Hollow where Shegorath should be residing. The last adventurer who saved me not too long ago should have cleared it out for you, so you should have no problem reaching the Mad God.”

“Ready Dexpa? Rokai?” Salazar asked looking their way.

Rokai nodded looking at Dexpa who did the same.

Salazar stepped through with a wave back at his friends, followed by Rokai close behind. As Dexpa began to walk up to the portal, Shalidor interrupted him saying "Wait my boy. I almost forgot; I have something to give you for your journey."

Dexpa stopped in his tracks, coming back to the Arch-Mage.

"Closer, mage. There are two very powerful spells that I wish to show you. You said you're a lightning mage, correct?" Shalidor asked.

"That is correct, sir," Dexpa replied.

While still charging the portal with one hand, Shalidor placed the other on Dexpa's forehead. He whispered some words that Dexpa couldn't make out. Suddenly, Dexpa began feeling a weird sensation in his entire body, starting in his skull and working its way down. It felt like his brain was expanding rapidly, which made his head ache.

"There you go," Shalidor said, almost breathless taking his hand off Dexpa's forehead. "I shared my knowledge on a couple spells with you: lightning cloak and chain lightning. I hope they can help you attain what you seek. Good luck young one," he said bowing his head to Dexpa, with a weakened look on his face.

Dexpa bowed his head back at Shalidor and stepped through the portal feeling even more ready than before.

"Took you long enough. What were you doing back there?" Salazar asked looking at Dexpa now stepping through the other end of the portal.

"He wanted to give me a gift before I left. Some knowledge on a few new spells," Dexpa replied. Dexpa began admiring his environment, noticing the black daedric metals and stone covering all the walls, with the occasional red flags hanging from them. They were Daedric Ruins.

In front of them stood a balding man wearing raggedy leather clothing. He stood with a polite yet demeaning look on his face glaring at the three of the adventurers.

"Haskill?" Dexpa inquired.

"Do I know you?" Haskill replied.

"I just saw you the other day," Dexpa said almost offended by the butler.

Haskill sat there completely unphased and enjoying the silence.

Dexpa, continued, "You know, two khajiit boys. Running away from certain doom. Trying to get away from the Crystal Knights wreaking havoc on the Shivering Isles."

For the first time, Dexpa saw a slight reaction in Haskill's face at the mention of the phrase "Crystal Knights."

"Jyggalag's servants..." he replied. "You used the Lightning Scroll."

In an angry tone, Dexpa responded, "Yeah, you gave it to us to take us off the Island, not knowing what it would do."

Haskill signaled the boys towards the door behind him. "My Lord would love to see you again. He will be very interested in seeing what his experiment has accomplished."

Dexpa began to feel sick at the thought of Haskill's cold heart. But he ignored him and walked past, heading through the door taking him out of the daedric ruins.

On exit, the three adventurers found a small plot of land filled with beautiful flora surrounded by both water and lava flowing off parts of the steep rocks encasing them in. It was a strange sight, but even stranger were the bodies of daedra which were littered all over the place.

They eventually made it to a shrine-like plaza with four empty pedestals and a dead clannfear laying in front of them. Dexpa approached the body and kneeled over to inspect it, but right as his knees touched the floor a voice appeared behind them

"You killed Gutsripper! You cheeky little monsters! I'll have you slain for that!" they called out.

The party jumped to their feet. Salazar grabbed out his newly repaired lightning staff and Dexpa began charging a shock spell. They both looked around the area until they spotted a man in purple and red clothing with grey hair standing behind them.

"Just kidding!" the man called out laughing hysterically. "Oh, I really scared you with that one, didn't I? Don't worry I know you didn't kill the little guy. I saw the one who did it, just the other day."

"Sheogorath," Dexpa said with an annoyed sigh.

"You sound just like my butler!" Sheogorath chuckled. "How can I help you? You didn't come here for my cheese did you!?" he said furiously.

“You mean you don’t remember me either?” Dexpa asked. “It hasn’t even been a week. You gave me and my brother the Lightning Scroll to get off the Island. You told us there was no other way to get away from the Crystal Knights.”

The term began to ring a bell for Sheogorath now. “My my! What a delight! To see you again after 583 years, and you haven’t grown one bit,” he burst out laughing. He added, “If you’re here for the Elder Scroll, I don’t have it! I sold it to some dremora for some delicious cheese. Best decision I’ve ever made.”

“583 years?” Dexpa questioned.

“I had a feeling it was something like this was happening,” Rokai intervened. “Dexpa, I think the scroll sent you to the future. If you’ve really been gone 583 years, that means you’re from the end of the first era.”

Dexpa was stunned. “Then what about Jo’navir?”

Salazar replied, “I assume that’s your brother? It’s impossible to tell where he was sent. The Elder Scrolls work in ways that man and mer have yet to understand.”

Dexpa walked closer to Sheogorath, with an even more serious tone, and asked, “Where did you send my brother?”

“I didn’t send him anywhere,” he said pouting like a child. “It was you remember. You’re the one that had the scroll. And look what it did to you!” he began laughing boisterously again. “I guess that answers my little experiment.”

“You didn’t answer my question,” Dexpa said, not breaking eye contact with the Mad God.

“You think I would know? You’re hilarious! Even the gods don’t understand the Elder Scrolls. Why do you think I made you use it? Letting you escape the Greymarch was kind enough of me wouldn’t you say?” he replied.

“The Greymarch?” Dexpa inquired.

“You know, the day Jyggalag comes back at the end of every era and tears the Shivering Isles to pieces, ruining my beautiful utopia of madness. Did your mother not tell you about it? Shame,” Sheogorath said shaking his head side to side.

Dexpa looked angry at the mention of his mother, but he regained his composure quickly. “Then at least take me to the Shivering Isles. I’ll figure it out myself,” Dexpa demanded.

“You don’t make the demands around here my little friend. How about a little contest? Oo I know! A cheese eating contest!” He interrupted himself, “No I just ate. Maybe a fight to the death!? No that would be too easy. Hm,” Sheogorath began to ponder to himself for a good thirty seconds before Dexpa finally interrupted.

“How about I continue your experiment for you? My brother is still out there, and I intend to find out where that scroll took him. Or when,” Dexpa said.

“That’s a great idea!” Sheogorath said, his eyes beaming with joy. Dexpa looked relieved that he had finally won him over, but the Mag God continued to speak.

“You could be my champion!” Sheogorath shouted.

“That’s not what I…” Dexpa began to say, but Sheogorath shouted over him.

“Then it’s a deal! You swear your undying loyalty to me as my champion and I will allow you passage back to the Shivering Isles.”

Sheogorath patiently awaited Dexpa’s response.

Dexpa turned around trying to get some advice from his companions.

Salazar turned to Dexpa saying “I don’t know how I feel about that offer. I can’t think of a better way, but I’m sure there is one, Dexpa. Let’s take our time with this.”

Rokai stood closer telling him, “I hate to agree with the archivist, but I do agree that you shouldn’t force yourself into servitude like that. We can find another way. Together.”

“I’m done waiting,” Dexpa stated, now visibly frustrated. “Jo’navir could be out there by himself. I need to find him before something happens. He’s the only family I have left, and I was never there to protect him the same way he did me. I can’t stand waiting around anymore.”

His two companions stopped talking. They saw the way Dexpa was suffering and didn’t want to push him any further to make a decision.

Salazar put a hand on Dexpa’s back. “Listen, my friend. Whatever decision you make, just know we’ll be there to back you up.”

Rokai followed by example, placing his hand gently on Dexpa’s shoulder. “What the mage said. I promise I’ll help you get back to your brother, however you decide to do it. I still need to pay you back for freeing me from that hellish prison. I’d be glad to do it as

long as it doesn't involve sending me back there." Rokai laughed for the first time around the two of them.

Dexpa walked up to Sheogorath who sat with his hands together waiting for Dexpa to make a decision. The khajiit finally spoke.

"I agree to your terms Mad God. I will be your champion, now take me home."

"That's the spirit!" he yelled. "Here's your portal!" He casted a portal in the center of the plaza. "No more tricks, I promise. And a Mad God keeps his promises."

The party nodded in agreement and went through the portal together.

Coming out the other side, Dexpa recognized the atmosphere immediately. It was the ruins past the swamp where the chaos all began. Though there were some minor differences. Most noticeably, the ceiling of the ruins was caved in and was flattened to the ground. There were also a lot more dust, vines, and moss than he remembered there being.

Dexpa glanced over to the stone door in the center. It no longer had a purple glow to it, and the door was wide open, exactly how they left it. Moving inside he could see more clearly. The Obelisk was in pieces on the floor. It was no longer active.

Heading back to the entrance, it was in similar shape to how it was when Dexpa, Jo'navir, and Mo'nazar were rushing back to the village. The only way out was the hole in the ceiling.

"Come over to me," Dexpa called out to Salazar and Rokai who stood admiring the scenery.

As they stacked together in one spot, Dexpa cast levitate on the three of them lifting them out and over the entrance to the ruins. His limits to the height of that spell hadn't changed since he last used it. A wave of Nostalgia hit Dexpa, but it quickly began to turn into a bad memory.

He brushed aside the thought as best he could and proceeded through the swamp with the other two following behind.

"Where are we headed, Dexpa?" Salazar asked.

"My village is just at the edge of the swamps. This way," Dexpa replied.

Rokai began to speak gently. "My boy, just remember, it has been almost 600 years since you've been here. You should be ready for the worst."

"I'm aware," Dexpa said staring into the swamp water as he moved forward.

Rokai shrugged and continued to follow.

"Here it is," Dexpa said walking around the last corner to finally reveal the village.

The village was flattened as Dexpa expected it to be, but something else changed. Something huge and impossible to miss even if you weren't looking for it.

Now sitting over Mo'nazar's house was a massive stone castle. It was several levels higher than the original and spread out to multiple times its old width. It was carved out of grey stone. There were multiple windows with a blue light coming out of each, except for one triple sized window sitting on the top floor emitting a purple light from within.

The front door was not easy to find. Looking around for a large presentable stone door, the party was let down. The only door in sight, sitting at the base of the castle, was a small wooden door sitting just as it used to at the entrance to Mo'nazar's old house.

"That's the entrance," Dexpa said without hesitation.

"Are we going inside?" Salazar asked.

"What about the time wound?" Rokai continued.

"This is where the house my best friend used to live in. Seeing a castle now standing in its place is concerning. We need to go inside," Dexpa declared.

"Well, we said we'd follow you wherever, so let's get going then!" Salazar replied cheerfully.

Reaching for the door, Dexpa was lost in thought, pondering the reason for the existence of this castle. He opened it revealing another familiar sight. The base floor looked almost identical to Mo'nazar's old house. Almost nothing had changed except for the hatch, which was now just another part of the wooden floor. But besides that, the house looked even neater than it did on the day of the Greymarch, aside from the excess of dust laying around.

The three of them began searching separately around the house for information. Salazar wandered around the kitchen, while Rokai admired the table where Mo'nazar's

family used to eat at. Dexpa scavenged the bookshelf, skimming over the covers and pulling out books that didn't interest him and throwing them on the floor.

Eventually, Dexpa's hand pulled on a book titled, "Dead Thrall" which let off a clicking sound followed by a subtle shaking beneath the floorboards, alerting the others in the room. Dexpa let go of the book and walked towards the others to see if anything had changed. He spotted it right away.

"The cellar! It's open now," Dexpa called to Salazar and Rokai.

Dexpa walked over and hopped in without a second thought; his two party members following in his wake.

Dexpa had never entered their cellar before. It was always another off-limits zone to him, his brother and Mo'nazar.

Inside it was a faded out red summoning circle on the floor with old blood stains painting the floor and walls. There was also a bookshelf in the corner that held a multitude of conjuration and destruction spell books in it. And beneath it laid a bunch of purple crystals scattered across the floor.

Salazar walked over to the bookshelf suspiciously checking behind it. "I thought so!" he said. "There's a hole behind this thing. Help me move it."

Dexpa and Rokai joined him, pulling the bookshelf out of the corner, and revealing a hole behind where it stood about half the size of a doorframe. Dexpa crawled in and maneuvered through the stone tunnel until he reached a metal fence on the other side, covering the tunnel exit. He cast a thunderbolt at it, piercing a hole big enough for the three of them to crawl through.

They now stood in the corner of two large hallways shooting out in different directions, one left and the other straight ahead. The scenery began to match what they saw outside with grey stone taking up most of their vision. The floors were laid with red carpet, and above them hung blue lanterns spread out through the hallways, emitting a dim and eerie glow. The amount of dust sitting around was just as bad as the house was. And even worse was the random piles of bones and ashes sitting around in random parts of the hallway.

They took the left path, leading them past three cages carved into walls along the hallway, each with a skeleton in them. Some of the bones on the skeletons were missing, while others were either broken or crushed into shards lying on the floor of their cages. Soon, they reached a point in the hallway where the right wall was replaced with a large archway, leading into another room.

It was filled with metal contraptions, each looking like it was intended for creating armor and weapons. Sitting in the middle of it all, was a skeleton lying face up on the ground. It had a tail and a long nose, and a hole through its ribcage. Beside it was a steel greatsword, and above it all was a large red chandelier that lit the room below. Sitting at the back of the room was a huge master staircase leading to the upstairs.

They walked past the contraptions and the skeleton, and then up the master staircase, which took them past a few blue doors. But they continued up the stairs as they curved around both sides, heading up in the other direction. And then the last level of the stairs brought them to a large purple door at the end of a small hallway with black conjuration symbols painted on both sides of it. Dexpa, standing ahead of his companions, pushed the two doors open to see what was inside.

It was the throne room. In front of himself, Dexpa could see an enormous stone plaza, just like the one in the Fringe. Surrounding the plaza, several stone pillars extended into the ceiling from the floor, creating an arena of sorts. Around the pillars sat multiple piles of bones and ash spread randomly around the room. At the end of it was the throne chair, made of stone and padded with thick purple cloth, which had two purple lanterns shining light from each side of it.

Looking in between the throne and the plaza, Dexpa saw two skeletons.

One laid with its head pointing toward the throne, and was many times the size of a normal person. Its skeleton was completely unrecognizable, as if it was made of random body parts glued together.

And at the end of its head was another skeleton with a tail and a long nose. It was kneeling over the larger skeleton with its hand resting on the creature's head, as its other hand held onto an amulet with a green skull.

Dexpa stood there trying to understand whose castle this was and why it chose his village. The changes that came with 583 years of his absence was overwhelming and confusing.

After some time staring at the scene in front of them, Dexpa began to speak.

"Alright, it's time to go," he said turning around and walking back out the purple door.

They went back through the way that they came in, now leaving them at the entrance to Mo'nazar's house.

"Where to now?" Salazar asked Dexpa.

“To the place where I used the scroll. Over there,” Dexpa said, pointing towards the entrance to the Fringe as he proceeded towards it.

They maneuvered through the long dark hallways, taking them to the plaza where the abomination dwelled.

“It’s not here?” Dexpa questioned, thinking out loud.

“What’s not?” Rokai asked.

“There was an abomination here when me and my brother were fleeing. It looked like those flesh atronachs that we saw in the prison, only bigger. I guess it’s gone now,” Dexpa added suspiciously.

Looking out into the open fields, they could see two pillars of light extending into the sky. Dexpa rushed out to see what it was.

He could see it clearly now, standing in front of him. It was the exact spot where he and Jo’navir used the scroll in.

“Those are time wounds!” Rokai shouted. “This is perfect Dexpa. Do you remember where the two of you stood?”

“This one was me,” Dexpa said pointing to the beam of light sitting slightly farther away from them. “And this was Jo’navir,” he continued, pointing now at the other beam of light sitting just beside it.

Knowing Rokai had a plan, Dexpa grabbed the elder scroll out of his leather bag and handed it to him.

“This is it then, Dexpa,” Rokai said, looking at Dexpa proudly. “Let me know when you’re ready. I believe I have a method that could send you to your brother.”

“Right,” Dexpa said. He began looking at Salazar with a last request. “If this works and I’m gone from here, can you do me one last favor?”

“Of course! You know I can’t say no to you now,” Salazar joked.

Dexpa chuckled softly. “Bring the scroll to Shalidor and have him stow it away deep in his maze in the Labyrinthian. I have a feeling it’ll be safe place for the scroll to rest.”

Salazar replied, "You've got it, Dexpa. I'm sure Shalidor will be able to find a place for it there." He paused after his sentence glancing at the ground, and then looking back at Dexpa.

"I will miss you, my friend," he said patting Dexpa on the back one last time.

Dexpa smiled wholeheartedly at his two companions and brought them in for a warm embrace. Talking between their two shoulders, he said "Thank you for everything," leaving the rest of the moments to peaceful silence.

Dexpa returned to his position, standing in the beam of light where his brother stood, and looking to Rokai for confirmation.

Rokai nodded his head in approval and began to unravel the scroll in front of Dexpa. The white light began to shine on him as he read. His face reacted negatively as if the scroll's side effects were already taking place, but that didn't stop him. He was reading words in a language Dexpa didn't understand. All Dexpa and Salazar could do was sit around and wait for the scroll to work, if was going to.

After a few more moments of Rokai reading the scroll, Dexpa began to feel worried. He looked at Salazar with concern in his eyes, as Salazar stared back with a mutual feeling.

Rokai continued to read; his eyes entirely focused on the scroll and voice shouting to the heavens.

In the next moments, Dexpa began to feel something he remembered feeling the first time he used the scroll. His head felt dizzy, and his heart pulsed rapidly. Although this time, there was no lightning. Rokai continued to read the scroll.

Soon Dexpa's heart began racing to the point where it felt like it was going to explode out of his chest. And then his vision went white as his body became numb, and finally, he vanished.

Chapter 2

Jo'navir: Knowledge

(4E 201)

Jo'navir's vision began to return within a few seconds, like a fading white light. He began looking around, seeing himself in a totally new environment. There were beautiful trees everywhere he looked, and mountains in the distance; some with white snow and others covered in flourishing green flora.

"Dexpa!?" he called out searching for his brother. He thought to himself that his brother must've been nearby. They should have been teleported away together after using the scroll.

Suddenly, over the horizon a massive, winged beast began flying across the sky. Its presence was intimidating, with pointy grey scales and sharp horns that made Jo'navir instinctively hide behind some rocks to stay out of sight. It let out an echoing roar that shook the bushes around him. Peering back at the beast, Jo'navir noticed a trail of smoke floating behind it as it made its escape.

He began to panic at the thought that maybe Dexpa was near the source of the smoke. Jo'navir waited for the creature to soar away and then proceeded towards the source.

It was a wooden village with walls torn to pieces and with flames coating most of the buildings and dirt below them. He couldn't look anywhere without seeing corpses somewhere in his vision. Some were impaled or torn to pieces, while others were burnt to a crisp.

"Dexpa!" Jo'navir shouted again hoping for a response. But there was none. Jo'navir was still determined, inspecting every corpse closely to make sure it wasn't his brother.

In a courtyard, he saw a man in blue armor who sat dead with his wrists tied behind his back. His head sat several feet in front of him on the other side of a small stone block, as blood continued to leak from it onto the dirt below.

He ran inside continuing his search, approaching a living man in blue armor identical to the armor from before. The man pulled out his sword ready to attack, but he hesitated at the sight of Jo'navir, looking him up and down.

“Listen kid, you need to get out of h..” the man began to say, but he was interrupted with a sword slicing through one part of his neck and out the other. His head rolled to the side as his corpse fell to the ground revealing another man in brown leather armor.

Jo’navir stepped back in fear and reached for his sword, but it wasn’t with him anymore. He realized he never picked it up after witnessing his father’s death and darting back to the village.

The man was breathing heavily, proud of his kill. “You should listen to him. You’re not safe here kid.” He left the room, running back to where he came from.

Jo’navir’s thoughts began to overwhelm him. There were too many things happening at once. But he understood that his vulnerable state needed to change.

He glanced at the floor where the blue armored warrior laid dead. Thinking fast, Jo’navir took up the dead man’s sword, and took his armor off for himself. He was now well-equipped with a steel sword, a blue armored chest piece, some fur boots, and a pair of fur gauntlets to match. He reached into the pockets of his new armor, finding a few gold coins which he left in their place.

He continued through the building, heading in the same direction as the man in leather armor. He saw plenty more bodies on the way, noticing a theme in the process. Every corpse he saw laid on the path was either wearing blue fur or brown leather armor. There was no in between.

Soon, he found himself at a rocky den full of webs and eggs. He walked past as quietly as he could. But his next few steps ended up smashing a pile of eggs, alerting a horde of spiders, large and small, descending from the ceiling above.

Jo’navir cast fireball sending some of the little ones smashing into the walls, but there were too many for him to handle. He kept running for the exit keeping the spiders at a distance with his steel sword. He passed a brown bear waking it from its slumber, but it quickly became distracted by the spiders chasing Jo’navir. Eventually, he made his way towards a light at the end of the cave, bringing him to safety outside.

His hands fell to his knees as he tried to gather his breath. After taking some time to recuperate, he brought himself back up and began to admire his surroundings. The trees and grass were nothing like the swamps. The scene was beautiful and unreal to Jo’navir.

Soon, he noticed footsteps engraved in the dirt below him heading down the natural trail of dirt carved between the grass field. Realizing it might lead him to somewhere safe, he decided to follow them for some time.

Eventually the footsteps took him to a village with a sign titled "Riverwood," which had villagers wandering the streets as they would on a normal day.

Proceeding through the village he came across a blacksmith who welcomed him to the town. "Welcome to Riverwood, kid."

"Thank you," Jo'navir said nodding his head. "Have you seen a khajiit walking through here recently? With white fur and black stripes?"

"Afraid not, boy. You should be careful out there though. We just got news of a dragon over Helgen," he said while smacking a heated iron sword over an anvil with a hammer.

"I appreciate the warning," Jo'navir said continuing through Riverwood, waving to the smith in thanks.

His stomach began to feel empty. Looking ahead, he could see a wooden sign hanging off the side of a building carved out to read "The Sleeping Giant Inn."

"That sounds promising," he said to himself heading up the stairs to the door. Opening it, he could see a few men residing inside, with a large campfire in the middle, some tables and chairs, an alchemy station, and a bar counter.

"If you need food or drinks, you've come to the right place," a man called to Jo'navir from behind the counter. "If it's a room you need, we've got that too."

"Food sounds good," Jo'navir decided, walking up to the counter.

"You got coin?" the man asked.

Jo'navir just looked at him confused. In his village, there was no concept of currency.

"Do you have any gold, cat?" he asked again.

"Oh," Jo'navir stuttered, reaching into the pockets of his new armor. He pulled out some coins leaving them on the counter. "Food please" Jo'navir said.

The innkeeper pointed to the meat hanging behind him. "Which'll it be?"

Jo'navir pointed out the red-striped, rectangular slab of meat nailed against the wall. "I'll take whatever that is."

“Horker meat,” he replied. “Here you go, pal.” The man placed the meat on a plate and slid it over the counter, grabbing the right number of coins for the exchange, leaving the leftover.

Jo’navir repocketed the rest of his gold and started chowing down on his meal. He began asking his questions again about Dexpa in between bites. “Have you seen a khajiit boy walk through here recently? Just a bit younger than me.”

“Sorry, I haven’t. Is he your friend?” the man replied.

“Brother,” Jo’navir said focusing on his food.

“It’s getting late you know. The sun is going down, and I have a feeling you’re not from anywhere around here,” the inn merchant said now feeling genuine concern for Jo’navir. “If you need a room, you just say so. I’m sure you’ve heard the rumors about a dragon lurking about. Plus, you’re not going to find your brother if you can’t see where you’re going.”

Jo’navir sat silently for a few seconds considering the man’s words. “You’re right,” he said hesitantly, placing the rest of his coins back on the counter.

The man grabbed all of the coins but one, which Jo’navir pocketed once again. “Take the room on your left. My name is Orgnar if you need anything.”

Jo’navir nodded his head in thanks and went into his room for the night. He managed to get a few hours of sleep, but the thought of his brother being in danger made it difficult to get any more. The only solace he had was that he didn’t find a body belonging to Dexpa amongst the chaos at Helgen.

It felt like forever, but morning finally came. He got out his room and began walking to the exit door, waving to Orgnar as he went through.

“Stop thief!” he heard coming from the left. A dunmer man in hide armor was sprinting away as fast he could towards the mountains in the distance ahead of him. He could barely make out a golden item in his hands with sharp finger-like edges.

Curious, Jo’navir decided to pursue the thief, eyeing the golden claw, while pondering its value. He chased the man up to the mountains, finding patches of bandits along the way. But he continued anyways, avoiding as much contact with them as he could.

The snow on the mountain grew thicker the further up he went. Eventually a large stone structure in the shape of a ribcage sat at the top of a stone path, with a large door sitting

underneath the furthest rib-like archway. He found a way up the side, sneaking past the next wave and bandits and entering through the large metal door.

Immediately, he could hear more bandits arguing in the distance. He now stood quietly in a large stone room. It had a black table sitting on the right side with a bandit seated on top of it. There were dead skeevers spread around the stone floor surrounding the body of one of the bandits, now deceased.

“It got me! Blasted rats!” a bandit screamed as they sat on the table. “I can’t take this. The poison feels like it’s eating away at me. Where the hell is Arvell? Why did we even let him go ahead with the claw?”

Jo’navir reacted at the mention of the claw.

The bandit looked at the others and continued to shout, “If you had just killed the thing, we’d all be fine, you useless...”

The other two bandits cut him off and began arguing back. Meanwhile, Jo’navir realized this was his perfect chance to slip by. He got past undetected and went through a few hallways eventually taking him to a miniature arena coated in spider webs.

He heard a man fighting for his life inside, so he went to look, ducking behind a stone pillar. The man was swinging his sword hopelessly at a giant frost spider. It struck back with its fangs and then proceeded to wrap him up in thick webs, hanging him in a doorway.

On the man’s hide armor, Jo’navir could see the golden claw hanging. It was the Dumner man he saw in Riverwood, running off with the claw.

“Hey! Harknir? Bjorn? Is that you!?” the man screamed out looking towards the pillar that Jo’navir hid behind. “Soling!? Please help me! This isn’t how I want to go.”

Jo’navir, holding his position began to think. His fist began to glow with fire as he prepared a spell. Was he really going to save a bandit? He didn’t even know what he was doing here in the first place. His first thought was to pursue a thief and get back a stolen item. He knew it was the right thing to do, but he was also hoping to gain some more gold in the process to keep him fed and strong

The fire in his hand faded as he made up his mind. He remembered his real goal.

“Dexpa,” he whispered to himself.

There was no reason to risk his life here, especially not for some random bandit. He stepped away and then started running back where he came from with the other bandits.

Luckily they were still arguing, allowing Jo'navir to slowly sneak past towards the other side of the room with the exit door.

Observing the scene, Jo'navir saw one of the bandits holding their sword in the air, preparing for a swing. "I say we put him out of his misery," they said.

"No! Please! I'll be fine I promise. I didn't mean what I said earlier!" he begged.

But the other bandit swung their sword anyways, piercing his stomach and spreading blood on the black table beneath him. The body flopped backwards, laying there helplessly.

"That takes care of that," one of the bandits said, returning to their campfire, allowing Jo'navir to get past undetected.

After reaching the outside, he made his way down the mountain getting past without alerting any of the other bandits.

After arriving back at Riverwood, Jo'navir went towards the inn again. He was deep in thought during his walk, trying to figure out a better way to find Dexpa. And eventually, an idea came to mind.

He entered the inn once again, standing at the counter where Orgnar still stood.

"Where can I find a golden scroll with the ability to transport living beings?" Jo'navir asked.

"You mean an Elder Scroll?" Orgnar replied concerned for Jo'navir. "You must be out of your mind to be looking for one of those."

Jo'navir stared without reacting to the inn keeper's joke. "My brother might have it. Or maybe it'll lead me to him. I'm not sure, but its the only thing I can work with right now to find him."

Orgnar sighed. "If you want information on the scrolls, the only place I can think of is the Mage's College of Winterhold."

"Where is that?" Jo'navir pondered.

“You really aren’t from around here, are you?” Orgnar said. “It’s up in the mountains far northeast of here, buried in snow. The place doesn’t have the best reputation though, so lookout for that.”

Jo’navir felt relieved, finally having a lead to take him to Dexpa. “Thank you!” he said running out the door in a hurry.

“Just follow the river!” Orgnar called out as Jo’navir walked out the door.

He began his voyage northeast following the river up the trail. Eventually he reached an open field with a huge town to his right and a single large tower in the distance to his left. Looking closer, he noticed another dragon flying around the tower shooting flames to the ground below it.

Jo’navir approached to get a closer look, noticing the people in yellow armor fighting alongside an adventurer. It didn’t take long for them to bring the dragon to the ground, slaying it. But when its body finally collapsed, a glowing white aura began seeping out of the dragon and into the body of the adventurer, as if its life energy was being sucked away and absorbed. Shocked and confused at what was going on, Jo’navir decided to distance himself from the scene.

Stepping away, Jo’navir found himself at a camp with food stashed in every corner. There were dead animals spread around including a deer and three wolves, and then there were sacks holding loads of mammoth cheese. While Jo’navir didn’t recognize the things sitting before him, but he could tell it was food, which he needed to keep close.

He took handfuls of cheese and shoveled it into his mouth, breathing a sigh of relief. It was delicious. He then grabbed up a part of the deer and started walking away with it over his shoulder searching for a safer location to finish his meal.

Suddenly, he could hear heavy footsteps approaching him rapidly. Turning behind himself, he could now see a giant stomping its way towards him, waving a huge bone in one of its hands.

With the deer over his shoulder, he was nowhere near fast enough to get away from the speed of the oncoming giant. Thinking fast, he stopped in his tracks, laid the deer on the ground, and swiftly cut through one of the legs with his steel sword. He grabbed the leg, leaving the rest of the body behind, and continued running away again.

But the giant was already too close. It swung its weapon at Jo’navir grazing his arm and sending him flying in the other direction, skidding past dirt and landing against a rock.

The giant, now satisfied, picked up the legless deer carcass and brought it back to its camp. Meanwhile, Jo'navir was sitting flat against the rock he slammed into. He got off and sat down, looking back at the giant, now walking away. "What the heck was that thing?" he asked himself.

His hands and knees were scratched and bruised, and his shoulders were numb. But worst of all, his arm that got hit by the huge bone was pulsing viciously; a feeling which Jo'navir didn't notice until he finally stood up.

He screamed internally, grabbing on to his arm with his other one and squeezing tight. The pain wasn't going away any time soon. He needed to find a place to rest. A safe place.

Checking his surroundings, Jo'navir could see the town on the other side of the rock he landed against. He started his approach towards the town, still in pain, and spotted the deer leg sitting on the ground ahead of him. He went to pick it up but was met with more unfamiliar footsteps.

Peeking its head around another rock, an injured male wolf made its way towards Jo'navir getting closer to the meat. It stopped its approach and began to growl at Jo'navir, who held onto the leg tightly.

The wolf was alone and injured, just like Jo'navir. It was limping as if one of its back legs were damaged.

The khajiit boy sat for a moment, beginning to sympathize for the injured and hungry animal. After careful consideration, Jo'navir cut off another slab of the deer meat presenting it to the wolf in front of him. It came closer inch by inch, carefully analyzing Jo'navir with every step. Jo'navir continued holding the meat in his hand, careful not to make any sudden movements.

Eventually the hungry wolf came within inches of Jo'navir's hand, swiftly grabbing the food away and stepping back a few feet to eat it, while keeping a watchful eye on Jo'navir.

It gulped down the meat and soon made its way back to Jo'navir for seconds. Realizing this, Jo'navir cut off another chunk of meat, handing it to wolf, but this time it began to eat it out of his hand, carefully avoiding his fingers.

Jo'navir began feeling a mutual trust with the animal and reached his other hand slowly over the wolf's head. The creature stopped chewing and froze up, looking at the hand approaching it as its ears shot up in caution. And the moment Jo'navir's hand made

contact with the wolf's head, its ears came back down, and its entire body began to relax.

"See that's not so bad, is it?" Jo'navir said to the injured wolf. Now more trusting of Jo'navir's intentions, the wolf laid down next to him, continuing to munch on the deer meat. When it was finished, it reached for the rest of the deer leg, but instead of eating it, it placed it at Jo'navir's feet, and nudged it towards him.

"Thank you," Jo'navir said to the wolf. "You're much different from the creatures we find in the swamps," he added with a laugh.

After a few minutes of resting in the dirt together, Jo'navir decided to get up, remembering his arm pain which began to pulse again. The wolf stood up with him watching him carefully again.

"Thank you for not eating me," Jo'navir jested walking away from the wolf and towards the city. But as he began to leave, he could hear little footsteps coming behind him again. He turned around to see the wolf now following him closely behind.

He stopped and turned around, and the wolf stopped with him. And as he continued to move forward, the wolf moved with him again. It clearly wanted to stay by his side.

"Alright, fine," Jo'navir said with a sigh followed by a smile. "You look like you could use some shelter and rest as well. Let's go," he gestured to the wolf, heading for the town once again with his new companion following closely.

Soon, he came upon the front gate of the town with two guards standing on watch. One of the guards came closer to Jo'navir and began to speak. "Halt! City's closed with the dragons about. Official Business only."

"What?" Jo'navir questioned. "Look, I'm just searching for a place to rest for the night. I'm coming from Helgen, and my friend and I aren't in the best of shape right now."

The guard peered at the wolf. "That thing looks wild. Why would we ever let something like that in the city walls?"

The wolf politely sat by Jo'navir's legs. Jo'navir continued, "Does that look wild to you?" he said patting its head between its ears as its tail wagged back and forth.

"That won't work on me, cat. Find some other place to take refuge," the guard replied remaining vigilant.

"Relax," a voice called out behind Jo'navir. "He's one of us."

Glancing over his shoulder, Jo'navir saw a man in steel armor with a large greatsword sheathed on his back. He was a Nordic man with brown hair and black circles around his eyes. He looked intimidating, contradictory to his actions towards Jo'navir.

"Farkas, welcome back. I didn't mean to..." the guard began to say.

"It's fine. You're just following the Jarl's orders. But let us through," Farkas replied.

"Of course," the guard replied opening the gate for the three of them to walk through.

Jo'navir immediately began admiring the size of the city. There were homes and shops at every corner, and people roaming the streets which were coated in layers of stone bricks over dirt. The houses were intricate, and patches of grass and flora were spread to the outskirts of the walkway.

"This is Whiterun," Farkas added as Jo'navir gazed upon the different parts of the city, still taking it all in. "I guess you're not too familiar with this setting." There were awkward moments of silence as Jo'navir was unknowingly ignoring Farkas' words.

Farkas looked over the khajiit boy and his wolf noticing their injuries. "You look like you're in bad shape, kid," he said as they continued walking through the streets of the city. "What kind of mess did you get yourself into?"

He snapped back into reality and answered Farkas. "It was a tall humanoid creature with a massive bone in its hand that it used like a mace to blow me away. I guess I was asking for it though. I sort of took a few things from its camp."

"Ah, sounds like a giant. My friends and I took care of one of those the other day over at the Pelegia Farm," Farkas replied. "Glad to see you made it out in one piece."

Farkas examined the wolf limping behind Jo'navir. "So, what's this little one's name?" he asked.

"I haven't given him one yet. We just met after the giant attack," Jo'navir said.

"I guess the guard was right to be so skeptical, then," Farkas responded in slight shock. "But it looks like you've already tamed him quite well. I knew there was something special about you when I saw you with that wolf at your side."

"Thanks for helping me back there," Jo'navir finally said.

“It was nothing,” Farkas said. “You know, you would make a great Shield-Brother yourself. Taming that wolf is proof alone that you’re worthy. Why don’t you head back with me to Jorrvaskr? You could meet the other Companions. Plus, it’d be a great place to rest up for free. What do you say kid?”

Jo’navir accepted his invitation without a second thought. “That would be great. I could really use some rest right now.” He looked down at the wolf, still limping behind him. “And I’m sure he could use it too.”

“What’s your name?” Farkas asked.

“Jo’navir.”

Farkas lead him through Whiterun until they reached the entrance to Jorrvaskr. The building was in the shape of a large oval, with a rooftop that took on the shape of an upside-down boat. “Here we are,” Farkas said opening the door for Jo’navir to walk through, keeping it open for the wolf to follow him in.

The room was filled with tough looking warriors. There were meat and drinks spread along a large dinner table in the middle.

Farkas joined Jo’navir inside and took the lead. “Come with me. I’ve got someone you’ll want to meet first.”

He took Jo’navir down a staircase and through a door, leading him to a long hallway with several rooms on each side. At the end they met with two men in armor sitting at a table together.

“Vilkas, Kodlak,” Farkas said standing in front of the two men with Jo’navir and his wolf behind him. “I have a new friend here who needs a place to stay for the night. He might be interested in the Companions as well. His name is Jo’navir.”

Vilkas looked like Farkas in both age and appearance. Kodlak, on the other hand looked much older and wiser with a black marking on his right cheek.

“More new blood,” Vilkas replied suspicious of Jo’navir.

“Give the boy a chance, Vilkas,” Kodlak replied.

Farkas continued, “If you’re worried about him being worthy, just look at the wolf standing by his side. He tamed it today.”

Both Vilkas and Kodlak looked surprised at the mention.

“Have you given it a name?” Kodlak inquired.

“No, I hadn’t thought about that until now,” Jo’navir said looking down at the wolf as it stared back as if waiting for a command.

Vilkas began looking Jo’navir and his wolf up and down. “Are you a Stormcloak?”

Jo’navir responded, “I don’t know what that is.” He looked down at his body. “If it’s my armor, I found it off a body when I was in Helgen.”

“You went to Helgen!?” Kodlak asked. “What were you doing there?”

Vilkas added, “And how have you not heard of the Stormcloak rebellion?”

“I’m not from this land. I was looking for my brother; well, I still am. But we got separated so I went to look for him there. It’s a long story,” Jo’navir said exhausted from his few words.

“Perhaps you are as worthy as Farkas says you are,” Kodlak remarked. “You are welcome to use the beds down here as you wish, khajiit.”

“You heard the man,” Farkas said with a smile. He lead Jo’navir to the sleeping quarters. “Take these potions and heal up,” he added, handing Jo’navir a couple of red potions. He used one himself and the other on the wolf. The pain in his wounds began to subside and as they headed towards the room, the wolf’s limp seemed to fade away as well.

“Find me in the morning. I’ll have a task for you then. But for now, get some rest,” Farkas said.

Jo’navir nodded his head and went into the living quarters. He found a bed and rested for the night, with the wolf lying beside him on the floor.

Waking up, Jo’navir swung his legs to the ground, accidentally waking up the wolf in the process. “I’m sorry boy,” Jo’navir said petting the fur on his back. “Let’s get going.”

Together, they walked back through the door heading up the stairs and found Farkas sitting in a chair at the long table eating food.

“Up already?” he said to Jo’navir.

“About that task,” Jo’navir started to say. “I really need to get back to my brother, and I’m headed to the College of Winterhold because they might know what happened to him.”

“Take a seat,” Farkas requested pulling a chair out for Jo’navir to join him. “Feel free to dig in,” he added pointing to the food and drinks on the table. “It’s up for grabs.”

“Thanks,” Jo’navir said sitting in the chair next to him as the wolf sat between them.

“About your brother,” Farkas started to speak. “I know exactly how you must feel. My brother Vilkas has been with me since day one. I wouldn’t want to live without him. There’s no pressure to stay you know, but you’re welcome here if you ever need a safe space.”

Farkas moved to another subject. “You said the College of Winterhold. Are you a mage?” he asked with food in his mouth.

“Well, sort of. I do both,” Jo’navir said. “I use a sword in one hand and fire magic in the other.”

“A battlemage,” Farkas added with slight awe. “We don’t see those too often around here.”

They both sat for a few moments, each chowing down on some food and drink from the table.

Farkas continued, “Well, do you have gold? There’s a carriage right outside town, but it’ll cost you some to get passage to Winterhold. It’s not exactly close by.”

“Unfortunately, no,” Jo’navir responded. “I only have one gold piece left. I was planning to get there on foot.”

“And look where that got you?” Farkas joked. “Look, if you need gold, we can help you, but we don’t give that stuff away for free here. How about I tell you about that task, and you can choose which option sounds better to you?”

Jo’navir glanced around the room, pondering the decision. “Sure.”

“That’s what I like to hear,” Farkas continued. “We got a lead from some farmers in the outskirts of Whiterun again. Pelagia Farm; the same place we fought that giant. But now there’s word of a hagraven that keeps coming by snatching away the livestock there. I was hoping you’d help us keep guard today.”

“That’s doesn’t sound too bad,” Jo’navir responded.

Farkas added on, “Hagraven’s are nothing to laugh at. But either way, I want to make sure your sword is strong enough for the challenge. You can join me on the night shift if you’re up for it. And while we’re waiting, I know someone who could help you work on your one-handed skills if you’re interested in that too.”

Jo’navir sat for a second in deep thought. Waiting another night would mean Dexpa would be out there doing the same. But he needed this coin to take him to Winterhold, so he didn’t have much of a choice. “Okay, one mission. Then tomorrow, I leave for Winterhold.”

“That works for me,” Farkas added. “I’ll take you to meet Athis. He’s our one-handed specialist here, and he could show you a lot more than any of us could,” Farkas said leading Jo’navir and the wolf outside to the Companion’s courtyard area.

As they entered the courtyard, Jo’navir saw other Companions sitting at tables directly in front of him, and behind them were target dummies spread along the stone wall. “Here’s your man,” Farkas said to Jo’navir, pointing at a dark elf man in hide armor sitting at one of the tables.

“What’s that supposed to mean, Farkas?” the man replied.

“We have a new recruit, and he needs training in one-handed combat. How would you feel about showing him a thing or two?” Farkas asked.

“You got coin kid?” Athis responded.

“Don’t worry about that, Athis” Farkas interrupted. “We’ll reward you with something later. Consider this a one-time thing.”

Athis paused, considering the terms. “Fine. Join me at the target dummies,” he said walking over to the stone wall.

They trained together, while the wolf sat at the tables watching. Athis showed Jo’navir the most efficient ways of utilizing his sword, doing the most damage and conserving the most energy. However, something was still missing for Jo’navir. He didn’t feel like he was improving as well as he could’ve.

“Hmm,” Athis began to think. “Your fighting style is forceful and not very controlled. Not that it’s a bad thing, just a different style that I’m not used to.” He sat in thought for a few more seconds before turning around to head inside. “I’ve got an idea for you,” he said waving his arm at Jo’navir, signaling him to wait outside.

He came back moments later with a steel axe in hand, giving it to Jo'navir. "Try this."

"I've never used an axe before," Jo'navir said politely.

Athis replied, "there's a first time for everything. You won't know until you try."

Jo'navir accepted the axe and went back to swinging at the target dummies. He was amazed at the increase in force that came with it. He was cutting through the targets with ease now. "Is this sharper than my sword?" Jo'navir asked.

"It's heavier," Athis answered with a shrug.

He swung a few more times almost laughing at how satisfying it was compared to a sword for him. "It feels like I was meant for this!" Jo'navir yelled caught up in the moment.

Athis smiled. "There you go. Why don't you hold onto that axe, then. We've got plenty more inside just like it. May as well give it a go on that mission Farkas had planned for you."

"Thank you!" Jo'navir said bowing his head. He continued swinging at the target dummies for by himself until the sun started to go down.

"You ready kid?" Farkas asked appearing out of the corner of Jo'navir's vision.

"I'm ready," Jo'navir responded with confidence.

Before leaving, Jo'navir brought his wolf to Kodlak. "Would you be able to take care of him, while I'm gone?" Jo'navir asked him.

"Of course," Kodlak replied. "Stay safe out there, and keep a watchful eye. You'll have Farkas by your side, so I'm not too worried," He pet the wolf as it sat by his side.

Jo'navir approached his wolf with another scratch on the head. "I'll be back soon."

Farkas and Jo'navir began heading out, exiting the Whiterun gates and making their way toward Pelagia farm. There were no civilians out at this time of night, aside from the two carriage men and their carriages, which they passed by along the way, each varying in size and the amount of horses tied to them.

Now arriving at the farm, Jo'navir could see two figures in armor standing watch. Approaching the two of them, Farkas called out, "Alright, we'll take over from here."

“Took you long enough,” Vilkas called back.

“Who’s this?” a woman’s voice added.

“This is our new recruit. Although he won’t be around too long, he’s decided to help us stand watch for the night,” Farkas replied. “Jo’navir,” Farkas added on, “meet Aela the Huntress.”

Jo’navir nodded his head in greetings.

“Welcome to the Companions Shield-Brother,” Aela said. “Best of luck out here you two.”

Aela and Vilkas walked back to Whiterun, leaving Jo’navir and Farkas alone on the farm.

They sat around for hours silently, watching in all directions for movement. After a while, Farkas broke the silence with another question.

“How did you lose your brother exactly, if you don’t mind me asking?” he questioned Jo’navir.

Jo’navir took a breath before responding. “Our home was invaded, and we were trying to escape. The only out we could find was this scroll, but after using it, I ended up here by myself with my brother nowhere in sight. I honestly don’t even know if he survived, but I’m trying to find answers.”

“A spell scroll?” Farkas inquired.

“An Elder Scroll,” Jo’navir answered.

Farkas began to feel genuinely concerned and it showed on his face. “How did you get your hands on an Elder Scroll!?,” he yelled. “And why was your first thought to use it? Are you insane? Do you know what those things do to people?”

“It wasn’t our first thought!” Jo’navir yelled back almost enraged at the thought of taking blame for his brother’s disappearance. “It was our last option,” he said, staring at the ground clearly upset with himself.

Farkas let out a sigh and placed his hand on Jo’navir’s back to comfort him. “I’m sorry, kid. I’m sure you did what you had to for your brother. I would’ve done the same for Vilkas.”

His comforting words were effective. Jo'navir raised his head up and continued to explain his situation. "That's the real reason I'm headed to the College. An inn keeper told me they might have knowledge on the scrolls and their usage. Something that could tell me where my brother was sent."

"That's a good lead, then," Farkas replied. "I understand why you were hesitant to stay here. Once this is over, you should take a well-deserved rest."

Jo'navir nodded in agreement.

In the next second a rustling came from the bushes on the outside of the fence with the livestock. Shooting out of it came a creature with skinny grey limbs and a witch-like moldy face. Its scrawny legs quickly brought it to one of the chickens, picking it up, and turning to run.

"Hagraven!" Farkas cried pulling out his greatsword.

Jo'navir followed in example, unsheathing his new steel axe and running into battle.

"Don't let it get away!" Farkas shouted continuing his chase. But the Hagraven was already far ahead.

Jo'navir stopped in place to aim a large fireball out of his other hand, launching it at the creature. It made direct contact with the hagraven, forcing out a painful screech. The chicken flew out of its hands as the hagraven fell to the ground. Its screams continued as it laid down groveling in pain from the burn, allowing Farkas to finally catch up.

Leaning over the hagraven, which was now attempting to lift itself off the ground, Farkas stomped its head back down, holding it still with his foot. He gripped onto his sword with both hands, pointing it down at the creature's body, and stabbed through its chest nailing it to the dirt below. As it was stabbed it let out one more scream that was interrupted by the gargling of blood flowing out of its mouth, until finally, it fell silent and immobile.

"Is that it?" Jo'navir asked.

Before Farkas could answer his question or sheath his greatsword, they began to hear more rustling from the bushes surrounding them. They quickly found themselves encircled by warriors in silver armor wielding silver swords.

"You think we wouldn't recognize that armor you beast?" a man called out from one direction.

“We’ve got you cornered like a dog. How fitting!” another man added with a laugh.

“Who are these people?” Jo’navir asked Farkas.

“I was hoping I’d never have to explain that to you,” Farkas responded.

Jo’navir looked confused as the men began inching closer to Farkas, ignoring Jo’navir.

Farkas made the first move, swiping his sword at one of the men grazing their chest and pushing them back. As the others began to charge Farkas, Jo’navir decided it was time to interfere. He started throwing multiple fireballs at the men in silver, now gaining their attention.

“You’re fighting for the wrong side, cat!” another man called out charging for Jo’navir with their silver sword ready to swing at him.

Jo’navir approached the man sending his axe into the oncoming sword, completely overpowering it, and tossing it aside. He followed up with another powerful swing aimed at their arm slicing it halfway through. It dangled there as the man screamed trying to hold it together. Finishing the job, Jo’navir threw out another fireball blowing the man away and knocking him out.

Checking back in on Farkas in the distance, he could see he was getting overwhelmed.

“I’m sorry you have to see this, kid,” Farkas said in Jo’navir’s direction.

Thinking Farkas was about to accept his death, Jo’navir called out, “Farkas!” as he sprinted in his direction. But then, Farkas’ body began to change. He started to grow fur on every part of his body as his muscles bulked up to several times their size. A snout and ears began to form on his head as he began to growl like a dog. He took on the look of a wolf, but his humanoid figure remained intact.

Farkas, in his new form, looked to the skies and let out a howl that echoed against the mountains in the distance. And in the next few seconds, he ripped the men around him to shreds with his new teeth and claws one at a time until there was only one man left.

The last man started running at Jo’navir screaming “Please, don’t let him eat me! Call him off, I’m begging you!” He threw his sword to the ground and took off his helmet. He was a Nord, just like the Farkas, but he looked to be Jo’navir’s age. As he ran, he was bleeding out of his ears and nose, holding his arm out to Jo’navir, begging for protection. But Jo’navir just sat there in horror and watched.

Farkas came at the man on all fours reaching him in an instant. He tackled the man to the floor, holding him still, and then proceeded to bite into his skull, pulling and ripping it apart from the rest of his body, and throwing it aside.

Jo'navir still couldn't move. All he could do was stare ahead and hope he wasn't next.

The beast stood up from the headless body, indifferent to the gore that sat underneath him. Blood leaked out of his mouth between his sharp wolf teeth, and his eyes were gold and full of fury.

He slowly made his way toward Jo'navir, who now pulled out his axe ready to defend himself. "Farkas?" he asked, still standing in place.

Farkas stopped his approach towards Jo'navir. His muscles and fur began to retract into his body, and soon, he began to look himself again.

"Yes, it's still me. Don't worry," Farkas said reassuringly, while holding his head as if he had a headache. "I've had this curse long enough to know how to control it."

Jo'navir started to feel slightly relieved at the return of his Shield-Brother's normal appearance. "Okay," he said breathlessly, still in a subtle state of shock.

"Let's go back," Farkas said. "Our job is done here."

During their walk back to Jorrvaskr, Jo'navir was trying to find the courage to ask about what had just happened. But Farkas went first.

"Jo'navir," he said as he continued to walk. "Be honest. What are you feeling right now?"

Jo'navir waited before replying. "Are there more people like you in the Companions?" he asked curiously.

"Only those in The Circle," Farkas answered.

Jo'navir continued his questions. "Who were those guys that were after you?"

"Bad people who don't like werewolves." Farkas continued, "They're the Silver Hand. An organization dedicated to wiping out the werewolves."

"I was scared," Jo'navir said. "But, I still trust you."

Farkas grinned, "I'm glad to hear it my friend. The feeling is mutual. Now let's get back to Jorrvaskr to report the news."

After returning to Jorrvaskr, they found Kodlak inside at the back of the long hallway downstairs, with the wolf sitting beside him still. Kodlak called out to Jo'navir, "For a newly tamed wolf, he sure is calm." He greeted them both. "I assume your early return means good news?"

"Sort of," Farkas replied. "It was a trap by the Silver Hand. But we managed to take care of them, and the hagraven too."

"This unnecessary violence..." Kodlak said stopping himself before he could finish. "Well, you did what you had to. Here's your reward, boy." He handed Jo'navir a good sum of gold, which he stashed away in his pockets.

"He also knows about the curse," Farkas added scratching the back of his head. "Though he fought with me anyways."

Kodlak looking surprised added, "Well that was quick." He glanced at Jo'navir. "What do you think of us now?"

Jo'navir felt a bit more comfortable being with the two people he knew best in this strange land. He responded, "it doesn't matter. Farkas used it as a means of self-defense. Can't say I'd want to become one myself anytime soon, but I don't mind it."

Kodlak smiled. "I'm relieved to hear it. You've proven yourself loyal, Jo'navir. And your wolf too; so well behaved," he said while patting the wolf's head. "Have you still not thought of a name yet?"

"I've given it some thought," Jo'navir said.

"Well?" Farkas chimed in. "Any examples?"

"What about Vaskr?" Jo'navir responded.

Farkas chuckled. "Like Jorrvaskr. I like it."

Jo'navir was pleased to hear the reaction. He reached for the wolf's head and scratched the back of his ears. As he turned to walk away, he signaled Vaskr to follow him. "We'll see you in the morning," Jo'navir said to his shield-brothers as he and Vaskr went to rest in the living quarters.

The night went over smoothly giving Jo'navir the rest his body needed. He woke with Vaskr at his side, careful not to startle him awake. He whispered to the sleeping wolf, "Vaskr. Hey Vaskr." Vaskr's ears twitched as he woke up, elongating his body as he

stretched himself onto all fours. They both got up and went upstairs to say goodbye to the others.

Jo'navir found Athis and Aela talking around the table as they ate.

"Is it time, kid?" Aela said in Jo'navir's direction.

"Yup," Jo'navir replied. "I'll be taking the carriage to Winterhold."

"Take care of that axe," Athis added.

"Jo'navir," Farkas called from behind. "Before you go, come see me at the Sky Forge. It's out in the courtyard past the target dummies." Farkas went toward the forge, as Jo'navir soon joined him with Vaskr at his side.

The forge was filled with hot orange rocks encased in a stone ring, and above it sat a huge statue of a bird with its wings leaning over it all. Vilkas, Kodlak, and Farkas were standing in wait for Jo'navir's arrival, while another man sat at the forge finishing up some work.

"This is Eorlund Grey-Mane," Farkas introduced the man. He looked even older than Kodlak. He wore hide armor and had white hair and wrinkles that complimented each other.

"It's an honor to meet you, wolf tamer," Eorlund said to Jo'navir. "By request, I've crafted a parting gift for you that I think you'll like." He grabbed some pieces of gear sitting next to the forge and handed them to Jo'navir.

"Seeing you in Stormcloak gear was a fine sight, but I think this'll suit you even better. It's wolf armor. To show you'll always be one of us," Eorlund Grey-Mane added as Jo'navir grabbed the pieces from him.

"Thank you, sir," Jo'navir said with a bow of his head. He began equipping the set of armor. There was a chest piece, a pair of boots, and a pair of gauntlets, all which shared the same design of grey metal over black fur.

"How's it fit?" Kodlak asked.

"It's perfect," Jo'navir said smiling like a child who just got a new toy.

"Best of luck on your journey, my friend," Farkas said with a hand on Jo'navir's shoulder.

“I hope you can find your brother,” Vilkas added.

“And don’t be afraid to pay a visit if you ever find time. You’re a Shield-Brother,” Kodlak stated.

Jo’navir handed Farkas his Stormcloak armor, being sure to take the gold out of the pockets beforehand. “I promise I won’t let your kindness go to waste,” Jo’navir said to all of them. “Thank you again.” He began to walk away with Vaskr following by his side. They watched him off as he left Jorrvaskr and headed for the Whiterun gates.

Outside, he saw the two carriages from before. One of them had a simple Nord man wearing basic clothes, sitting in a small wooden carriage tied to a brown horse. The other had a bulkier looking Nord man with iron armor and horns coming out of his helmet. His carriage was made of both wood and iron and was a lot larger than the other one. Plus it was pulled by two horses, one brown and one all black.

He called to Jo’navir as he walked by, making sure to sure to grab his attention before the other carriage man could. “Hey! If you’re looking for a ride, I’m your man. It doesn’t get faster or cheaper than this. There’s no carriage that can outrun mine.”

Jo’navir asked, “Can you take me to Winterhold?”

“Easy. Just show me the coin and hop on in,” the man replied pointing his thumb to the back of the carriage.

Jo’navir was suspicious of the man’s overconfidence, but he wasn’t sure if it was his lack of experience making him feel this way. So, he gave the man the coin he needed and jumped in the back with Vaskr hopping in right after him. No more words were needed. They were finally headed on their way northeast, towards Winterhold.

After a while, Jo’navir was beginning to enjoy the silence, and the view of the tour. Skyrim’s weather was a sight to behold. The atmosphere over the course of the trip began to change from grass and flowers to snow and mountains.

After some time traversing the snow, their journey was put to a halt. An argonian man in leather armor stepped out behind a rock and into the path of the carriage, forcing the horses to stop in their tracks.

“Get out of the road!” the man in the carriage called out to the Argonian.

“How about you get out of the cart?” the argonian proposed instead, pulling out a steel sword.

“A thief?” the Nord said. “Get out of here before you get yourself hurt.” He shook the ropes attached to the horses signaling them to move forward again.

The argonian could see he wasn't going to listen to his commands. So, he grabbed his sword with two hands, and swung it for the brown horse's leg, cutting it off and forcing the horse to the ground. He followed through with a stab to the horse's body, killing it. The black horse began to panic thinking it was next. It started jumping around trying to escape from the rope which was keeping it attached to the cart.

Deeply offended, the Nord got out of the carriage, pulling out an iron dagger and confronting the thief. “Do you know who you're messing with, thug? That horse is going to cost you more than your life.”

The argonian said nothing back. Instead, he pulled his sword out of the dead horse, swiping it aside to shake off the blood, and came running at the Nord.

“Wait!” Jo'navir yelled out trying to get the carriage man to back off, but he continued in his charge. Jo'navir hopped out to put off the fight quickly. But the argonian acted fast, smacking the Nord's dagger out of his hand with his own weapon, and cutting his head off. The carriage man fell helplessly, dead in an instant.

Meanwhile, the argonian continued towards Jo'navir who was now approaching the argonian with his axe raised and other hand starting to cast a fireball. He shot it out catching the argonian off guard, but not injuring him. He started charging Jo'navir now with his sword ready to swipe his head off next, but Jo'navir saw it coming. He ducked under the swipe, punched the argonian with his spell casting hand knocking him back, and then swung his axe straight into his stomach.

The axe lodged itself deep into the argonian, ceasing his movements. Jo'navir finished it by placing two hands on his axe hilt, placing his foot against the thief's knee to push him away, using the momentum to pull out the axe from his stomach. The argonian stood for a second trying to understand the damage that had just been done, looking down at his stomach.

Before the argonian could fall to the ground, joining the Nord, Vaskr came running up, latching itself onto his neck throwing him on his back into the snow. The wolf pulled away with his bite ripping out a chunk of his neck and leaving his body lifeless.

Jo'navir stared at the bodies buried in the snow, feeling a rage building up inside of him. The number of distractions keeping him from finding his brother was beginning to pile up and infuriate him.

“Damn it!” he screamed kicking a pile of snow in front of him. The sound of an anxious horse struggling in the snow interrupted his angry fit. He looked up from the bodies, seeing that the black horse remained untouched.

“Good boy, Vaskr,” Jo’navir said giving Vaskr’s head a rewarding pat without looking at him. He proceeded to the horse to try and calm it down. It almost kicked him a few times, but soon he was able to keep it floored, rubbing the side of its nose and mouth gently. “There you go. You’re fine, don’t worry,” Jo’navir said to the face of the horse.

He checked the horse’s back where the ropes were tangled, and unraveled it, freeing the horse from the carriage. To his delight, it didn’t run away.

Jo’navir realizing this would be a good opportunity reached into the carriage to pull out a saddle the Nord had stored, and placed it on the horse. The horse gladly accepted it.

Looking ahead on the trail, he could see a massive structure sitting on top of a mountain-sized rock, with a bridge connecting the structure to a larger chunk of land with homes resting on it. He might’ve arrived sooner than he thought he had, and there was only one way to find out.

He hopped on the horse, directing it towards the town, while Vaskr followed behind in the snow.

Soon the three of them made it to the city, which appeared to be in worse shape than he thought it would be. Multiple houses weren’t even houses anymore, just rubble. And the number of villagers wandering the streets was scarce. He found a place beside an inn to leave the horse, tying it to a post.

“Don’t go freezing to death on me while I’m gone,” Jo’navir said to the horse. He went straight through the city finding the entrance to the bridge he saw earlier, but there was a high elf woman guarding the entrance to it.

“State your business, khajiit,” she said.

“I’m looking for information on an Elder Scroll. It’ll help me find my brother,” Jo’navir replied.

The high elf responded curiously. “That sounds dangerous,” she said. “Are you a mage?”

“Yes,” Jo’navir said.

She nodded her head adding, "Then prove to me that you can control that magic. What type of spells do you use?"

"Fire destruction magic and alteration magic," Jo'navir replied.

"Alright, how about you show me a spell from each specialization. One fire spell; let's say incinerate. And then one alteration spell, maybe iron flesh?" she said. "If you don't know them, I can share the spellbooks with you for a small price."

"Isn't there another way in?" Jo'navir asked. "I just need to ask someone about the Elder Scrolls, that's all."

"I can tell you right now that we do have someone who can answer those questions, but before I tell you who it is, you must be tested," she declared.

Jo'navir sighed with a roll of his eyes. "Fine. I'll buy the books," he said holding out his gold as she took the needed amount out of his hand.

"Thank you, please stay here while I fetch those spell books," she concluded as she walked across the bridge.

Jo'navir leaned against the wall with Vaskr sitting across from him as they waited. She returned shortly with two books in her hands.

"Study these for a few moments," she said. "I have a feeling it won't take you long to learn them."

Jo'navir sat with Vaskr reading the book titled "Iron Flesh," attempting to cast the spell on himself while he continued to read. The first few tries, his skin turned to rock as if he was casting the spell stone flesh, but after a few more minutes something clicked.

For his next attempt at the spell, he stood up focusing his magic, and cast it again. "I did it!" His skin turned into a hard metal. He clanked his fists together creating a sound like two hammers smashing into one another.

"Very good," the high elf woman applauded. "One more to go. This one is going to be a challenge though."

But it wasn't. Not for Jo'navir. His fireball was only a step below the incinerate spell. He read the next book quickly coming to an understanding on how the spell differed from his fireball. It was merely a hotter version of the fireball spell focused down to a smaller point.

“Once you’re ready, shoot it at this rune,” she added, stepping away to reveal a circular stone rune engraved into the bridge floor.

Jo’navir aimed his palm at the rune, thinking of the new spell. His hand began to glow reddish-orange with a shade of blue. And in the next second, a burning hot flame shot out of him and onto the rune below, leaving burn marks and melting the snow around it.

“That was even faster than I thought it would be,” the woman said, clearly impressed. “I never introduced myself. My name is Faralda. If you’re ever in need of knowledge on destruction magic, I’m the one you should find.” She turned around signaling Jo’navir to follow. “Come with me, I’ll get you through the gates.”

Faralda walked with Jo’navir and Vaskr across the bridge. It was more unstable than it appeared to be from a distance. The ledges were short and there were several cracks in it, leaving more room to fall down to the steep cliff below.

As she brought Jo’navir through the large metal gate blocking the entrance to the college, he could see a fountain of magic coming out of the center of the circular courtyard, shooting a beam of blue light into the sky. Around the courtyard were several pillars and a few doors. She brought him straight ahead through the largest door at the end of the courtyard and brought him inside.

When they got in, she pointed him to another door. “Our librarian is the one who would have information on the scrolls. He’s just through that door and up the stairs. His name is Urag Gro-Shub; a grumpy old orc always burying his face in his books. You can’t miss him.”

“Thank you Faralda,” Jo’navir said opening the door and heading up the stairs.

He entered a library about the same size and shape as the courtyard outside. At the end was an orcish man with his face covered by a book.

“Are you Urag Gro-Shub?” Jo’navir asked.

“Who’s asking?” the orc replied with a grunt.

“My name is Jo’navir. I’m looking for my brother and the Elder Scroll is my only hint to finding him. Do you have any information that might help me? Maybe on where the scroll is, or what happens when people use them,” he inquired, standing in front of the desk where the orc sat, with Vaskr sitting at his side again.

“You’re not the first person to ask me about the Elder Scrolls,” Urag replied. “If you want information, how about a tip. Stay away from those things. They’re dangerous.”

“I need to know,” Jo’navir demanded. “My brother and I used one, but we got separated in the process. I just want to know what happened to him and how I can find him.”

“Did you say you used one!?” Urag laughed mockingly. “You’re crazy, cat.” He regained his serious tone and continued. “Listen, if you want more info, how about you ask someone as crazy as you are. There’s a man named Septimus Signus north of here hiding away in a cave. Maybe he’ll have the information you’re looking for.”

Jo’navir took a breath trying to keep his composure and turned around to walk out the door.

He made his way out of Winterhold, and went north on his horse with Vaskr following behind again. It wasn’t too long of a journey luckily, as Jo’navir was becoming more and more impatient.

Soon he came upon a wooden board covering a doorway carved into a glacier. “This is probably it,” Jo’navir said waving for the horse to stay and Vaskr to follow.

Inside, he found a small ice cave with some furniture like a bookshelf with books and a table with potions on it. He also saw a huge golden cube sitting half-buried in the ice wall. It was open, revealing a short tunnel into a small room with an empty pedestal in the middle. Jo’navir approached cautiously with Vaskr a short distance behind him.

Jo’navir approached the pedestal, but accidentally stepped in something suspicious sitting at the base of it. It was a pile of ashes, but from what? Or from who?

Vaskr began barking suddenly from behind Jo’navir, making him flinch in surprise. He turned around to see what was going on and found Vaskr barking at the exit of the small tunnel. It was now completely blocked by a creature with multiple green eyes and tentacles shrouded in a black fog.

Jo’navir joined Vaskr, walking up to get a better look at whatever it was.

“Pitiful mortal,” a voice said coming from the black fog. “There is nothing left here for you. You seek the scholar, and yet all you find are ashes. That is merely the fate of one who has lost their use.”

Jo’navir was shocked to see the mix of eyeballs and tentacles talking to him. “Who are you?” he asked. Vaskr stopped barking after hearing Jo’navir speak.

“I am Hermaeus Mora,” the creature said. “The Daedric Prince of knowledge and memory.”

“You killed him?” Jo’navir questioned looking at the ashes on the floor.

“I merely spared him from his sad and lonely life. He had nothing left to give, so I disposed of him accordingly,” replied Hermaeus Mora.

Trying to ignore his fears, Jo’navir jumped straight to the important questions. “Do you have knowledge on the Elder Scrolls?”

“I may or may not,” the Daedric Prince replied jokingly. “I know what it is you seek, mortal. But if you want that information, you’re going to have to give me something in return.”

“Tell me,” Jo’navir said sternly, desperate for his answers.

“I will tell you whereabouts of the Lightning Scroll, mortal. And in exchange, you will swear your allegiance to me as my champion,” Hermaeus responded.

“Why would I ever do that?” Jo’navir asked.

“Because you’re out of options,” Hermaeus answered.

Jo’navir thought it over for a few minutes. Every lead he’s gotten has brought him to a dead end. Even if he kept searching, the fear of Dexpa being out on his own scared Jo’navir. He needed to protect his brother, and right now, this was the only way he could do it.

“I will be your champion,” he said confidently. “Now tell me where to find the scroll.”

“Good,” Hermaeus said letting out a deranged laugh. “The scroll you seek is hidden within Shalidor’s Maze.” He continued, “Come closer and I will gift you with the knowledge to find the Labyrinthian where the maze rests.”

Jo’navir stepped closer to the Daedric Prince. A tentacle slowly made its way to his skull, piercing through it and causing Jo’navir’s head to pulse violently. He began screaming, which triggered Vaskr to start barking louder and more desperately. Though, he was quickly released from the tendrils, ceasing the pain he felt immediately.

Jo’navir quickly calmed Vaskr to get him to stop barking and turned back to the black fog. He could see the path to the Labyrinthian almost engraved into his mind. “Thank you, Hermaeus Mora,” Jo’navir said relieved. “I won’t let this knowledge go to waste.”

“I know you won’t” the Daedric Prince said. “Now go. Fulfill your destiny.”

Jo'navir and Vaskr left the cave. He grabbed up the black horse and began heading far west, towards the Labryinthian, following the map in his mind.

Eventually, Jo'navir arrived at the walls of the Labyrinthian. Inside, he could see it was a wide-open flat land with a bunch of random stone structures spread about. And the whole place was surrounded by a stone wall with very few openings to the outside.

He found a good spot to leave his horse near the entrance against a stone pillar. As he went to leave it there though, a frost troll jumped out from behind the corner swiping at the horse leaving a deep gash. Before Jo'navir could react, it continued to thrash at the horse leaving multiple serious wounds in its side tipping it over into the snow below.

Jo'navir cast incinerate at the beast before it could do any more damage, leaving a serious burn on its stomach. Vaskr joined in the fight running up to the troll and biting its arm to distract it.

To finish the job, Jo'navir pulled out his axe, charged at the troll and swung deep into its side cutting more than halfway through its body. It fell dead quickly after the blow.

Jo'navir turned around and kneeled by the black horse which was shaking intensely in the snow where it laid. He tried to think of what he could do, but the shaking soon stopped, and the horse sat lifeless.

Remembering his objective, Jo'navir stood back up calling Vaskr over and continuing into the Labyrinthian. "Stay close, boy," he said to his wolf companion.

He found himself heading towards the left side of the Labyrinthian where an open door sat next to an empty chest. "This is it, I can feel it," he said to himself. "Shalidor's Maze."

Heading inside, he saw two courtyards, one behind the other, separated by a large stone archway. The first had a small garden of flora in the center and stairs going up the sides.

Jo'navir and Vaskr went through the first courtyard and under the archway leading into the second one. There laid a burnt corpse on the ground on top of a blue mat, and in front of it, four stone platforms with an empty hole in each of their centers. But what stood out the most to Jo'navir was what sat behind that. It was Shalidor's Maze.

The entrance was a smaller archway lit with two torches on each side and tall stone walls spreading in both directions. Jo'navir readied himself to go inside, knowing the Elder Scroll was in there waiting for him.

Out of nowhere, he heard a warp sound coming from the other courtyard behind him. He faced the other way, now seeing a purple orb flashing behind the flowers of the other courtyard. As the orb faded, a dremora in black robes took its place, quickly summoning a frost atronach and a flame atronach to fight at his side. The dremora's face was covered in red paint and he had wicked horns growing out of his skull. And top of his head rested a golden circlet.

"A new fighter!?" the dremora yelled. "Just what I was looking for!"

Jo'navir readied his axe and spell casting hand, targeting the flame atronach with incinerate. The spell landed, but barely seemed to phase it.

The frost atronach and the dremora charged Jo'navir as the flame atronach stayed back shooting fireballs his way. Vaskr bit onto the leg of the frost atronach but was quickly thrown aside by it into a wall.

Jo'navir cast incinerate at the frost atronach dealing significant damage but taking an indirect fireball explosion from the flame atronach behind it. Meanwhile, the dremora mage began shooting a stream of flames at Jo'navir who began to run aside to dodge them. But he was quickly knocked to the ground from a shockwave that came from the frost atronach slamming its hardened fists into the floor next to him.

He tried to get up with his injuries, but it was proving immensely difficult. In a panic, he cast iron flesh hardening his body, but all he could do in that state was sit and endure as his body was pummeled by flames and fireballs, and smacked around by a massive frost arm. He looked over to see if Vaskr was doing okay, but the wolf was already charging back in, biting away the frost atronach's arm to defend his master.

The dremora mage quickly dealt with the wolf with a fireball spell of his own, blowing Vaskr away into the other wall. Both Jo'navir and Vaskr were sitting helpless now.

The dremora approached the wolf, preparing a final spell to finish the job. Meanwhile, the frost atronach began doing the same for Jo'navir, raising its heavy arm into the air preparing to slam it down directly on Jo'navir's vulnerable body. Jo'navir raised his spell casting arm for one more incinerate, buffing it as quickly as he could.

Another warping sound came from behind the enemies, quickly followed by a blinding flash of purple light. In an instant the dremora, the flame atronach, and the frost atronach were chained together in a channel of electricity shredding apart their insides and turning them into ashes on the floor.

As the frost atronach in front of Jo'navir disappeared into nothing, a mage appeared a small distance behind him. The mage's entire body was covered in vicious lightning,

making it difficult to see his face, but the lightning soon faded revealing the identity of Jo'navir's savior.

"Dexpa..." Jo'navir whispered, the words barely escaping his mouth.

"Jo'navir!" Dexpa yelled with a content and severely relieved smile. He approached his brother, lifting him off the ground and looked in his eyes as tears started swelling up in his own.

Jo'navir's eyes began to do the same as he stood for a second in disbelief that his brother was really standing in front of him. They took another step towards one another, falling into an emotional embrace, crying over each other's shoulders.

"I was close to accepting your death," Jo'navir said to his brother, still sitting in the warm embrace.

Looking over Dexpa's shoulder, Jo'navir noticed the Elder Scroll sticking out of his leather bag. He pushed him away slowly with his hands on Dexpa's shoulders. "You found the scroll!"

"Yup!" Dexpa replied cheerfully. "Though that dremora wasn't too happy about me taking it."

Dexpa, remembering the wolf that fought alongside Jo'navir, walked over to Vaskr, kneeled down and poured a potion into his mouth. "You made a new friend?" he asked Jo'navir.

Vaskr began to get up, looking visibly healthier and licking Dexpa's face in joy as Dexpa scratched his chin in return.

"His name is Vaskr," Jo'navir responded. "I found him in the wild a few days ago and he's been my travel companion since. He's also one of the only things keeping me sane aside from the thought of getting back to you."

Dexpa's relieved face returned to a worried one. "We have a lot to talk about."

"About what?" Jo'navir asked concerningly.

"About the Elder Scrolls. About timelines and what's happened between them. There's a lot that I need to tell you. I'll explain along the way," Dexpa said.

"Where are we going?" Jo'navir inquired.

Dexpa answered, "As much as I'd love to stay here in this time with you forever, I saw something the other day that I still can't completely explain."

"Like what?" Jo'navir replied.

Dexpa hesitated in disbelief of his own discovery. "About the attack on our home that day..." He gulped nervously, and then finally let it out.

"I think Mo'nazar survived."

Chapter 3

Mo'nazar: Domination

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“Mo'nazar.” The word echoed in his head as he began hallucinating at the glimpse of his mother's corpse. He couldn't feel anything or see anything except for the sorry sight laying below him.

“Let go of me!” he could hear in another echo, getting further and further away. He trying to imagine how his parents could've been killed and how it all would've played out, but he couldn't focus enough to think of anything clearly.

“Mo'nazar!!!” The word began to echo progressively louder in his head until finally he snapped out of it.

“Dexpa?” Mo'nazar called out, searching for his best friend in the room. Peering at his father's corpse, he spotted the necromancer amulet resting in his hand.

He walked over and picked it up, wondering why his father's body was keeping it so close. He then ran over to the front door to look outside and understand his situation.

He spotted Dexpa and Jo'navir in a distance, running away from the village. They were heading for the entrance to the Fringe, trying to get away from the chaos.

Devastated, Mo'nazar could barely get out the words, “Don't leave me...” but they couldn't hear him. He took a step out of the house ready to make a sprint for his friends but was immediately cut off by a crystal knight who stepped in the way of him.

It began swinging its sword for Mo'nazar's body, forcing him to jump back into the house to avoid the attack. He fell on his back inside, dropping the strange amulet on the ground behind him. The knight's sword was lodged deep into the door frame.

The knight was preoccupied trying to unstick its sword. Mo'nazar took this chance to grab the amulet and make a dash for a place to hide.

“The hatch,” he thought to himself, noticing the cellar opening on the floor that his parents considered forbidden.

To his surprise, the hatch was wide open now as if there was an explosion inside, blowing the hatch door outwards and shredding it to pieces across the floor above.

The crystal knight successfully pulled its sword away from the door, wielding it once more and continuing to make its way towards Mo'nazar. Thinking quickly, he jumped down the hatch looking around for another escape, but there was none. He could hear the knight's footsteps above getting closer by the second.

"Think, come on, think!!!" he shouted at himself desperately. Next to the entrance, he could see a bookshelf filled with suspicious books in it. Mo'nazar observed the shelf, realizing it was probably wide enough to block the entrance, so he approached it and began throwing the books out and onto the ground, taking some weight out of it.

After the books were all out, he grabbed the bookshelf and started sliding it over the hatch entrance. He could see the crystal knight right above him swinging its sword for his fingers as his slid it into place. But he managed to block it off just before it could do so, preventing the knight from entering the cellar.

Mo'nazar stepped back in shock, waiting to see if it would hold. In the next moment, could hear the knight slicing into the top of the bookshelf, slowly carving out an opening for it to jump through.

Mo'nazar's could feel his limbs start to shake. He checked around the room again, noticing the books he threw to the ground. He started sorting through them looking for something that he might be able to use. "I need a spell. Please! Anything!" he screamed to himself, throwing aside the books that he didn't need.

"I'll use this," he said opening a book titled "Conjuration: Bone Colossus."

He checked around the hatch room now noticing the other things that sat within it. There was a summoning circle in the middle with blood surrounding it on the floor and walls. And there were multiple purple gems spread around the room which he'd never seen before.

He brought the book over to the summoning circle and started reading through the pages as fast as he could. He would flinch every time he heard the knight's sword slice into the bookshelf, but would continue reading, determined to survive.

Placing his hand over the circle, he began to cast the spell begging for a miracle. Surprisingly, a portal opened up over the circle, and climbing out of it was a bone colossus. Its body was almost humanoid, but much taller and was made entirely of bones. It stood up now facing away from Mo'nazar and towards the hatch entrance.

The knight finally cut through the bookshelf, opening a hole big enough for itself to jump into the hatch. "Kill it!" Mo'nazar commanded of his new summon pointing at the crystal knight which stood in front of it.

Surprising Mo'nazar once again, the bone colossus began to follow his orders without question. It threw its fist into the knight cracking its chest like glass. Then it lifted its hands up clenching them together in a combined fist and pummeled the knight into the ground, finishing it off.

However, two more knights now jumped into the hatch together and began attacking the colossus. One acted as a distraction, taking a blow from the colossus as the other chopped one of its arms off.

Mo'nazar, realizing the colossus wouldn't be able to hold them all off, began rummaging through the spell books on the floor again. Though he was now he was set on finding a means of escape.

"Portals, portals, portals, portals," he repeated anxiously still searching for the right book.

A huge thud interrupted Mo'nazar's search, coming from the hatch entrance. He glanced up from his books, seeing the bone colossus now laying on the ground with the crystal knights stepping over it, slowly making their way towards Mo'nazar.

He searched through a few more titles, his hands shaking once again.

"Soul Trap?" he read. Opening the book, he could see pictures of crystals just like the ones that sat on the floor. He grabbed up a crystal from the ground and held it in his hand, backing into the corner of the room.

The crystal knight was now within feet of him, preparing to slice into him with its weapon. But before it could follow through, Mo'nazar cast the spell, holding on tightly to the gem in his hand which now began to glow.

In the next moment, his vision went black. He could hear his own thoughts. "Did it work? Where am I?" A sense of defeat washed over him. "I was too late. Wasn't I..."

Mo'nazar's vision came back to him as he now stood in a world he's never seen before. It sat in a shade of blue, with dirt topped by a layer of fog spread out as far as he could see. There were several dead trees growing out of the dirt. It was dark but still light enough to see. The clouds were heavy and shooting lightning to the land below. Though the things that stood out the most were the towers that stood tall and isolated, spread randomly throughout the desolate land.

He looked down at his hands and saw a transparent blue silhouette of himself. "I guess I didn't make it." Mo'nazar said peering back over the horizon. His face began to take on a bewildered expression. "What did I not make?"

His memories were blurring the longer he remained in this world. He soon found himself treading the new land searching aimlessly for something that didn't exist.

Eventually, he came to a tower that was full of activity. He could see other figures with the same blue transparency as him, as well as some black skeletons pacing around a courtyard filled with a strange white fungus.

Approaching the transparent figures, Mo'nazar began to speak. "Hello."

"Hello," they said back in an older woman's voice. "Who are you?" she asked.

"I'm..." Mo'nazar paused and looked away in an attempt to jog his memory. "Who are you?"

"I don't know," she replied.

The short conversation they had felt hazy and meaningless. Mo'nazar continued to walk forward, not knowing where he was going.

This world had a strange impact on his sanity. He would say things to himself that he didn't understand and laugh when he didn't feel like laughing. It was painful, yet painless. Mo'nazar longed desperately for something, not knowing what it was. It was obvious he wanted to escape, but he couldn't figure that out, so instead he kept moving without purpose. As he remained stuck in this world, his concept of time began to diminish, along with his sanity.

2E 5:

After five years of wandering the land without reason or a will to live, Mo'nazar found himself in front of one of the stone towers.

Walking up the stairs to the entrance, he could see an open metal gate practically inviting him inside. His body moved on its own, stepping into the tower similar in appearance to a small prison.

In front of him sat a large circular, black platform, and at the end of it, a black pedestal which carried the statue of a head. The head was clearly daedric and had sharp horns that gave off an intimidating aura.

Without thinking, Mo'nazar walked onto the platform and stared ahead at the shrine.

"You approach me, yet your intentions are unclear," a demonic man's voice called out from the shrine.

Mo'nazar stood there not saying anything, barely reacting to the voice.

"Pitiful being. Stuck in a realm of nothingness trapped by the Ideal Masters," it called.

Mo'nazar looked into the eyes of the statue.

"Yes, I know what you want. You may not know it yourself, but I can see past your hopeless eyes," the voice began to say. "You want your freedom."

Mo'nazar's eyes began to twitch, almost coming to life again. He looked down at his phantasmal body trying to remember something about himself. Looking back up at the shrine, he barely let out the word, "Who?"

The voice continued. "You speak to Molag Bal, the Daedric Prince of Domination. All that you need to do is pledge your soul to me," Molag Bal declared proudly. "Swear to serve as my champion until death, and I will grant you the freedom that you desire. Go on."

Mo'nazar's consciousness was beginning to return subtly as he began to speak again. "I wa...want..to." He could feel an urge coming back, an urge he had easily forgotten about. His memories were quickly starting to flood into his mind again.

"Say it," Molag Bal demanded.

"I want to leave this place," Mo'nazar finally spat out coming to his senses. He raised his head confidently and stated, "Until the day that I die, I pledge my soul to you as your champion, Molag Bal."

He felt relieved finally being able to speak his desires after spending so long in a hellish landscape numb to his own thoughts.

Molag Bal began to laugh boisterously. "Perfect! Now listen carefully." A portal opened around Mo'nazar's body preparing to teleport him away. "You will obey me from now on. Upon your return, I will grant you a gift. Use this gift to slay mortals and send their souls

to my realm. If you dare disobey, I will not hesitate to bring you back to this place. Do not disappoint me.”

After hearing the last words, Mo'nazar felt his body being pulled into the portal and sent away. His vision went black once again.

Soon, the darkness began to fade and Mo'nazar could see again. He was thrown into the hatch in the same spot that he vanished from. Between his legs sat the purple gem that he held onto in his last moments, now dim and void of energy.

Everything was mostly the same aside from the cobwebs and dried blood stains that littered the room. He reached into his pockets, pulling out the strange amulet. Glancing at it, he noticed his arm was once again opaque. “I'm alive,” he whispered in astonishment. “Thank you, my lord.”

Out of the corner of his eye he spotted another portal which swiftly vanished, dropping a glowing green spiked mace onto the ground. Mo'nazar came closer reaching his hand to pick it up. The moment he made connection with the mace he could feel its power surging through his body. “A gift,” he said to himself.

Seeing the spell books on the floor, Mo'nazar decided to read through them again. He remembered the bone colossus he summoned several years ago during the attack on his village. It made him feel uneasy at first, but the thought of his successful summon gave him chills of excitement. “Conjuration,” he whispered as he searched through the spell books looking for any with that specific title.

He came upon a few fire and shock spell books, but they only reminded him of Jo'navir and Dexpa. The longer he stared at the books, the more enraged he became. “You left me!” he screamed throwing the books against the wall in a tantrum.

He cast sparks at the books turning them into ashes but flinched at the sight of his own spell. It made him think of Dexpa again. “You left me,” he said, this time with sadness in his voice. But that sadness quickly turned back into anger and fury. “I hate you! I hate you!” he yelled ripping at the fur on his scalp.

After his moments of frustration, Mo'nazar came to his senses, returning to his search for conjuration spell books. But he came across another destruction spell book first. “Ice Spike,” it read.

He read the book, attempting to cast the spell and to his amazement, it worked, shooting out a sharp chunk of ice into the stone walls of the hatch. He began laughing uncontrollably. He felt a sort of thrill using ice magic, and the best part was it didn't remind him of Dexpa or Jo'navir.

He spent the rest of the night reading through all the books on the ground, with a focus on learning the ones having to do with frost destruction or conjuration magic. Eventually, he passed out from overworking his mind.

His stomach woke him up the next day. He could see sunlight shining through his house outside of the hatch entrance. It was time to go hunting.

Adventuring out into the swamp, Mo'nazar began to feel a sense of nostalgia, which continued to upset him. He maneuvered past some vines, carefully treading through the mud on the rim of the swamp waters.

Suddenly, the red kelp of the swamp started to shake across from him. A baliwog jumped out of it, making a snack out of the vines.

Mo'nazar snuck as closely as he could to the creature without alarming it, and then proceeded to shoot out an ice spike, piercing it through the stomach. It stopped moving the second it hit the ground.

"Another successful hunt," Mo'nazar said with an overconfident smirk on his face.

He picked up the baliwog, brought it back to his house, and cooked it up in his kitchen. He took it into the hatch and ate it alone on the floor using the summoning circle as a dinner plate and his hands as utensils.

After finishing the meal, Mo'nazar stood up and got right back to work. He studied more conjurations spell books and began his summoning rituals, spawning a frost atronach and a frozen colossus.

He pointed them to corner of the cellar where he "died" and said, "Start digging." The golems began punching a small hole, gradually carving out a small tunnel. Meanwhile, Mo'nazar returned to his studying of the spell books.

After some time, the summons breached through the other side of the wall, revealing a crack of sunlight, which soon became a wide hole to the outdoors. Mo'nazar, noticing the light in the corner of his eye, ceased his reading and crawled through the tunnel, stepping to the outside with his two summons.

They were standing at the back wall of Mo'nazar's house, facing away from the village. "We build here," he commanded to the golems. "Find the strongest materials you can around the swamp and bring them here." The ice giants listened to his command and went in in separate directions, disappearing into the swamp fog.

Mo'nazar, realizing he'd need a lot more workers to build his idea, conjured several more ice colossi and frost atronachs, sending them out into the swamps until he started to lose count of their numbers.

Soon there was a steady flow of summons leaving and returning with chunks of stone and glass scavenged from around the swamp.

As several days passed, the castle began to near completion, but Mo'nazar began to feel more and more lonely. He often found himself imagining scenarios he used to be in with Dexpa and Jo'navir when they were younger. But he would slap himself out if it, remembering the hatred he still harbored for them.

Being consumed by loneliness, he began spending the days searching for survivors who might've been in the Mania region with him. Though so far, his search proved to be pointless. His speechless minions only made things more difficult for him, yet he would still talk to them, and they would understand his words.

Standing in the old door frame of his house, he began pondering where to search for people this time. His brain did the work for him, implanting the image of Dexpa and Jo'navir running away towards the Fringe in the west.

"The Fringe," he whispered to himself starting to move west towards the long hallway that acted as the entrance to it.

He made his way through the hallway ending up on the other side with the plaza. Mo'nazar noticed the abomination sitting far off in the corner of the plaza, sliced to pieces. He ignored it, walking further into the Fringe until he eventually came into some ruins without a ceiling. He scouted through the ruins, carefully peeking behind each corner as he passed it, but he was beginning to lose hope.

As he continued to wander the ruins, he heard a leaf crunch as if it was stepped out, coming from outside of the ruins. He ran outside to see what it was only to find a grummite stomping around the mud and into the water. But the moment it spotted Mo'nazar, it began running another direction.

Coming from behind the creature, a thick frost cloud quickly overwhelmed it. It quickly caught up to the grummite and flowed past it, freezing both it and the water in its path. In the next few seconds, Mo'nazar could see a group of people walking across the now-frozen swamp water and cutting the creature down with an iron greataxe.

Mo'nazar jumped out eagerly, desperate to meet the first people he's seen in a long time.

“Stop!” they screamed, forcing Mo’nazar to stand still.

“I’m so glad to see you! You have no idea how long it’s been since I’ve seen another...” but Mo’nazar was interrupted by a young dark elf girl in yellow robes.

“Stand back! Who are you? A bandit?” the girl inquired cautiously.

“No! I’m just a mage, I promise,” Mo’nazar said holding his hands up to show he was unarmed. He began to stutter his words nervously. “I..I used to live here, back there,” he said pointing to the plaza behind himself.

Beside the young mage girl stood two others, including an orc warrior with an iron greataxe and an elf woman who carried nothing. They relaxed when they saw Mo’nazar had no intention to fight.

The orc man began to speak. “We’re not here to fight you. We got into some trouble with the Mad God and we ended up getting sent here. Now, we’re just trying to survive,” he finished saying walking over and picking up a chunk of frozen meat from the grummite they killed.

“Oh,” Mo’nazar started to say empathizing with his words. “I know that feeling.”

“My name is Durgog,” the orc said. “And this is my wife “Evandril,” he said as she waved at Mo’nazar politely.

“My name is Eries,” the little girl said confidently. “I’m their daughter.” Despite being young, the girl seemed capable of holding her own.

Mo’nazar nodded his head in respect. He felt a rush of enthusiasm wash over him bringing him chills. “My name is Mo’nazar,” he said with a relieved smile. “If you’d like, I have a home that’s almost done being built. Perhaps we could eat together?” he added looking at the other chunk of the frozen grummite.

The family looked to each other for approval. The orc shrugged his shoulders saying, “Why not, it’d be nice to eat indoors today.”

“That’s great!” Mo’nazar said almost letting his excitement overcome him. “Come with me.”

Mo’nazar picked up the other chunk of the grummite, lead them towards the entrance to the Mania Region, passing the flesh abomination along the way.

“Father, what is that thing?” Eries said pointing at the pieces of flesh lying on the plaza floor in the distance.

“I don’t know, but it looks like something we best stay away from,” he said patting her on the head. “You did amazing back there, kid. That thing was frozen solid. You’re making my job too easy,” he said with a wholesome laugh.

“You’ve grown to be a strong young girl,” Evandril added. Eries took the compliment with a smile.

They made their way through the dark hallway and soon found themselves near the ruins of Mo’nazar’s old village. As they approached, the structure he had been working on revealed itself.

“A castle!” Eries yelled in amazement.

The father and mother looked more shocked than amazed at the ominous appearance of the castle. It was built on top of Mo’nazar’s old home which was the only wood you could find in the structure. The rest of the castle was stone and glass.

“Before you panic, my golems are friendly, I promise,” Mo’nazar declared. Just as he was saying it, a frozen colossus came around the corner of the castle walls holding a large chunk of stone in its hand. As it passed, Evandril and Durgog flinched in surprise at the appearance of it.

The bones and ice making up the contents of its body was not exactly a soothing sight. Eries however, didn’t hesitate to approach the monster for a closer look, admiring its appearance.

Mo’nazar was happy that at least someone wasn’t scared of his summons and proceeded inside following the colossus closely behind. It hopped into the hatchet room and began crawling into the hole in the wall, which acted as the castle entrance.

“I’m sorry this entrance isn’t very convenient. This cellar is special to me, and I wanted it to act as the doorway to my home,” Mo’nazar explained crawling out the other side of the hole taking him to the castle hallway.

The hallways were huge and split off in two directions from the corner they came out of. Red carpet stretched the length of the hallways, and blue lanterns hung from the ceiling, spaced apart evenly. There were also multiple windows sitting across from each blue lantern letting their light shine out to the exterior of the castle walls.

The colossus took the left path, bringing its stone to another part of the castle. Meanwhile, Mo'nazar and the family took the right path, taking them down the hall and into a room that took on the look of a kitchen.

There were utensils and equipment for cooking, a dinner table, and a beautiful blue chandelier hanging over it. Though the walls and floor were stone, the floor was layered with a yellow carpet giving it a more comforting appearance.

"This place is beautiful, Mo'nazar," Evandril said admiring the chandelier.

"Yeah, it's very well put together," Durgog added.

"Thank you!" Mo'nazar said with joy in his eyes. "My summons have been working very hard to make this place look nice."

Mo'nazar went to prepare his chunk of the grummite over a fire. "Feel free to leave that other part of the meat wherever you'd like. I'll get this one ready for you in just a second. Please, sit."

"Thank you," Eries said politely being the first to sit, with her parents following in example.

Eventually, the meal was ready, and the four of them sat together eating in peace.

"Mo'nazar," the young mage girl began to ask.

Mo'nazar looked her way waiting for her to continue.

"Could we live here? she asked.

"Eries!" her mother chimed in. "That's a rude thing to ask so soon after meeting someone. This is his home, not ours."

"It's alright," Mo'nazar said waving his hand to show it wasn't a big deal. "Honestly, it gets pretty lonely living in such a large place by myself."

A frost atronach began walking past the kitchen door through the hallway carrying another slab of stone. Mo'nazar continued, watching the golem move. "And these guys aren't exactly the most talkative," he added looking mildly upset.

The orc father looked concerned at Mo'nazar's expression. "I wouldn't mind spending a little more time here if you need some people in your life. You'd be doing us a favor anyways."

Evandril looked defeated, realizing the same thing as her husband. "Alright then. If it's okay with you Mo'nazar, could we stay?"

"Yeah of course!" Mo'nazar shouted, excitement clearly showing on his face again. "I have a bedroom upstairs that would work perfectly. It's got a few beds. I was actually hoping to get visitors one day," Mo'nazar said scratching his head nervously.

As soon as they finished eating, Mo'nazar stood up and said, "How about I show you to your room?"

"Sure," Evandril replied.

He walked back down the hall, taking them back towards the entrance and took the left hallways this time. Eventually they reached a blacksmithing room with equipment to match inside of it. At the top was a bright red chandelier, which lit the room accordingly. And behind it all was a very presentable master staircase going up and then curving around both sides of the room as it ascended.

The orc noted, "Is this your forge?"

"Yup!" Mo'nazar replied. "Though I haven't really gotten around to using it myself."

They proceeded upstairs to the second level taking them to a few blue doors. "You'll be right in here. I hope the place is to your liking," Mo'nazar said.

They entered the room seeing several beds, each with their own wooden dresser and desk. It was lit with more blue lanterns that hung from the ceiling.

The orc looked impressed at the atmosphere of the room. "This is impressive, cat!"

"Thank you so much," Evandril added bowing her head and pushing her daughter to do the same.

"Thank you," Eries added shyly.

"You're welcome," Mo'nazar said bowing his head in return. "Make yourselves comfortable. And from now on, feel free to call this your home. Walk around as much as you'd like, and don't be afraid to read whatever you find lying around. I'll see you all in the morning." He shut the door softly.

Mo'nazar left them to their room and walked up the rest of the stairs to his own. Reaching the top of the stairs, Mo'nazar proceeded through a small hallway with a

purple door at the end. On both sides of the door was the symbol for conjuration magic. He approached the end of the hallway and walked through the door bringing him to his room.

He went inside closing the door behind himself and looked forward. The room was huge. The closest thing to him was a stone plaza, similar to the one in The Fringe, surrounded by stone pillars. Around the plaza sat multiple piles of bones spread across the room. And at the end of the plaza was a throne chair facing towards him. It was made of stone and layered with thick purple cloth, with two purple lanterns hanging on each side of it. They shined their purple light on both the throne and the large window sitting behind it which looked out to the rest of the village.

Taking his time, he went straight through the plaza and stood before his throne, looking out the window behind it. He then sat down and began to rest his eyes, thinking of the new friends he had finally made. For the first time in several years, he fell asleep with a smile on his face.

Waking up the next day, Mo'nazar made his way into the kitchen finding the family sitting at the dinner table with the grummite prepared in front of them.

"We made you food, Mo'nazar!" Eries said.

"Thank you. That's very kind of you, Eries," Mo'nazar replied smiling at her parents and sitting at the table with them. They had already prepared him a plate, leaving it where he sat. They began to dig in.

"How about we go hunting?" Durgog asked Mo'nazar. "Unless you've got a hidden stock somewhere that I don't know about," he jested.

Mo'nazar laughed and replied, "No, unfortunately I don't. I'll take you up on that offer. Did you want to go now? I could show you around the swamps while we're at it."

"Sure!" the orc replied cheerfully. "Don't destroy the castle while we're gone you two," he added pointing at his wife and child.

"We won't father, I promise," Eries said taking her father's question seriously.

Evandril waved them out with a smile.

They crawled out the castle entrance together and began making their way into the swamp with Mo'nazar taking the lead.

Mo'nazar brought the two of them down one of the paths carved out of the vines. "I usually find a baliwog here every time I come to explore. We used to..." Mo'nazar interrupted himself. "I used to come here often, and I'd never be disappointed."

Durgog replied, "Maybe this is their mating grounds?"

"Don't put that image in my head," Mo'nazar said.

They both had a good long laugh before hearing something splash into the water nearby. Mo'nazar signaled Durgog to follow his lead and stay low. They crept over to inspect the noise and to no surprise, they saw a baliwog splashing around in the water.

"How about I freeze it in and place, and you follow through with your greataxe, just like the night we met?" Mo'nazar proposed.

Durgog replied, "Alright, you ready?"

Mo'nazar nodded and charged at the baliwog and cast frostbite, shooting out a steady stream of frost, keeping it in place and hardening the water around it. Durgog followed through as planned treading through the half-frozen water and cutting it in half, spilling its blood into the swamp water.

"That was fun wasn't it!?" Mo'nazar asked excitedly.

"Nothing feels better than swinging this axe," Durgog said placing his greataxe over his shoulder proudly.

They each picked up a part of the baliwog meat and started making their way back through the swamp.

Not realizing where they were, Mo'nazar accidentally made eye contact with the ruins from his old adventure. He was stunned for a second feeling like his eyes were glued to their walls.

He began picturing the image of Za'vanir being stabbed through the chest with a silver sword, but hearing Durgog's footsteps marching through the swamp brought him back to his senses.

The two of them made it back to the castle with their new pile of food. They crawled through the entrance tunnel again and came back to the kitchen, finding no one in it.

"They're probably in their room," Durgog said. "I'll hang this thing up," he added grabbing the other meat slab out of Mo'nazar's hand. "You go check on them. My

daughter said she wanted to talk about magic with you. I think it would be a great opportunity for you two to bond.”

Mo'nazar replied happily, “Sure. I'll go find them.” He made his way through the halls and up the master stairs leading him to their door. Opening it slowly, he saw the mother and daughter sharing the covers of a bed and reading a book together titled, “Icy Spear.”

“I almost forgot we had another ice mage in this house,” Mo'nazar said pleasantly surprised. “How are you two doing?” Mo'nazar asked.

“Great!” Eries called back. “Hey Mo'nazar, did you want to go practice magic together?”

“Yeah, that sounds fun!” Mo'nazar replied joyfully.

“How did the hunting go?” Evandril inquired.

“We caught a baliwog,” Mo'nazar stated. “They're everywhere in these swamps, so you might want to get used to their taste.”

Evandril replied shrugging her shoulders, “Well, something is better than nothing.” She closed the book they were reading and reached her arm around her daughter. “Eries, why don't you got with Mo'nazar and study this book outside?” she suggested.

“Okay mother,” Eries replied, taking the book out of her hands and walking over to Mo'nazar. “I'm ready!” she said eagerly.

“Then let's not waste any more time!” Mo'nazar responded. “To the swamps!” he yelled marching out of the room with Eries marching behind him.

They delved into the swamps and got straight to work. “So, what's this new spell book you were reading?” Mo'nazar asked her.

“It's called icy spear,” she replied.

“Sounds like a step up from the ice spike spike. Want to try it out?” Mo'nazar said.

After reading the book together, they pointed their hands out to the swamp standing side by side and began trying to cast it.

Eries was the first to cast hers, launching a massive icicle into the swamps, lodging itself into the mud.

“That was awesome!” she yelled.

Mo'nazar was still trying to cast the spell, but nothing was coming out of his hands.

“Think of the ice spike spell, but change it a little differently to what you read in the book,” Eries suggested. “That’s what I did.”

“I’ll give it a go,” Mo'nazar said as his hand began charging up an aura of frost, soon releasing an icy spear into the mud in front of him.

“You did it!” she yelled, jumping around. “Let’s do it again,” she said as she began casting the same spell into the mud over and over. But on her last cast, she stepped into a plant sitting beside her, which tripped her to the ground, sending icy spear into Mo'nazar’s arm, barely grazing it, but drawing blood.

“I’m sorry Mo'nazar! I didn’t mean it. Are you okay?” she said still sitting in the mud.

“Yeah, I’m fine, don’t worry,” Mo'nazar said letting out a forced laugh and grabbing his arm tightly. “Come on, let’s head back,” he said offering his hand to pick her off the ground.

As he reached for her, he was thrown off by the plant she tripped over sitting under her body. She grabbed his arm, pulling herself up and started heading towards the castle. Mo'nazar stood in shock staring at the plant, realizing it was his sister’s favorite piece of flora, red kelp.

“You coming!?” Eries called out from afar.

Mo'nazar turned around after hearing her voice, but was still in another daze, remembering the past he wished to forget.

“Yeah, I’ll be there in a second,” he replied pretending his arm wasn’t still in pain. He looked at her as she went back to the castle now realizing she was probably the same age as his sister Ra’zita would’ve been if she had lived these past five years. He imagined the image of her in Eries place as she walked away.

Still in a hazy state of mind, Mo'nazar went back into the castle and went straight to their bedroom, finding the three of them together.

“You did what!?” Durgog yelled. “Mo'nazar are you okay? I’m so sorry about that,” he said looking at Mo'nazar’s arm trickling blood down to his fingertips.

Evandril reached in his desk and pulled out some ingredients and began mixing them together. "This should help you Mo'nazar," she said pouring the results into a bottle. "Drink this."

"You're an alchemist?" Mo'nazar whispered again in shock after another reminder of his sister and the past.

"Yes, someone has to take care of these two when they get themselves in danger," she added.

The picture of Ko'zura now entered Mo'nazar's mind. He found himself staring at Evandril emotionlessly.

"Is something wrong?" she said trying to hand the bottle to Mo'nazar.

"No, I'm fine," he replied taking the bottle and downing it quickly. The wound on his arm began to close and the pain faded along with it.

"Okay," Evandril responded suspiciously.

"Anyways," Durgog began to say, "It's been quite a day, hasn't it? I think it's time we all get some rest."

"Good night Mo'nazar," Eries said hugging his leg.

Mo'nazar flinched at the unexpected gesture but put an arm on her shoulder in an attempt to give the same kindness back. "Good night, Eries."

She let go of his leg, and he walked to the door. Mo'nazar turned around and waved to them as he closed it.

After it shut, he placed his head on the door, still shaken by the eventful day he had, and whispered quietly under his breath in a shaken voice.

"Good night."

After leaning against the door for a bit, Mo'nazar decided to head back upstairs and into his throne room, taking a seat in his throne chair. His thoughts overwhelmed him as he sat there with his fist supporting the weight of his head, until he finally dozed off.

It was pitch black for him now and he began to feel uneasy. Suddenly, he could hear an unsettling voice calling to him again.

“Do not forget your promise, my champion,” it demanded.

“Who are you?” Mo’nazar said recognizing the voice but suppressing it from his memory.

“You know who I am, mortal,” the voice said back.

A dim blue light revealed a shrine now standing before him in the dark room. “Molag Bal,” Mo’nazar said staring wide-eyed at the statue of Molag Bal’s head sitting on top of a black pedestal.

“I hope you don’t plan on disobeying the Daedric Lord of Domination,” the voice said now seeming to come from the statue of the head.

“What do you want?” Mo’nazar asked.

“You thought you could make new friends,” Molag Bal said sarcastically, “behind my back. I see everything. Do not forget who you serve. Kill those mortals and send their souls to me.”

“But they,” Mo’nazar began to say.

“Perhaps I need to remind you,” Molag Bal cut in, “of your punishment for disobeying me.”

The room vanished and was replaced with a familiar sight for Mo’nazar. Lightning struck from above to the dead trees below, and towers stood spreading infinitely into the distance. A thin layer of fog sat on the ground. Mo’nazar looked down at his arms seeing he was once again transparent and feeling his mind slipping away once again.

“No! Don’t! I don’t want to go back, please!” Mo’nazar screamed desperately.

His surroundings were again replaced with the previous image of the blue room. The shrine now sitting in front of him began to speak.

“Claim their souls for me. If you fail to do so before sundown, I won’t hesitate to send you back there, leaving you trapped in the Soul Cairn for all of eternity.” The voice vanished after its last line and Mo’nazar’s vision went black again.

He woke up in a panic, sweat dripping from his forehead to his lap. His breathing was intense and uneasy. He gathered himself after a few minutes, got out of his throne and went downstairs to the base floor. There were a few of his summons walking around the smithing room and out in the halls.

“I have new orders,” Mo’nazar said with a determined, yet fearful look in his eye. “I want three cells engraved into the walls of these hallways. Now.”

The frost atronachs and frozen colossi went straight to work, grabbing materials from the swamp and bringing them back to the hallway near the entrance. Meanwhile, the other workers began pounding away at the walls to make a hole large enough to act as a prison cell.

After a while, the noise woke up the family who went downstairs to check it out.

“What are you building now Mo’nazar?” Durgog said walking down the master stairs letting out a yawn.

Mo’nazar said nervously, “Oh it’s a new addition. I thought it would look nice.”

Evandril added, “Those look like cages.” She was becoming more suspicious than before.

Mo’nazar did not respond. He kept staring ahead at the progress being made. They were already near completion.

“They’re fast workers, aren’t they?” Mo’nazar said with his voice beginning to shake. One of his summons came over, handing him a key, signaling they were finished with the cells.

The family started talking amongst themselves in a whisper.

“Maybe it’s for the monsters of the swamp,” Durgog said softly, trying to think of any excuse.

“There’s three of them!” Evandril responded in a quiet rage. “Don’t you think that’s suspicious?”

“Mo’nazar wouldn’t do that,” Eries said halfheartedly.

“We can’t stay here anymore,” Evandril whispered to her family. “Grab your things we’re leaving.” But her words echoed in Mo’nazar’s direction.

“Where are you going?” Mo’nazar said as innocently as possible, but the desperation in his voice made it clear he knew what was going on.

“We were just...” Evandril started to say, not knowing what to add after it.

“We were going to explore the swamps a bit,” Durgog said his voice now shaking. “We should be back by sundown.”

The word triggered something in Mo'nazar. “I don't have until sundown,” he said glaring in their direction.

He could hear his summons stomping around the hallways behind him. “Cease them!” he called out to them, pointing at the family of three.

They tried one more act of kindness to calm Mo'nazar. “You can come with us I promise,” Durgog added. “You don't have to do this Mo'nazar, please.” But the golems approached the family, picking them off their feet and throwing them in the now-finished prison cells.

They laid in their cells for several hours, before Mo'nazar decided to finally come visit.

Mo'nazar sat outside of their cages leaning against the wall across from them. “I don't want to go back there,” he whispered to himself.

“Back where, Mo'nazar?” Durgog asked. “We can help you, whatever it is.”

“No, you can't,” Mo'nazar replied abruptly.

The day flew by and the light the windows began to fade subtly. Mo'nazar anxiously pondering his decision began pacing back and forth through the hall.

“Mo'nazar, listen,” Evandril began to say.

“Silence! I can't think,” Mo'nazar yelled back.

The light outside began to fade more visibly. It was getting close to sundown. Mo'nazar left the hallway and went up to his room, soon coming back with the glowing green mace in his hand.

“Good,” a voice echoed in Mo'nazar's mind.

“What is that Mo'nazar?” Durgog asked him. “Please, we know this isn't you. Just let us go.”

Mo'nazar stared at him while he spoke with fear and confusion in his eyes. But he said nothing back.

“At least let the others go. If you need to kill someone, you can take me,” Durgog begged.

Mo'nazar, questioning his own sanity, stepped close to the young girl's cage sitting furthest from the exit, trying to think of what to do.

“Mo'nazar, please,” Eries whimpered in the corner of his cell.

He saw the image of his sister again taking the place of Eries. The image hypnotized him into reaching for the cage with his free hand and unlocking it with the stone key. “Don't leave me too,” Mo'nazar whispered pulling the cage open slowly.

The parents stood speechless in their cells trying to see what was going on in Eries cell next to them. She walked out calmly and approached the cell in the middle where Durgog stood.

The two of them whispered something to each other and Mo'nazar came closer to listen. When he made it to Durgog's cage, they ceased their conversation.

“Please,” Mo'nazar whispered back.

He looked at Durgog hopefully and Durgog smiled back, while still eying his daughter beside Mo'nazar.

Mo'nazar reached for the cell door with the stone key preparing to unlock it, but right as it clicked open Durgog screamed out, “Run Eries!!”

Durgog forced his body against the cage to shove it open, but Mo'nazar reacted immediately, turning the key to lock the door again. He ran towards Eries who now made her way towards the exit. She dashed past her mother's cage bringing her closer to the exit.

Mo'nazar could hear the voice speaking to him once more, as he raced towards Eries.

“Kill her! This is your last chance!”

Mo'nazar, scared and confused in all the chaos, reached his arm out for Eries and shouted “Wait!” But without realizing it, his hand became surrounded by an aura of frost, and then proceeded to shoot out an enormous icy spear towards the young mage girl. It pierced through her stomach and left her lying on the ground looking towards the ceiling helplessly gasping for air.

“Eries!!!” Durgog yelled out in a steaming rage.

“No!” Evandril shouted as well, crying as the word came out. “How could you do this, Mo’nazar!?”

“You’re sick!” Durgog continued to yell.

Mo’nazar approached Eries’ body as the shouting and crying continued behind him. She was still alive, but not for long.

“Do it! Before her soul escapes!” Molag Bal demanded.

Mo’nazar stood over her body crying when he saw her wide eyes looking around for her parents.

“Now!!!” the Daedric Prince demanded one more time.

Mo’nazar’s tears continued to fall, but his face turned into a determined scowl as he raised the mace into the air slamming it down on Eries to put her out of her misery.

“Eries!!!” Evandril screamed now whining uncontrollably.

Eries sat lifeless as the mace seemed to sap the life force out of her body and sending it somewhere else.

“Well done Mo’nazar,” Molag Bal called out. “Now finish the rest, you don’t have much sunlight left,” he claimed letting out a sickening laugh.

Mo’nazar walked back to the cages starting with Durgog’s in the center. “Let me out and see what happens,” the orc said grinding his teeth together.

Mo’nazar started to unlock it again, ignoring the orc’s words. As the cage creped open, Mo’nazar gave Durgog one final pitying look and said, “I’m sorry.”

He charged Mo’nazar the second he saw enough room in the opening of the cage to slip out of, but Mo’nazar had the range advantage. He swung his mace smacking the orc across the head, knocking him to the ground.

“I’m sorry,” he said again with bitterness in his voice now. He leaned over the orc continuing to smash his bones to pieces, piercing the skin with every strike of the spiked mace and ripping flesh out as he pulled it back. Eventually his soul was ripped from his body and absorbed by the mace.

Evandril continued to cry in the background, no longer physically capable of getting a word out. Mo'nazar, hearing her whimpering, stood up with his bloodied mace in hand and came over to her cage closest to the exit of the castle.

This time he said nothing. He proceeded to give her the same treatment as the others. Opening her cage and pummeling her corpse until the mace sapped the soul from her body.

Breathing heavily, he stood over their bodies admiring his work. Mo'nazar made his way towards the master staircase calling out another command to the nearby golems. "Remove everything except for the bones and sweep them back into their cages. I don't want to see their faces anymore."

Making his way back to his throne room, he sat in his throne chair, numb to the thoughts that grazed through his head.

The sun finally went down. Mo'nazar looked at his arms to make sure, and to his relief, he was still opaque. He sighed and looked around the room with guilt in his eyes.

He began to have thoughts again of his old friends, imagining his adventures in the swamps with them. But his thoughts were interrupted once more.

"Well done, my champion," Molag Bal said invading his mind.

Mo'nazar kept his silence, sitting in his throne for the rest of the night, unable to sleep.

The sun of the next day began to light up the outside of the window behind his throne chair. He got up and walked around every part of his castle, seeing only frozen golems and frost atronachs maneuvering through it. He was lonely once again.

Eventually he wandered out through the exit, crawling through the hole and into the hatch room. As he walked past, making his way to the hatch exit, he spotted a book on the ground that caught his eye. A book he didn't notice before now. He picked it up and read the cover aloud.

"Dead Thrall."

He read through it trying to understand its use and effects. Though it was still a bit unclear in his mind it had something to do with resurrecting the dead. Mo'nazar began pondering the ways he could do a spell like this, and the picture of the ruins appeared in his mind.

“Za’vanir,” he said to himself. He wondered if the body remained intact even after five years. It was decided. He brought the book with him and marched through the swamps, eventually making it to the door of the ruins.

He pushed at it for a few seconds until he remembered why it wouldn’t budge. Realizing this, he cast levitate, bringing himself up and over the door and into the hole above that he once escaped from.

He proceeded to the final room where he knew Za’vanir’s body should’ve been. Walking through the entrance of the room, he spotted the crystal obelisk still in place but inactive, and in front of it was Za’vanir’s corpse lying in the same place he left him, though his steel armor and greatsword now sat covered in mold and dust.

He leaned over the lifeless body and began his attempt at casting his new spell. But every attempt proved pointless.

He collapsed to his hands and knees in shame, forcing the strange green-skulled amulet to fall out of his pocket. He looked at it for a few seconds and began pondering its use.

Trying to connect the dots, he thought about his father who held the amulet on the day of the attack, their burnt corpses, the hatch door that was blasted open, and the summoning circle that sat within it, coated in blood.

He grabbed the amulet in his hand looking at it for a few seconds, and then placed it around his neck. Then he began to reach his hands out to Za’vanir again, casting the spell again.

The strange amulet began to glow an eerie green, and an energy began to fuel Mo’nazar as he went at it again.

The power from the spell began to enter Za’vanir’s corpse. Suddenly, the eyes opened themselves, and the body started to stand itself up from the ground. It bowed his head towards Mo’nazar, which threw the khajiit boy off his guard. “Master,” it said.

“Za’vanir,” Mo’nazar said on the verge of tears, thinking he’d just brought back someone he finally knew from the past. But he was let down from the creature’s next words.

“If that is what you wish to call me, then I shall obey,” Za’vanir replied.

Mo’nazar no longer knew whether to feel happy or furious, but he didn’t give it much more thought. “Very well, come with me.”

The two of them went back to the castle, crawling their way through the entrance. Mo'nazar brought him to the smithing room, showing him around. "This is where you will stay. You will be my blacksmith," Mo'nazar said to Za'vanir.

"Thank you, master," Za'vanir replied as he sat down near the equipment and got to work, starting by sharpening his own greatsword and carving the mold off of it.

"I will leave you to it. You will also act as my guard. If you spot any unusual activity, you bring it to me immediately," Mo'nazar added.

"Of course," Za'vanir said bowing his head respectfully.

Mo'nazar, slightly satisfied with his obedience, went out to search for one more mystery he hadn't solved yet.

He went west towards the Fringe and approached the fleshy remains of the creature that sat in pieces there. Taking a closer look, he could see leopard fur among the bloodstained body parts.

"Ra'zita," he whispered in horror.

Realizing nothing would come of trying to revive pieces of a body, he brought the chunks of meat back to the castle one by one with the help of his summons. He also brought leaves from the red kelp of the swamp so that she could wear it like she used to.

Soon the pieces were all gathered, but as Mo'nazar tried sewing them back together, there were body parts missing to make it whole again.

He sat in thought for a few moments before getting an idea. Making his way down the master staircase, he approached the cages holding the remains of the family.

He grabbed out the bones that he needed to make his sister whole again, leaving behind the rest.

Eventually, everything he needed was ready and sitting beside his sister's abominable corpse lying in the center of the plaza of the throne room. Piecing the parts together, Mo'nazar was ready to use dead thrall once again.

With the glowing amulet around his neck buffing his spell, he sent the energy from the spell into the mess of flesh before him. The body began to twitch, and within seconds it was pushing itself onto its feet, standing in the middle of the plaza.

Mo'nazar looked up at his creation in awe.

"Ra'zita!" he screamed looking up at the skin that made up her face. There was no mouth hole, but he could see eyes that looked just like hers and the fur on her scalp held on by a thread.

She looked down at Mo'nazar and said nothing but got down on her knees to reach eye level with him, as if waiting for a command. Mo'nazar answered by grabbing a piece of red kelp off the floor and placing in what was left of her hair. He gave her a hug and she gave one back trying to comfort her new master.

Mo'nazar thought this was the moment he would cry tears of happiness, but he couldn't shed one. It was tough to accept that this abomination was his sister, but he did what he could to convince himself. As they released from their embrace, Ra'zita left stains of blood on Mo'nazar's clothes, though Mo'nazar didn't seem to care.

Mo'nazar hardly questioned the loyalty of his two new recruits. Ra'zita and Za'vanir showed no signs of betrayal. Remembering the day Dexpa and Jo'navir left him alone though, he commanded to Ra'zita who stood before him, "Never leave me."

He proceeded downstairs, passing Za'vanir and giving the same command, and then made his way towards the entrance of the castle.

As he entered the hatch and climbed up into his old house, he whispered to himself with a confident expression, "And nobody comes or leaves except for me."

He demanded rope and metal bars from his golems who left and returned in minutes with what he asked for. He continued to seal off the entrance leaving the dead thrall spell book as the key to open the hatch. And the secret bookshelf inside of the hatch covered the hole in the wall that acted as the entrance to his castle. To finish it off, he sealed the other side of the hole with the metal bars that required his stone key to open.

Confident in his decision, Mo'nazar went back to his room and spent the rest of the day staring out the window behind his throne chair.

As time passed, Mo'nazar lived with the resurrected versions of Za'vanir, Ra'zita, as well as the frozen colossi and frost atronachs. Though the lonely feeling in his heart wouldn't go away, not matter how much time he spent with them.

He stayed in the castle for several days with what little supplies of food and water he had left.

One night however, as Mo'nazar sat miserably in his throne, he could something outside the window behind him. He stood up from his throne in surprise, glancing at the window from afar. There were flashes of red and purple coming from the front of his castle, and he could hear his golems being thrown around and blasted to pieces.

In the next second, Za'vanir came running into the room, barging through the door, and kneeling in front of the throne. "Sir, we have guests."

Mo'nazar's eyes shot open as he turned around to look at Za'vanir, but he was quick to react with a command. "Return to your station. They mustn't get past our defenses!" Za'vanir followed orders without hesitation, returning to his post downstairs.

Mo'nazar could feel his hands shaking. He tried holding them together in a fist to stop it, but it only made him shake more. He turned back around and walked up to the window to see for himself what was going on.

As he looked out the window, finally setting sight on the invaders, his shaking abruptly stopped, and he couldn't feel himself breathing anymore. His surprised expression soon turned into one of intense loathing. He whispered to himself with a smile that was both furious and excited.

"Welcome back."

Final Chapter

Champion

4E 201:

“Lord Sheogorath, please grant us passage to your realm,” Dexpa whispered to himself.

“What did you say?” Jo’navir asked.

“I was casting a spell,” Dexpa explained as a portal appeared in front Shalidor’s Maze. “It’ll take us to the Shivering Isles.”

“When did you learn that?” Jo’navir asked in surprise.

“A lot has happened since we’ve been separated,” Dexpa added, starting to walk towards the portal. “Let’s go.”

Jo’navir tapped Vaskr’s back signaling him to come into the portal. He followed his master’s orders and the two of them went through side by side.

In the blink of an eye, they ended up in a place that partly resembled The Fringe, though the flora and atmosphere seemed entirely different from the one they knew originally.

In front of the party sat a village.

Curious, they entered to village to see if there were any people around. It was mostly barren aside from an inn that appeared to be open and well lit. They went inside.

“Welcome to ‘The Wastrel’s Purse,’” a woman called from behind the counter. “The only place still kicking in this little ghost town we call ‘Passwall.’ Can I get you boys a drink or a bed?”

The woman was as old as they come for wood elves. She could barely keep her eyes open, and her posture was stuck in a slouched over position. Her words sounded completely unmotivated and uninterested in what she was saying.

“We’re from the Mania region of the Isles,” Dexpa said, stepping closer to the counter to have a conversation. “Has anything important happened around here recently?” Jo’navir followed beside his brother as Vaskr sat next to him.

“Not recently, no,” she replied. Ever since a hero saved us from the Greymarch 200 years ago, things have really calmed down around here.”

“What’s the Greymarch?” Jo’navir asked.

Dexpa explained, “Every era, those crystal knights roam the land and destroy everything that Lord Sheogorath made.”

“There was no hero to save us from that mess,” Jo’navir said. “How long has it been?”

“It’s possible we’re hundreds or even thousands of years in the future,” Dexpa answered. “The Greymarch in our time must’ve been from several eras ago, however many years that may be.”

“I guess that would explain the land and the flora looking so different,” Jo’navir said looking out the window of the inn. “Hey, what is that?” he said looking further into the distance.

Out the window, the boys could see a massive white beam of light shooting out of the ground and into the sky above.

“That’s our time wound,” Dexpa said, admiring the light on the horizon. “We need to bring the scroll there. I have a strong feeling it’ll bring us back to our time. I just know it.”

“Then why are we wasting our time here?” Jo’navir scolded him.

“Because I was hoping to see the Mania region again,” Dexpa said longing for answers. “I want to know what it looks like now.”

“Let’s get going then,” Jo’navir said walking back to the door.

Another woman slammed the door open chiming into their conversation. “Hello Dredhwen!” she yelled boisteriously.

She was a dark elf woman about as old as the inn keeper.

The woman at the front desk let out an annoyed sigh. “Hello Relmyna. Shouldn’t you be out snooping around the graves for body parts. You sick old woman,” Dredhwen said to the other elf.

“Quiet, hag,” Relmyna responded with a scowl. “I couldn’t help but overhear these boys are trying to get through the gates of madness.”

“The what?” Jo’navir replied.

“If you want to get back to the Mania region, you’ll need the key, which means you’re going to have to get through my beautiful child first,” Relmyna said starting to giggle. “She could use another snack.”

Jo’navir ignored her laughter and pulled Dexpa out of the inn with him, beckoning Vaskr to follow.

They made their way towards the plaza starting to recognize the scenery more and more as they approached it.

“I was here in another timeline,” Dexpa started to say as they walked, “between our time and this one. But something changed in the village.”

“Like?” Jo’navir asked waiting for him to continue.

Dexpa gave as short of an explanation as he could. “Like how the village was flattened and the only structure still standing was a huge castle looming over Mo’nazar’s house. I was with some others when we went to explore it. The hatch was closed off and there was a secret entrance. There were all these bodies everywhere and some of the skeletons were khajiit. One of them had an amulet just like Mo’nazar’s father did the day he died, remember?”

Jo’navir reached into his thoughts pulling out the image of an amulet with a green skull sitting in the charred hand of Mo’nazar’s father. “So that’s why you think he survived?”

“Yeah, and that’s why I want to see the state it’s in now. I’m curious how things have changed since that moment,” Dexpa said.

They soon arrived at their destination stepping onto the stone plaza floor. There was a flesh abomination sitting in the center of the plaza as if it was guarding the entrance. It looked different from the abomination they passed on the day of the Greymarch though.

This one had a slimmer body, a metal helmet, and a metal mace replacing one of its arms. Vaskr was begging to shiver and started barking at the creature, but it didn’t budge.

“Here they are my child!” a voice called from behind the boys. Relmyna was once again following them and eavesdropping. “Come get your dinner!” she yelled again.

The giant monstrosity reacted to their mother’s voice and began charging the team with its mace raised high.

Dexpa shot out a thunderbolt, while Jo’navir cast incinerate at the monster’s body attempting to slow it down. It stopped to cover its face from the blasts.

As its eyes were covered, Vaskr went in from below and took a bite out of its leg ripping off a chunk and leaving it on the plaza floor. The creature roared, swinging its mace for Vaskr not knowing where he was, but luckily the wolf was able to get out of the way.

It turned its attention over to Dexpa, running at the khajit at full speed, but Dexpa kept it at a distance with a lightning cloak. He quickly followed up with a barrage of thunderbolts against the behemoth’s body keeping it in its place, but not dealing considerable damage. Jo’navir tried the same with incinerate, but it proved to have the same effect. The monster lifted its hands up to protect its face once again.

“Kill them!” Relmyna yelled from a safe distance.

Dexpa noticed the creature was bent on protecting its head, which gave him an idea. “Go for the helmet!” Dexpa yelled.

Vaskr came in for another bite on the waist of the abomination, bringing it to its hands and knees. Dexpa took this chance, shooting out a thunderbolt at its head, cracking the helmet in half and leaving an opening to its now-exposed scalp.

“Stop shooting!” Jo’navir cried out as he came at the monster with his steel axe. He jumped in the air for momentum and swung straight down into the opening of the helmet, cutting into the skull and down to the neck.

The creature’s body flailed to the ground face-first. Jo’navir pulled his axe out and looked back to make sure Dexpa and Vaskr were uninjured.

“No!” screamed Relmyna running up to her child, leaning on the corpse and crying over it. “You monsters! How could you do this to him!”

“Come on, let’s check out the village,” Dexpa said completely ignoring her and heading for the gate. He attempted to shove it open, quickly learning that it was locked. “The key,” he whispered to himself looking around the plaza floor.

"It's here," Jo'navir replied pulling a metal key out of the flesh of the monster on the ground. He brought it over to the Mania door opening it up allowing for them to walk through.

They proceeded until they finally reached the spot where the village should've been. "Where's the castle?" Jo'navir asked.

"I guess it didn't last any longer," Dexpa said looking at the spot that was supposed to be Mo'nazar's house.

The entire village was completely flattened and the pieces of wood that used to be spread about, were now mostly missing. "Maybe the new residents of the Mania region scavenged the place for materials?" Dexpa suggested.

"Maybe," Jo'navir replied.

"Wait," Dexpa called out looking towards Mo'nazar's flattened house. "I can still see some of the floorboards. Let's go check it out."

They walked over to some of the stray pieces of wood, stepping their way into Mo'nazar's old home, which was now roofless and without walls.

Mostly everything was taken, but surprisingly, the hatch was still open. Dexpa approached it and jumped inside seeing it now filled with dirt, almost like it was being buried away. But in the corner of the room, he could see the bookshelf peeking out of the dirt.

He went over and started digging it out to see if anything was left. Jo'navir joined him in the process, while Vaskr sat outside the cellar waiting for them.

They soon got all the dirt off the bookshelf, revealing two spell books hidden among its shelves.

Dexpa picked up the first which read "Lightning Storm."

Jo'navir grabbed the second titled, "Firestorm."

They each spent some moments reading through the books trying to learn how to cast their respective spells. After some time, Dexpa put them both away in his leather bag and they hopped out of the hatch to start heading back.

"Did you get any of that?" Jo'navir asked.

“Kind of. I’m not sure,” Dexpa replied. “I’m afraid to cast it though. It sounds powerful.”

“That’s what I was thinking,” Jo’navir said. “Let’s worry about it later. For now, we should get back to that time wound thing you were talking about.”

The three of them traced their steps back through the Gates of Madness and into The Fringe once again. They passed Relmyna, who was still crying over the body of her child.

They soon ended up at the pillar of light sitting in the fields surrounded by a variety of mushroom flora.

“Are you sure this’ll work, Dexpa?” Jo’avnir questioned.

“It should. Besides, do you know of any other ways to traverse time?” Dexpa replied with an eyebrow raised.

“No, but...” Jo’navir said looking downhearted. “What if it separates us again.”

Dexpa placed a hand on Jo’navir’s shoulder to comfort him. “It’s different this time. I can feel it. Trust me.”

Jo’navir still looking disheartened agreed and followed along. Dexpa stood underneath the light and began pulling out the scroll. “Hold onto me,” he said to Jo’navir. “And Vaskr.”

Jo’navir walked up and locked his arm with Dexpa’s, pulling Vaskr in close with his other arm, and waited for his brother to read the scroll.

Dexpa took a deep breath and started to unravel the scroll revealing that familiar blinding light. He could feel something different this time, as if he was more in control.

“Yes!” a voice screamed in Jo’navir’s head. “I knew he had some connection with the scroll. It’s beautiful.”

Jo’navir tried his best to ignore the voice in his head.

Soon the scroll was getting charged with Dexpa’s lightning, making it glow a bright purple. Dexpa’s hands shook with overcharged energy, but his eyes remained focused on the scroll.

After a few seconds, the three of their bodies began to glow along with the scroll and they were sent away in another white flash.

2E 5:

They reappeared in the exact same spot in the Fringe, but the environment changed drastically.

“It worked!” Jo’navir screamed looking at his brother and patting Vaskr on the head.

“It did.” Dexpa said with a smile. “Let’s just hope we’re here in the right time.”

The flora, the hills, and the empty fields looked exactly like they did on the day of the attack on their village. There was no village in The Fringe called Passwall anymore and the plaza in the distance remained an open hallway like it used to.

“The scroll stayed with us this time too,” Dexpa added reaching into his bag. “And no more time wound! This has to be it.”

Jo’navir trusted his brother’s word.

As they walked onto the plaza, Jo’navir noted, “No flesh abomination either.”

Dexpa was confused. “You mean Relmyna’s child?” he asked.

“No, the other one,” Jo’navir corrected him. “It was different from that one. We saw it the day our village was attacked.”

Dexpa was surprised but gave out the first excuse he could think of. “I assume they were killed from those crystal knights flooding out of this hallway, remember?”

Jo’navir grunted silently in response.

The three of them continued through the hallway and into the village.

“That’s the castle,” Dexpa said pointing ahead to the giant stone castle looming over the village.

Jo’navir replied in awe, “That’s bigger than I thought it would be.”

“I was just as surprised,” Dexpa added looking to the rest of the village. “Our home is still standing, Jo’navir!”

Looking over, they could see their house still in one piece. Dexpa didn't hesitate to stray from their goal as he desperately wanted to see the inside of his house again.

"Hey, what are you doing?" Jo'navir called out to Dexpa now walking inside of their old front door.

The place was left in the same shape as the day they left it, aside from a plethora of cobwebs and dust now lying around.

They went up the stairs together finding Ko'zura's bedroom where she died. They weren't surprised to see her body and ashes still lying there, a black silhouette against the wall. The holy flames on the other side of the room were gone and replaced with more black marks, though the ashes of the creature she killed remained.

Dexpa and Jo'navir approached their mother's body together, leaning over to get one last look, as Vaskr guarded the doorway. Dexpa spotted the Amulet of Mara still lying there in her hand. He picked it up and held it close to his chest and placed it away in his bag as a memory.

They went for the door again, but the moment they turned around, a transparent blue phantom was blocking the way between them and Vaskr. He reacted with a few barks but settled down quickly after seeing Jo'navir's calm mental state.

"Mother?" Dexpa questioned slowly stepping forward.

"Hello again my boys," she said with a smile.

"You're a ghost?" Jo'navir asked concerningly.

"That is correct," Ko'zura answered. "There were a lot of things I should've told you about before my passing. Most importantly, the Greymarch. Your father and I didn't think it would come so soon."

"That's not your fault," Dexpa said on the verge of tears. "If we were here," Jo'navir finished his line for him.

"We could've protected you. But instead, we went out to adventure when you told us not to." Now Jo'navir could feel tears starting to force themselves out. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

"Don't blame yourselves, boys," she said with a sincere look. "It seemed like Mo'nazar was just as uninformed as you were. His parents saw it coming before we did. That must've been why they were taking Ra'zita away in a hurry."

“How do you know all of this?” Jo’navir said wiping his tears away as Dexpa did the same.

“You find out a lot when you can walk around for five years as a ghost,” she chuckled, reaching her hand out to comfort her children, but fazing right through them. She sighed. “And you see a lot of awful things too.”

“What do you mean?” Dexpa asked.

“It took me a while to connect to dots,” Ko’zura started to say. “I need to tell you everything, now.”

There’s a lot that happened that day. The Dragon Priest which you see sitting across from my ashes is named Hevnoraak. I believe Mo’nazar’s parents summoned it to fend off against the incoming crystal knights.”

“They’re necromancers!” Jo’navir exclaimed. “The summoning sign in the hatch; the blood and the books.”

“Exactly. You’ve always caught on so fast, Jo’navir,” she said with a genuine smile.

Jo’navir gave the same face in return.

“Mother,” Dexpa intervened looking anxiously her way. “Is Mo’nazar still alive?”

Her smile vanished and she took on a serious expression. “Yes. That castle belongs to him and his undead army.”

“Undead army?” Jo’navir yelled.

“That is correct,” she replied. “The boy is gifted when it comes to conjuration. Straight from his parent’s blood into his. If you boys want to save your friend, your only option is to get past his summons, and reach him at the top.”

Dexpa began to feel nervous, but Jo’navir was there to quickly snap him out of it with a light punch on the arm. “We’re going to save him,” he said confidently.

“I know you can do it. You are my sons,” Ko’zura added shaking her head as if saying goodbye. “Now go. You must free Mo’nazar.”

“We will. Goodbye mother,” Jo’navir said with a sad but determined face, nodding his head, and getting one last look at her before walking out the door.

Dexpa followed behind getting another glimpse as well before he never sees his mother again. "I love you," he said before turning around the leave.

"I love you, my son," she said proudly as Dexpa walked out of the room and joined Jo'navir outside.

As the three of them approached the castle, they were quickly met with a swarm of frozen colossi and frost atronachs running to defend the entrance door.

Dexpa started off with lightning cloak to keep them at a distance and chain lightning to damage the horde together with every cast. The frost atronachs fell to their knees allowing Jo'navir to clean some of them up. He swiped the head off one with his axe, and cast incinerate the melt away some of the others.

Vaskr handled his own, chomping off limbs of the frozen colossi and biting chunks of ice out of the frost atronachs, shredding them down to size.

Meanwhile, Dexpa started picking off the frozen colossi with his thunderbolt, exploding them from the inside and sending their bones flying in every direction. However, a massive frozen colossus managed to slip through the spells and get close to Dexpa, ignoring his lightning cloak which barely left scrapes on its bones.

But Jo'navir managed to land an incinerate, distracting it and melting a hole in its side. He came running over as fast as possible. Dexpa reacted by stepping away to make sure his lightning cloak wouldn't reach Jo'navir.

After gaining enough momentum in his sprint, Jo'navir slid across the dirt past the colossus using his horizontal momentum to slice off one of its legs off with his axe.

As it fell to his level, Vaskr took another chunk out of the hole making an even bigger opening.

Jo'navir finished it off with a final heavy swipe through the melted hole in its side cutting all the way through, sending both halves of the colossus falling to the dirt below.

"Only a few more!" Jo'navir said moving straight into action again at the guards sitting ahead of them. Vaskr followed his master closely behind giving him support.

Dexpa was about to join them but got distracted by something at the edge of his vision. He gazed up at the large window sitting on the top level of the castle, seeing a silhouette of a figure shrouded by the purple light in the room. He recognized the shape of the body immediately. He stared at them intensely, as they appeared to stare back.

“Dexpa!” Jo’navir called out, bringing his brother’s focus back to the action.

“Stand back!” Dexpa yelled back running to the scene.

Hearing the command, Jo’navir started to move in the other direction, gesturing to Vaskr. “Vaskr! Here!” The wolf swiftly came back to Jo’navir allowing Dexpa the space he needed.

Dexpa threw out an enormous and high-speed chain lightning connecting with the rest of the castle guards in front of them. It turned the frost atronachs to water vapor and the colossi to bones and dust on the ground.

“You should’ve done that earlier,” Jo’navir jested.

“Come on,” Dexpa said ignoring his joke and walking inside the front door of Mo’nazar’s house. “I’ll show you through.”

Remembering the right bookshelf, Dexpa approached it and pulled on the book titled “Dead Thrall.” The room clicked and the floor began to shake just like last time, as the hatch entrance slowly revealed itself.

“I forgot, you’d already been here,” Jo’navir said gazing it awe at the moving contraption.

They jumped inside and Dexpa went straight to the next bookshelf sitting in the corner of the cellar. “Help me pull this,” he said signaling to Jo’navir to pull from the other side. They moved it together revealing the hole in the wall.

They crawled to the end where the metal fence blocked the way and Dexpa shot it open with a thunderbolt, allowing the three of them to crawl through.

Jo’navir began to admire the red carpet, the blue lanterns, and the massive size of the hallways. Like last time, Dexpa took the left path, past the three prison cells full of defiled skeletons, and into the large smithing room with the master staircase behind it.

But as they turned the corner, they spotted something they never thought they’d see again.

Sitting at a forging station, Za’vanir sat hammering his steel greatsword against an anvil to sharpen it. As soon as he noticed the three of them entering the room, he got up from his station and stood to face them with his greatsword gripped between both hands.

“Father,” Dexpa said in a state of reassurance as he started approaching Za’vanir.

Jo’navir grabbed his shoulder, holding him back. “Look closer,” he said to Dexpa. Vaskr quickly caught on to the situation and began to growl at Za’vanir like a hungry dog.

“That’s not our father,” Jo’navir added still in disbelief himself.

Though he wielded the same armor and weapon, Za’vanir’s face and other exposed body parts were covered in mold and exposed scabs.

“I am nobody’s father. I belong to my master and no one else,” Za’vanir replied coldly and confidently.

“You’re really not in there anymore, are you?” Jo’navir said with a hopeless voice.

Za’vanir said nothing, but a laugh echoed through the halls as a familiar voice called out, “You almost fell for it! That would have been the perfect ending for you, traitor.”

“Mo’nazar,” Dexpa said disheartened. “Why are you doing this? What happened to you?”

“Oh, like you care!” Mo’nazar’s voice replied in a sudden rage. “You left me to die! Do you know how many years I had to go in that empty world, not knowing who I am!? You ruined everything!”

Jo’navir began to yell back, “We tried! But you weren’t...” though his words were interrupted by Mo’nazar.

“Silence! I don’t want to hear it. Maybe killing your own father will make you understand even a fraction of what you put me through. Za’vanir, kill them!” Mo’nazar ordered.

Suddenly, the cages in the hallway behind them opened up and the three skeletons inside them stood up and walked towards the smithing room, surrounding their party.

Dexpa turned around with Vaskr to face the skeletons, while Jo’navir stood waiting for Za’vanir to make his first move.

Vaskr jumped in first approaching one of the taller skeletons that appeared unarmed. It punched him in the body, but he bit onto the bone arm that hit him and pulled hard, throwing the bone down the hall.

The other two skeletons turned their attention towards Dexpa. One sat back charging up frost magic, while the other came running at him with a its greataxe.

Dexpa acted fast, casting a lightning cloak around his body, keeping the greataxe skeleton at a safe distance. He then started to charge up a chain lightning spell, but he stopped himself when he saw how close Vaskr still was to his targets.

His reaction was too slow though, as the skeleton in the back threw out an ice storm spell, sending a cloud of freezing mist over Dexpa's body. His movements were slowed dramatically, and his body began to feel numb forcing him to his knees.

Meanwhile Jo'navir made the first move against Za'vanir, shooting out a fireball at the ground to make him lose his footing and then a steady stream of flames to keep him at a distance. The fireball spell knocked him back, but the flames proved weak against his steel armor.

He continued walking through it inching closer to Jo'navir with his greatsword ready to attack. Realizing his strategy wasn't working, he pulled out his steel axe to parry the attack.

He knocked the sword away from his face and pushed Za'vanir back with his hands trying to get him back at a distance again.

Suddenly he could hear Dexpa calling out in pain. "Jo'navir! Shoot me with flames."

"What!?" Jo'navir said turning around seeing his brother's body coated in a thick layer of ice.

"Just do it!" Dexpa shouted once more.

Jo'navir finally obeyed, spreading a weak line of flames across Dexpa's frozen body. It had a quick effect, allowing Dexpa to stand on his feet again. Jo'navir turned back around seeing Za'vanir back in melee range preparing for a vertical swing.

He jumped to the side to dodge it and began running around the room, trying to get his range advantage back. Za'vanir followed him at a normal walking pace, taking his time.

Vaskr seemed to be handling the unarmed skeleton fine. It ripped off its limbs one by one, soon rendering it a helpless torso on the ground. He chewed away the rest until its body fell limp.

Dexpa, still recovering from the numbness of his cold body, slapped himself back to reality. But his lightning cloak was now starting to fade.

The skeleton with the greataxe took advantage of this, charging Dexpa with an overhand swing. Dexpa jumped backwards barely escaping the blow, and followed through with a thunderbolt to its ribcage, sending it slamming hard into the wall, shooting every bone of its body down a different direction in the hallway.

Jo'navir circled around the active forge with smoke blurring his vision of Za'vanir's face. Za'vanir finally became impatient of Jo'navir's retreat tactics and decided to leap across the forge swinging his greatsword diagonally for Jo'navir's head.

He ducked under the sword as it passed over him and reached his spell casting hand for Za'vanir's face. He grabbed it tight, jumping and pushing his mold-infested face into the hot coals of the forge, causing his black fur to catch fire. But he didn't stop there.

While he pressed his father's head into the forge, he casted flames spell directly into his skull causing him to scream out in pain as the fire enveloped him.

But hearing the painful sounds in his father's voice traumatized Jo'navir, causing him to loosen his hand. Za'vanir pushed Jo'navir out of the way, allowing him to get back on his feet again. His face was now completely unrecognizable.

Dexpa and Vaskr now had the frost mage skeleton cornered and outnumbered. Vaskr began charging, but the skeleton cast a frost cloak over itself, causing Vaskr to flinch back in pain when it got too close.

It began aiming another frost spell at Dexpa. A powerful one. As the ice spear began leaving its hand, Dexpa rolled to the side of the hallway to avoid it. It grazed him across waist, drawing a small amount of blood.

Dexpa caught himself at the end of the his roll with a hand on the wall, reaching his other forward and charging up an immensely powerful thunderbolt. The spell shot out piercing through the air, flying above Vaskr, and ramming into the skeleton, turning it to ashes and burnt bone shards on the red carpet.

He turned around the see how Jo'navir's fight was going, only to see him lobbing off Za'vanir's head with his steel axe. Their father's desecrated body fell to the floor, just like it did on the day of the Greymarch.

The head landed shortly after, splashing blood onto Jo'navir's leg armor. Jo'navir stood there breathing heavily, clearly in a state of distraught from having to slay a defiled version of his own father.

Vaskr sat beside him, rubbing his body against Jo'navir's leg to show affection. And Dexpa went to stand at his other side, leaving a hand on his shoulder to comfort him while looking at their father's body in silence.

"Aww you poor thing," Mo'nazar's voice echoed sarcastically. "Well at least you still have your mother, right? Oh wait," Mo'nazar said letting out a hysterical cackle.

Hearing his taunts, Dexpa and Jo'navir began to feel infuriated. The three of them left the scene, marching up the stairs. Dexpa lead them to the top level where the purple door sat at the end of a hallway.

He blasted the door open with a thunderbolt and went inside with Jo'navir and Vaskr next to him. He stepped onto the edge of the plaza analyzing his surroundings.

The stone arena was surrounded by sturdy stone pillars. And outside of that sat piles of bones at the edges of the room. In the center of the arena stood the flesh abomination they saw on the day of the Greymarch in the identical-looking plaza outside.

It had decaying leopard fur on random parts of its body, fleshy stubs for hands, dried blood in the cracks of its skin, and stood three times the normal size of a man with bulking artificial muscles to match.

And behind it sat Mo'nazar in his stone throne covered in purple cloth, with purple lanterns sitting on each side of him. The moonlight shined through the window behind him, lighting the stage.

"It took you five years to come back," Mo'nazar said gazing at Dexpa and Jo'navir with malicious intent. "A lot can happen in that time." Mo'nazar got out of his throne, taking his time and began casting a spell aimed at all corners of the room. "I'm going to make you feel exactly what I felt," he added with anger in his raspy voice.

"Mo'nazar, just listen to us," Jo'navir started to say.

"No need," Mo'nazar replied.

"Please, Mo'nazar," Dexpa said nervously stepping forward.

Mo'nazar flinched at his approach and finally let out his spell. Suddenly, the bones around the room began to react to it, slowly crafting themselves into a small army of bone colossi. They surrounded the party before they knew what was happening.

"Kill them!" Mo'nazar commanded, sitting back in his throne and watching the scene with his head resting against his fist.

The golems inched closer to the party closing the circle around them. Dexpa covered himself in a lightning cloak and began casting chain lightning left and right, careful not to hit too close to Vaskr and Jo'navir.

Vaskr and Jo'navir managed to slip through the mess heading straight for the flesh atronach. Vaskr bit at the ankles, while Jo'navir cast incinerate to keep it occupied.

But it shook Vaskr off its leg and began sprinting at Jo'navir. Holding its stubs above its head, it slammed the floor in front of him sending Jo'navir flying back into the circle of colossi.

Seeing Jo'navir now standing with him, Dexpa ceased his chain lightnings and switched to his single target thunderbolts. He obliterated the colossi one at a time, but two of them slipped through undetected.

One of which came towards Dexpa smacking him out of the plaza. He was injured, but he managed to endure the blow, getting to his feet, and killing it with another thunderbolt.

The other came towards Jo'navir with bone fists raised. Jo'navir threw out a fireball creating a blinding explosion around the creature's eyes, giving him the chance to slip between the colossus' legs cutting him down from behind with his axe. But as the creature fell to the floor, he could see Vaskr in the distance behind it still fighting with the flesh abomination.

Vaskr went for the stomach of the creature with another bite, but was caught midair and thrown to the ground at an intense speed.

Jo'navir rushed over to help, but before he could get there, the abomination raised its heavy arms and slammed them down again crushing Vaskr into the plaza floor. Vaskr's body was flattened and completely unresponsive.

"No!!!" Jo'navir screamed.

Finally finished with the colossi, Dexpa and Jo'navir charged the flesh abomination desperately trying to get it away from Vaskr.

Jo'navir cast incinerate over and over as Dexpa did the same with his thunderbolt. The only thing it could do was sit and block, but the spells were effectively ripping its flesh to bits.

“Ra’zita!” Mo’nazar called to the atronach casting a spell in the direction of Dexpa and Jo’navir.

Dexpa and Jo’navir reacted to the name that was called, ceasing their spells at the creature.

Below Dexpa, a frost rune appeared and began glowing brighter, ready to explode. Seeing the rune, Jo’navir turned around diving into Dexpa to push him out of the way. The explosion created a sheet of frost over Jo’navir’s back, while Dexpa remained untouched.

Dexpa attempted to scratch the ice off his back, but Jo’navir stepped away insisting he was fine. Jo’navir stood forward facing Mo’nazar now sitting side by side with his badly damaged flesh abomination on the other edge of the arena.

“You said Ra’zita?” Dexpa asked concerningly, now noticing the red kelp sitting in the abomination’s hair.

“That’s none of your concern,” Mo’nazar said with a scowl. He checked on Ra’zita’s wounds putting skin back into place with his hands. “All better. I won’t let them hurt you,” he whispered to his sister.

He faced the boys again, ready to join the fight. He started with an ice storm sending a shroud of frost between the brothers. They split apart dodging the fog and then began circling around opposite sides of the arena towards Mo’nazar.

Dexpa began casting a thunderbolt at Mo’nazar, while Jo’navir cast incinerate at Ra’zita’s head. Mo’nazar counteracted the thunderbolt with an icy spear creating an electric-frost explosion in its place.

Meanwhile, Jo’navir’s incinerate only angered the abomination who now left Mo’nazar’s side to charge at him on the other side of the arena. It came crashing down with its fists again, but Jo’navir stood his ground, managing to slice one of its arms off with his axe.

But Ra’zita’s fury only grew with that attack. She followed through with a kick, grazing Jo’navir’s shoulder and sending him backwards.

Dexpa continued shooting thunderbolts as he ran towards Mo’nazar. Instead of shooting more spells back, Mo’nazar dodged the attacks while shooting a wall of frost at the ground beneath Dexpa making him lose his balance and fall to the floor.

He took advantage of this, shooting an icy spear past Dexpa's head cutting open a small slit, forcing blood to drip down his face. He allowed Dexpa back on his feet waiting to see what he would try next, confidently welcoming the challenge.

However, their fight was put on pause as Jo'navir's fight continued.

Jo'navir cut open a mouth hole for Ra'zita with a swing of his axe forcing a painful scream out of her new lips.

Mo'nazar turned around in fear of what he might see. All he could do was witness the scene as Jo'navir brought Ra'zita to her knees hacking into her neck with his axe repeatedly until it finally came off and landed on the ground below her. The rest of her body sat still, but Jo'navir wasn't ready to take any chances. He sliced into her legs forcing her body to land on the ground and continued chopping into her other limbs.

"Get off of her!!" Mo'nazar yelled shooting out an ice storm at Jo'navir who was too preoccupied securing his kill. His body was overcome by a thin layer of frost, freezing him in place.

Mo'nazar rushed over to Ra'zita, while Dexpa did the same for Jo'navir.

Ra'zita's body parts refused to move. Mo'nazar leaned over her head looking for a response but received none.

Dexpa approached his brother cracking away at the ice layer with his claws. To his surprise, the ice came right off and fell onto the floor, freeing Jo'navir.

Jo'navir cast flames to melt the rest of the ice bringing him back to his feet.

Mo'nazar, seeing Jo'navir was now free, came to his senses, running back to the throne of the arena.

"It's two on one now, Mo'nazar. Please, we don't want to hurt you. Just come home with us," Jo'navir begged.

Mo'nazar looked angrier the longer he spoke. "This is my home." Then his anger quickly turned into an overconfident laugh as he looked at Vaskr lying dead next to him. "How about I even the odds?" he said aiming his hand at Vaskr's body and casting dead thrall.

Vaskr's body twitched and writhed. You could hear his bones cracking themselves back into place as his body began to stand again. Mo'nazar laughed uncontrollably as

Jo'navir stood in shock watching his wolf friend rise from the dead with his body in terrible condition.

Vaskr turned to Jo'navir and growled at him for the first time, ready to attack. "Get him wolf!" Mo'nazar commanded pointing at Jo'navir.

As the wolf ran at Jo'navir with malicious intent, Mo'nazar returned to his fight against Dexpa once again colliding a multitude of thunderbolts and icy spears.

Jo'navir backed away from Vaskr, holding his axe in both hands defensively. "Vaskr. It's me. Vaskr!" he screamed as the wolf approached. Vaskr was unphased as it jumped at Jo'navir latching its jaw around his axe and holding it tight as Jo'navir tried desperately to hold it off without hurting him.

Dexpa, realizing this was bad news for Jo'navir. He hid behind one of the pillars to avoid Mo'nazar while he shot out a large thunderbolt towards Vaskr.

Jo'navir, spotted the attack, moving Vaskr aside and making the thunderbolt smack into the wall instead. "Focus on your fight! I'll be fine!" Jo'navir yelled out.

Icy spears flew into the pillar Dexpa hid behind slowly breaking it apart. Dexpa was soon forced out of his cover and returned to his fight, shooting another barrage of thunderbolts. The first one landed, zapping Mo'nazar's shoulder and pushing him backwards, but he recovered swiftly, shooting his own barrage of icy spears to collide with the rest.

Dexpa's lightning proved to be stronger, slowly overpowering Mo'nazar who was forced backwards bit by bit.

Mo'nazar decided it was time to change tactics. He hid behind a pillar and cast as many frost runes around the arena as he could.

Seeing them appear below his feet, Dexpa dashed away dodging as many as he could, but got knocked away from the impact of the last one that appeared.

Vaskr let go of Jo'navir's axe and bit into his leg instead forcing Jo'navir to yell out in pain. He raised his axe above his head, enduring the bite as well as he could. "Please forgive me, Vaskr," he said as his eyes began to water.

He closed his eyes and swung his axe down as hard as he could, plunging it deep into the body of the wolf. He could feel the jaws loosen on his leg until they finally let go. A small thud followed, and as he opened his eyes, he saw Vaskr lying dead on the ground with his axe lodged in his spine. Jo'navir's lips shivered at the sight.

After a few moments, he gathered himself remembering his brother was still fighting. Standing up, he grabbed his axe pulling it out of Vaskr's body bringing his blood with it and staining the already blood-stained leg armor he wore from the Companions.

He returned to Dexpa, but witnessed his brother being pushed away from the frost rune explosion coating his body in ice.

He rushed to his rescue melting the ice with some more flames. Jo'navir grabbed Dexpa by the arm, pulling him off the ground and facing Mo'nazar once again who now stood in the center of the plaza.

"We can help you, Mo'nazar. If you would just let us," Dexpa begged again.

Mo'nazar was looking more serious than ever. "I don't need help," he said. He reached both hands out, palms up, and began charging an immensely powerful spell. His hands were overcome with ice and fog, and the floor below him began to frost over.

Jo'navir dashed forward with his axe in hand ready put an end to the spell. Dexpa seeing this, reached for his brother to pull him back. Though Jo'navir zoomed past him before he could do so and swung his axe for Mo'nazar's hands.

But Mo'nazar's spell was already fully charged. He threw his hands to the plaza floor spawning a blizzard that shot away from him with explosive force in every direction.

Some of the pillars surrounding him were frozen over while others were broken into pieces. Jo'navir, being close to the blast, was frozen completely solid and thrown back all the way towards Dexpa who caught him before he could hit the ground and break into pieces.

The blizzard was relentless, continuing to push him and Jo'navir away from the center of the arena. He could barely see Mo'nazar standing behind the storm that separated them.

"Jo'navir!" Dexpa cried as he tried clawing away at the ice encasing his brother. "Come on break. Break!!" he screamed at the ice.

He could see his brother inside the casing, with his eyes closed and mouth open. His hand was still attached to his axe which was frozen with him inside.

His back was to the wall now with Jo'navir's frozen body lying beside him. He covered his eyes trying to block the intense cold of the storm from reaching his face. His limbs were slowly becoming numb the longer he stood there.

Dexpa desperately threw thunderbolt after thunderbolt, trying to knock Mo'nazar out of the center, but the storm blocked his attacks preventing them from reaching Mo'nazar.

"This looks desperate," a voice called out.

"Sheogorath?" Dexpa asked in surprise.

"Yes, hello my champion. How are you? Oh wait! Don't say anything, I can already tell. How about you use this!" he said as a staff manifested itself in Dexpa's hands. "The Staff of Sheogorath I call it. Beautiful name, right? Thank you. It's still in the prototype stages so you never know what will come out of that thing. But anyways, you look like you could use a little fun, so go crazy with it!"

Dexpa gripped the staff trying not to let it go in the wind of the storm. He pointed it towards the eye of the storm and charged his energy through it releasing the spell hidden within.

"Hold!" a voice echoed around the room. Dexpa didn't recognize the voice, but he could feel the power being released from the staff shooting forward a freezing wind of his own redirecting the blizzard back to Mo'nazar.

Mo'nazar was struck by the winds and pushed out of the eye of the blizzard landing on the floor next to his throne chair.

Dexpa could see Mo'nazar now frozen just like Jo'navir was, but the voice came once more shouting, "Release!" Mo'nazar's body thawed immediately, as he stood there shivering against the stone of his throne.

Dexpa approached him slowly trying not to seem like a threat. He carefully kneeled in front of Mo'nazar waiting for his eyes to meet his own, which they soon did.

"You can trust me, Mo'nazar," Dexpa said softly reaching his hand out for him to grab.

Mo'nazar looked at Dexpa with eyes that were begging to be saved. But a headache quickly overcame him, forcing him to pull at his own hair as Molag Bal forced his way back in his mind. "Remember your pledge mortal. Kill them now or be sent back to the Soul Cairn."

"Don't make me go back there, please" Mo'nazar whimpered back to the voice squeezing his skull between his palms.

"Go back where?" Dexpa said confused at his words.

“This is your last chance my champion. Act now, or else!” Molag Bal yelled.

“I don’t want to go back!!!” Mo’nazar screamed, shaking the air of the room as his hands began to glow blue again.

Realizing what was about to happen, Dexpa sprinted away diving behind the nearest pillar for safety. Another blizzard was summoned blowing away the staff in Dexpa’s hand to the other side of the room. Massive lumps of ice began gradually ripping apart the pillar. Dexpa was stuck without any alternatives to counteract the blizzard.

Walking through the storm is clearly not an option. Separating from the pillar to reach the staff would mean an immediate death sentence from the lumps of ice swirling around Mo’nazar.

Dexpa peeked behind the pillar to find Mo’nazar in the eye of the storm. In the cloud of frost that surrounded him, he could make out Mo’nazar’s eyes which glowed a bright blue, shining through the blizzard fog. At his side, he could see a glowing green mace with thorns. And out of his head, he could see a silhouette of horns like that of a Daedra.

Recognizing the sight, Dexpa could practically hear Salazar’s words from his adventures shouting in his head. “Molag Bal!”

Remembering the size and power of the Molag Bal he saw in Coldharbour, Dexpa’s confidence was soon replaced with fear.

“Well now,” a new voice said in Dexpa’s direction. “I can’t have you dying this early.”

Dexpa looking around the room to find the source of the voice saw his brother’s eyes now beginning to glow green through the thick layer of ice covering them.

Suddenly, the ice burst into shards and flew away, freeing Jo’navir from the ice prison. His body began to float off the ground unnaturally. His eyes grew a brighter green, summoning a green bubble around him with tendrils waving outside of it in every direction. Hermaeus Mora now had full possession of Jo’navir.

“Take this gift, my champion,” he said summoning a book out of thin air and placing it in Jo’navir’s hands. “The Oghma Infinium,” he added. “There is still much to learn of the mortal and his scroll. Protect him.”

Jo'navir meditated for a moment reading the book, which now floated open in front of him inside of the barrier. His hands began to burn with red-hot flames, which soon coated his entire body.

He finally let his legs touch the ground and began walking forward. Keeping the bubble around him as a barrier, he approached the blizzard without resistance, inching closer to Mo'nazar every second.

The pillar Dexpa hid behind was quickly being carved away, revealing his body more and more to the blizzard. He covered his hands around his head as he watched Jo'navir continue his approach towards Mo'nazar.

The tentacles outside of the barrier whipped away the thick chunks of ice flowing towards Jo'navir, as the barrier itself warded off the push of the storm.

The barrier was finally beginning to crack, but Jo'navir was already close enough to the eye of the storm, ready to use his new spell. The Oghma Infinium vanished and the flames around his body gathered between his two hands into an intense ball of heat.

He raised his hands into the air with the ball of fire, and he cast the spell to the ground below him creating a vicious firestorm shooting out in every direction.

The firestorm broke through his own barrier exploding outwards inside of the blizzard, turning the shards of ice and frost swirling around the room into water vapor and mist.

As the mist subsided, Mo'nazar was left standing with the mace in his hand; eyes and horns still glowing blue.

"This body can't handle much more. I have high expectations for you mortal," Hermaeus Mora told Dexpa using Jo'navir's mouth. "I look forward to seeing what you and that scroll can do."

Dexpa looked confused, not knowing what he meant.

Jo'navir's green eyes finally went back to normal as well, but he was quickly met with a spiked mace soaring into his stomach and sending him flying into the pillar. His back slid down it, leaving a trail of blood in its wake.

Mo'nazar stood laughing with his hand pulling back from the throw. His voice was mixed with the voice of the Daedric Prince who possessed him. "That's what happens when you stand too close!" He continued laughing menacingly.

Seeing what happened, Dexpa's mind felt like it was shutting down. He didn't know how to react to his brother as he sat against the pillar. Though the wound looked severe, he noticed Jo'navir was still conscious.

Holding his waist with one hand and looking up at Dexpa, he said breathlessly, "Finish the rest." His limbs collapsed to the floor as his eyes closed.

Before Dexpa could mourn, Mo'nazar interrupted. "One more to go!" he yelled as his hysterical face turned back into an anxious and furious one. Dexpa brought his attention to Mo'nazar for one more stare down.

"I'm going to bring you back," Dexpa declared. "I don't care what you say."

Mo'nazar reacted with a twitch of his eyebrows. He tried his best to ignore Dexpa, burying away his feelings.

His hands trembled before becoming coated in frost magic once again. "You should've stayed away," he said beginning to charge up his final spell.

Remembering what Hermaeus Mora said to him, Dexpa pulled out the scroll trying to find his connection to it. He tried charging his magicka into it, but it didn't seem to work like a staff. He then tried charging it with his lightning, just like he did with the time wounds.

But this time, instead of him unraveling the scroll, the scroll began to glow and unravel itself detaching from Dexpa's hands and floating in the space in front of him.

As his eyes glossed over the unfamiliar runes on the scroll, his whole body began to glow along with it.

Following soon after, lightning began to flow out of the scroll and into Dexpa, covering his entire body. Between his palms was a ball of sparks, growing exponentially fast. He held onto it tightly careful not to let go before the vicious lightning could escape him.

Mo'nazar's body emitted the same effect, but with frost magic, which he concentrated between his two hands. He cupped his hands around the rapidly growing ball of frost and brought it back behind himself preparing to shoot it forward.

Simultaneously, both of their bodies began emitting an intense wind which blew in the direction of the other. Though they both remained resolute in their stances, the winds began shaking the large window and blowing bones and bodies across the room. Jo'navir's body remained stuck to the pillar, his fur moving in sync with the fierce winds.

After giving the last of its energy to Dexpa, the scroll fell to the floor. He mirrored Mo'nazar, bringing the huge ball of lightning behind himself, now ready to throw it.

Mo'nazar went first, shooting his forward, launching a powerful and steady flow of frost and ice chunks towards Dexpa.

Dexpa released his spell in front of him in the same way, launching a powerful and steady flow of deadly lightning towards Mo'nazar.

They both let out a shout as they fired, though their voices were quickly silenced by the much-louder collision of the two massive beams of energy.

As they made contact, the window shook even more violently, the lanterns fell to the floor behind Mo'nazar, and the door behind Dexpa flew open with a crash, sending it off its hinges.

The channeled beams fought back and forth as Dexpa and Mo'nazar pumped all their magicka into their last attack.

But soon, Dexpa's lightning storm began to swallow up the other spell, crawling its way towards Mo'nazar.

As it finally made contact, it overcame Mo'nazar, coating the entire upper half of his body and shooting through the large window behind him, sending glass falling to the dirt outside. The beam continued moving until it disappeared into the night sky, which for a few seconds lit up a beautiful purple before fading back to normal.

Dexpa felt completely drained, almost too tired to keep standing. But he walked forward anyways to see the damage he had done.

Mo'nazar still stood in place, and while the bottom half of him remained untouched, his torso and face were bleeding badly and were smoking as if he was burned.

He got down on his knees and shifted his weight backwards, leaning against the throne beside him. The transparent horns on his head faded away and his eyes returned to normal.

Dexpa, breathing heavily, managed to trudge over to his friend kneeling in front of him. "Mo'nazar," he said with his lips shaking as he stared at Mo'nazar's burnt face. "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry! I should've held back."

"I was going to kill you," Mo'nazar replied, trying to breath normally. His eyes widened slightly, showing subtle signs of feeling remaining in his face.

Dexpa analyzed Mo'nazar's injuries, while Mo'nazar sat there feeling defeated. He tried not to make eye contact with Dexpa.

"You're going to make it right?" Dexpa asked fearfully.

Mo'nazar didn't want to reply. His guilt was overcoming him.

"Please say something, Mo'nazar," Dexpa added.

There were a few more pauses before Mo'nazar finally decided to reply, finally giving in to his guilt.

"I think so," Mo'nazar replied.

Dexpa looked relieved.

"Think again mortal," Molag Bal's voice shouted from within Mo'nazar's body. Dexpa could hear his voice now. "You've failed me and for that, you will be punished."

"No please!" Mo'nazar said to the voice as his body started to visibly shake. "Please don't."

"Silence!" Molag Bal's voice replied. "This is what happens when you disobey me, mortal. I granted you my gift, and you still lost. I have no need for someone as weak as you. Enjoy your journey into the Soul Cairn."

"I can get stronger! Just give me another..." but before Mo'nazar could finish his words, his eyes rolled back into his skull and his spirit was visibly sucked out of his body and sent away to the Soul Cairn.

"Mo'nazar, wait!" Dexpa screamed shaking his head to wake him up. But his attempts were pointless. Mo'nazar's body sat soulless against his throne.

Looking back to his brother, Jo'navir was now awake, but appeared to be in critical condition. Dexpa crawled over to him trying to desperately tend to his wounds. Pushing against his waist to stop the bleeding.

"You can still save him, Dexpa," Jo'navir whispered under his breath. "Hermaeus Mora," he said taking breaths in between each word, "says you can still find him. In the Soul Cairn."

Dexpa alternated between both of Jo'navir's eyes, trying to understand what he meant. "What is that? What does that mean?" but Jo'navir was unresponsive.

"It means you need my help," Sheogorath's voice echoed in Dexpa's head. "I've always wanted to pay a visit to the Soul Cairn. It's one of those places that are fun to visit, but not to live in. You know what I mean?" he said. "Anyways, I'll help you get your friend back. Just go grab onto him and I'll send you where you need to go to find him."

Dexpa crawled back over Mo'nazar's body holding both of his hands in his own and closing his eyes.

"This'll only hurt for a second. Have fun!" Sheogorath jested.

Dexpa could feel his soul leaving his body and being sent somewhere else as his body was left holding onto Mo'nazar. In the next second, he was in the Soul Cairn as a ghost.

The land was covered in a much taller and denser fog now. Dexpa could hear the lightning striking the ground from afar but couldn't see anything more than an arm's reach away from himself.

He continued walking forward through the mist blindly for several minutes. He was beginning to lose himself, but his legs kept moving.

Eventually, he noticed a silhouette of a figure standing within the fog in front of him. He approached the figure, revealing the ghostly body of Mo'nazar. "You're," Dexpa began to say not knowing what he wanted to say next.

Mo'nazar turned around to look back at Dexpa. The two of them began to approach each other step by step until they were within reaching distance.

Out of instinct, Dexpa reached his hand out for Mo'nazar to grab. Mo'nazar knew what to do, as he finally grabbed on linking their two phantasmal bodies together.

"Alright, I'm pulling you out!" Sheogorath's voice echoed through the Soul Cairn.

Suddenly, Dexpa could feel his ghostly body being taken away, pulling Mo'nazar with it.

His vision went black for a bit, but then his eyes slowly opened, revealing Mo'nazar sitting in front of him.

Their hands were still connected, and soon Mo'nazar followed in example, opening his eyes to see Dexpa sitting in front of him.

“Hey,” Mo’nazar whispered wearily, beginning to smile through the cracks in his face.

“Mo’nazar,” Dexpa said in disbelief with tears in his eyes as he admired Mo’nazar’s signs of life. He went in to embrace his friend holding him tight and crying onto his shoulder.

“Ow, come on,” Mo’nazar said almost laughing despite the pain. He couldn’t move his arms to return Dexpa’s embrace, but he was livelier than Dexpa expected him to be.

“What about Molag Bal?” Dexpa asked.

Mo’nazar looked around the room, waiting for a response. Suddenly, his face was overcome with excitement. “I died!”

Dexpa looked concerned for his friend. “Yeah, you did,” he said.

“No, I died! That was the deal. Serve until death.” Mo’nazar began to laugh as much as he could in his weakened state. “I can’t hear him anymore! Or feel him!”

Dexpa smiled gleefully. Seeing that Mo’nazar was fine, he swiftly turned his head around to see Jo’navir who was once again conscious but breathing heavily.

He crawled over to his brother without a second thought trying to move his face to keep him awake, but his eyes were slowly fading to a close as his breathes took longer to come out.

“Jo’navir! We made it. Please don’t close your eyes! Look at me!” he screamed in a panic. But Jo’navir continued to fade into unconsciousness.

Dexpa tried thinking of spells that he could use to help Jo’navir, but he had none. He thought to himself, “I wish mother taught me restoration magic, maybe then...” but his thoughts interrupted themselves at the word.

“Mother,” Dexpa whispered to himself, reaching into his bag to pull out the Amulet of Mara that she left on her body.

He first tried applying the amulet to Jo’navir’s body, but alone, it seemed to do nothing. His next attempt was to wear it, but that did nothing by itself either.

He then tried pointing his hands at Jo’navir’s body with the thought of healing him. And like a miracle, his hands began glowing white like his mother’s did when she would use her healing magic.

Dexpa noticed the glowing around his hands and began to focus even more, closing his eyes and thinking only of healing Jo'navir.

To his surprise, Jo'navir's wound began to close slowly, stopping the blood from flowing out. The look in his eyes returned next, as he looked at Dexpa with a weak smirk. "You never told me you could do that."

He looked down at Dexpa's healing hands. "Just like mother," he said. The strength in his voice was growing and soon, he was back to normal.

"Thank you, Dexpa," Jo'navir said looking past him to where Mo'nazar laid. He signaled Dexpa with a shake of his head nodding towards Mo'nazar. Dexpa caught on to his gesture, releasing his spell, and using it on Mo'nazar instead.

As he cast healing hands over Mo'nazar's charred body, the black marks began to fall off revealing sensitive skin underneath, and the cuts on his face sealed up.

Mo'nazar let it happen without speaking, enjoying the feeling of rejuvenation flowing through his body.

The realization that Dexpa had somehow managed to keep both Mo'nazar and Jo'navir alive began to finally settle in, like a delayed reaction. More tears began pouring out of his eyes again and he sat by himself crying tears of happiness with his head buried in his hands.

After a few seconds he could feel a hand on his back. He looked behind himself to see Jo'navir patting his back to bring him comfort. And in the next second, Mo'nazar appeared on his other side, with his hand on Dexpa's shoulder with a face that said, "Everything is going to be alright."

"Oh, I love a happy ending," Sheogorath said pretending to cry along in Dexpa's head.

They helped Dexpa to his feet as the three of them now faced out the broken window looking into moonlight on the horizon.

"There's a lot more out there, y'know," Jo'navir said.

Mo'nazar chuckled adding, "Yeah, maybe it's finally time we leave this village."

Dexpa admired the horizon with his brother and best friend standing on each side of him. It felt like forever since he'd been able to relax. He almost forgot what it was like to feel at ease.

Dexpa gazed further over the horizon with a proud smile and began to open his mouth with a sigh of triumphant relief.

“Let’s get going then.”