

Heavy thuds sound from down the corridor into the small room which houses Elara's cell. Elara turns to Raven, a puzzled look slowly spreading on her face. Raven then snaps to the sound of the footsteps, his brow furrowed and mouth slightly agape. Behind them, the infected demon they just bested was already healing, faster than any Twisted they had encountered before. From the dark corridor emerges a small, yet imposing figure, a large black cape billowing behind him, intricate and well adorned platemail armor, and a glint from a metallic mask upon his face. The figure pauses briefly in the doorway, then steps deeper into the room. As he enters, the cell's overhead light shines onto his armor and reveals the figure fully.

The armor has pulsating dark fleshy tendrils over most of it; the arms, legs, torso, and even some of the mask. His mask had a demonic grin carved into the metal, and eyeholes that seemed to sink back into the head of the wearer. Dark voids lay where eyes should have been. Dried blood was spattered about the armor and mask, in both big and small splotches.

"It seems that our resident prisoner has been saved by a guardian angel. How quaint." the figure says with a taunting tone. From behind the pair, the Twisted demon shuffles around.

"My lord," the demon says, kneeling low. "It is an honor to have you bless us with your presence." Raven looks back to the speaking demon, then over to Elara. His muscles were tightening and his breathing shifted into more shallow breaths, the tension palpable. It was well known to both Raven and Elara, the Twisted don't bow down to anyone.

The figure looks down to the kneeling demon. "You are a most honorable warrior, King of the Demons, but I request of you to leave the room so I may deal with the vermin present." With a quick nod, the demon runs down the corridor, leaving Raven and Elara in the now claustrophobic room.

"What, are you some sort of king to those *things*? Kings don't often deal with matters on their own," Raven presses, but beneath the bravado of his cocky tone lies a desperate hope it would get them out of the situation.

“Well since you asked so kindly, I believe that yes I am a king of sorts to them. And you, dear angel and dearest descendant of the Maine family, are trespassing on my kingdom.” The figure, the King, sneers. “And seeing as how I disdain those who trespass on my property, as well as loathe the Maines, I will be forced to remove you.”

“And how do you plan to do that? Surely you’re aware fighting two on one is unfavorable to you, and I doubt your *soldiers* could get here in time.” Elara rebuttals. Deep down she has the same apprehension that Raven seems to have. This new adversary is stronger than any they had fought previously, whether among the Twisted or otherwise.

“I propose a game then. A game of both skill and power. The rules are simple, if both of you land three combined blows upon my person, I will concede and you may end me as you see fit,” the King explains, looking them both up and down. Even through the voids that replaced eyes, they could tell he was scanning every minor detail.

“But if I render either one of you unable to fight, I get to keep that person as a servant and the other may never lay a hand against me.”

The walls of the spirit realm hold fast. Wraith slams against the invisible border as he watches the interaction between the Twisted and Elara unfold. Taug simply sighs. “My daughter is strong, you know. Just because she’s a woman doesn’t mean she can’t fight.” he states matter-of-factly.

“Do you not see that down there! That guy’ll kill both of them!” Wraith screams in retaliation. Since he met the strange woman, he has seen how powerful she can be. Yet even with how powerful he can tell she is, he knows when someone is outclassed. “Plus, I still wanted to ask her out!” Wraith follows up quickly.

Emakamay chuckles. “You do realize that technically, as you are my great grandson and she is the grandchild of my adoptive son, you are cousins right? And as far as the Corruption is aware, you two are siblings.” Wraith looks at Emakamay, the man of legend, in shock. The door

back to the mortal realm looked significantly more appealing in that moment. He could save Elara, his apparent cousin.

Taug steps between the door and Wraith. “I wouldn’t recommend doing that if I were you. That King fellow might be problematic. Even more so than Constantine was...”

“Fine, we’ll play your game, as long as you agree to it being only the three of us, specifically you, Elara, and myself. No outside help.” Raven asserts, his head reaching down to the pommel of his sword. Elara channels her will, summoning the Blade of Vitold to her hand.

“Then it’s a deal!” The King laughs then immediately springs into action. In an instant, he was between Elara and Raven, his hands having those fleshy tendrils come out in the shape of claws. Jumping into the air, Elara next brings out the Force of the Creators from within, granting her the same inhuman abilities her father had. In the corner of her eye, she sees Raven charging in.

Time slows. The King watches as Elara brings her blade down, holding his hand in preparation to catch her arm. Looking to his left, the angel was blazing in. The Sword of Sealing would prove problematic. He lifts and then promptly slams his heel back down, causing a shockwave to tear through the earth towards Raven. While his attention is turned to Raven, a sudden and sharp pain tears down his extended arm. A pain akin to being cut.

Snapping his vision to Elara, he sees the shimmer of a near invisible sword coming out of thin air that had struck him. As he stops focusing on his skill and time sped back up, Elara falls towards the King as Raven is sent crashing into a wall with a dull thud.

The King catches Elara out of thin air, grabbing her by the face and using her own momentum to slam her into the concrete floor with a sickening crunch. As he raises his hand from her battered face, blood pouring from her nose and out from behind her head. The impact

from both Elara and Raven caused the floor and wall to start to crack profusely, small bits of rubble and debris falling to the ground.

Pausing for a moment, the King looks from his hand to the battered woman at his feet, then to the mangled angel in the wall. "I cannot lie, I had expected you both to be stronger. One hit for each of you, and only a small scratch on my own arm to show for it. So much for the Maine family." He says, stomping on Elara's abdomen.

"You get off her..." Raven groans from the wall. "I'll-" he starts to continue, before being cut off. A fleshy tendril shoots from the ground, impaling Raven through the chest and pinning him to the wall.

Elara couldn't breathe. The cold concrete pressed against her back, and blood leaking from her body. It was supposed to be the Blood of the Creators, but it wasn't. It was supposed to heal, but it wasn't. *Why... aren't I healing?* She asked, yet no voice came from her mouth. A flash entered her mind, visions of destroyed vine and tendril covered buildings. People with vines protruding from their eyes and mouths, limbs twisting in unnatural ways. People infected with the Twisted.

She looked over to where Raven landed, seeing the King standing over him. The tendril impaled through him. Whatever they were saying was muffled beyond anything that she could make out. The scene reminded her of her past. Her other team, the team that was slaughtered by Emulemay. It reminded her of her father, before he was decapitated and pushed off the cliff.

"Get out of here, this is about to get worse. I feel it." Taug had said, moments later his head was taken off his shoulders. The snap of the clown's fingers. His deranged face standing behind Taug.

"I got your back. Don't worry 'bout a thang." Eizen had said before Emulemay showed up. She remembered clearly the fear on both their faces. It clung to her like a moth to a blazing pyre. There was Akamamay, too. Emulemay's Reality Cutter ability swiftly ended Akamamay.

Her entire team reduced to pools of blood and motionless bodies. And in Akamamay's eyes laid the same sadness that laid in everyone else's. Both scenes replayed themselves over and over in Elara's mind, the fear, the sadness, and the pain etched eternally in her mind.

Elara wouldn't let it happen again. She wouldn't let those close to her get hurt let alone killed. Rage bubbled from a depth she didn't know she had, a primal claw reaching out to grab the strings of her soul and pulling them like a puppeteer controlling a puppet. Her father had described the feeling of rage that is unearthed when the Creators reach out to take over. A feeling that against all warnings she had, felt incredibly tempting. Elara clenches her fist, allowing the new surge of rage to flow through her. "You... I will tear you limb from limb..." she looks over her shoulder, black liquid filling her eyes and seeping out of her wounds. Her voice was eerily calm, devoid of any semblance of emotion or any shred of humanity she might've possessed prior.

Her eyes lock onto the Kings. "I'll make you wish you were dead."