

Shattered Darkness

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What is life? Why are we here? What is our purpose? Many ask themselves these questions at least once in their lifetime, but some ask them more than others...

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Chapter 1 - Shattered Darkness: Prologue

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desolate plain liveable...'

Scenes suddenly begin to flash by, all in rapid succession. Lush forests, lightly colored and tinted in darkness, and great cliffs with a black sea smashing against the solid rock wall below. Rising above it, mountains, deserts, plains, and hills come into view, all of it with a dark background. The scenes are mysteriously lit in a faint glow, though there is no sun, moon, or stars.

'After this was done, the great priest set about creating beings to inhabit this place, using the awesome power given to him. These 'beings' took many forms. That of humans, animals, strange mixtures of both, and more. The priest gave the beings one purpose, and one purpose only. To guide the souls of the dead to their afterlife. He began to create Guides for every person, and every status. He bestowed on them power that no other creatures could even begin to imagine, and gave them the potential to grow, and get stronger even still.'

The scenes speed by again, though now, new figures are appearing everywhere. Small furry creatures, large strange beings, and human like people donning great weapons of power. Above all this, a large orb had appeared in the sky, a moon, which further lit all below it. The beings continued to flash by, never once seeing the same one twice, as they go on and on to more, each new and different, but somehow exactly the same.

'The great priest had no family in the world of the living, and so gave his entire life to his creations. He treated them like the children he never had, giving them what they needed, teaching them the ways of the worlds, and showing them discipline when it was required. But, the priest knew that even though he was given the power to create the Guides, he was still a mortal man. He would not live forever like the beings he created, but he still had so much to do to complete his task! So, the priest decided to take on an apprentice. Only a person that had the right heart and mind could wield the power of the Gods, so the priest had to search long and hard before he found one with potential.'

In a darkened field, tall grass waving in a soft breeze, stand two human-like figures. Closer now, the taller, older looking person seemed to be directing the shorter, younger person in a series of movements. Executing them perfectly, the man brings his hands together, and a small ball of light erupts into his hands. Trying to do the same, the boy goes through the ritual, but fails to create the ball. Eyes and face down-cast, the young boy slouches, depressed at his failure. Placing a comforting hand on his shoulder, the man shows the boy how to do it again.

'Taking in a young boy who had worked on one of the many fishing boats that sailed the Nile, the priest showed him what he could do, if he was taught. The boy was fascinated with the Guides the priest had already made, with the power given to him, so he agreed to devote his life to this task, as the priest did. They worked day and night, trying to teach him how to use his new power. Even though he tried, the boy could not find the one thing he needed to succeed. The priest understood, and gave him time. Then, when he was training himself one night...'

Still in the same spot as before, the field now seemed darker, if such a thing was possible. This time though, the boy was practicing alone, trying as hard as he could to do what his Master could so easily. After yet another failure, the boy fell to his knees, tears threatening to spill over onto his cheeks. But then the grass to his left swayed slightly, and a small furry creature came into view. It looked into the boy's almost teary face with its big purple and yellow eyes, and gave a reassuring croon. Recognizing it as his favorite of his Master's Guides, the boy rose to his feet to give one more try.

With his friend looking on, the boy went through the needed routine with more confidence than ever before. Completing, and initializing the final step, the boy felt something well up inside him. Staring in amazement, a ball of light overwhelmed his open palms, and bounced down to the ground before him.

Kneeling before his first success, the boy did not notice a figure coming up behind him until a hand rested upon his shoulder. Jumping at the touch, the boy's gaze traveled up, to be met by the joyous eyes of his Master. Turning his attention back to his ball of light, the boy reached out, putting his hands on either side of it. Closing his eyes, and tilting his head back slightly, the boy concentrated. The light between his hands vibrated, then started to take a rough form. A small but, lengthily body, little head, and overly large wings took shape. Its edges settling, the light around the creature slowly died away, until it was left with bright yellow skin. Opening its bright green eyes for the first time, it smiled widely before letting out a happy cry, and leaping into his creator's open arms.

'From that point on, the priest began to see that he needed to train more than one apprentice to finish the mission given to him by the Gods. For, the priest himself, had done almost all he could do, so instead schooled his apprentice on every point of the beings they created. And, as time went on, he noticed that his student's creations were different than his in many ways. For one, the boy created many aquatic type Guides, and the priest reasoned that this was because the boy had lived most of his life on a river. And, being on the large expanse of the Nile, saw many things, one of which being a colossal battle of Egypt's boundaries. From those memories, the boy created a small amount of fighter Guides.'

The landscapes move by again, though this time, different things are seen first. The many stretches of dark water, once barren and un-inhabited, where now teeming with life. Some creatures fly above the rolling waves, and those of the water leap up to meet them. Then in a lush grassland, loud clangs and stifled grunts resound over the gentle rolling hills. Into view comes two humanoid beings, sparing together with glinting swords, and lightning quick daggers.

'As time went on, the priest grew older and weaker, though he was able to take on many apprentices. The second he found lived in a caravan that roamed the desert. He created most earthen and plant guides, from his many years walking the hot desert sands, and camping in the rare and precious oasis' that gave life to its creatures. Next came a young and steady stable hand, who gave life to many animal based creatures. His last apprentice though, was the hardest to acquire. When walking through a market one day...'

A fantastic, beautiful light suddenly flashes all around, totally alien to all the other surroundings. When the light recedes, the dark world has been replaced with a busy market, sand and dirt swirling around the ground and the hot sun shining down. There are people all around, all bustling about their own business. In the middle of it all walks an elderly man. He seems to need a cane's aid, but walks proudly without one. Beside him, but slightly behind, is a strong looking young man, matching the elder stride for stride.

Following behind the two, they enter the main area of the market. The place is cut in two; on one side stand stall after stall of merchandise and food, and on the other, there is a slave market. Shuffling up to a stall, the elder man looks through the variety of sandals being sold there, while the young man stands behind with his arms crossed, looking about.

When a sharp cry pierces the air, the young man's head snaps around to look at the stage used to show off the slaves. A small female slave was fighting against a guard on it, desperately trying to get away. The guard grabbed hold of her wrist in a bruising grip, mouth moving in silent curses. Turning as well, the elder man's eyes widen when he see's the girl. Coming up behind the other man, he says something to him, slips a bag of gold into his hand, and pushes him forward with a surprisingly strong hand. Nodding his head, the young man hurries towards the slave stage.

Pushing through the crowds, he gets there just as the guard is raising a hand to strike her. The girl turned her head away, eyes squeezed shut and free arm in front of her face, bracing herself for the on-coming blow. But before it could happen, the man leapt onto the stage, and grabbed the hand as it started to come down. With narrowed eyes and mouth pulled to a tight line, he thrust the bag of gold into the guard's hand, while taking that of the girls. The young man glared into the face of the guard, daring him to object, or intervene. Backing down, the guard huffed slightly as he turned out the bag, counting the coins.

Turning back to the frightened girl, he felt her cringe as he placed his hands around her slim waist. Picking her up, he jumped down off of the stage and set her gently on the ground. Pulling away, he offered her his large hand, and seeing it, she turned her scared face to look up at him. Upon noticing his warm smile and gentle eyes, a tentative smile crept to her face as well. Taking his hand with her much smaller one, she followed him through the crowd, back to the older man. Smiling down to her too, he took her other hand, and they left the market together.

'And that is how the ageing priest found his last student. Though his colleagues did not agree with him on the fact of training a female slave in the art of being a Messenger of the Gods, the great priest taught her everything he knew, and she learned from the other apprentices as well. Being a slave for quite some time, she had trouble making her own new creatures, so she turned to them for help. Telling her stories, and memories, greatly expanded her imagination, and only a few weeks after she was found, she was creating many new kinds of Guides. She herself came up with all female Guides, and a few male ones as well.'

In a small clearing in a dark forest, a little stream running through that began with a small waterfall, stand three figures. They are all female, the taller two look strangely alike, and the smaller one the girl from

before. The tall women wear identical robes, except for their color, and the girl wears loose priest's robes. The look alike's begin to chant, to sing, and small lights flicker in the trees. From them, small and large fairy-like beings appear, some with wings, some with not. The fairy, pixie, and children like people dance around the first three, singing along with the two inside the circle. The little girl laughs, and joins in the dance.

'And so, though the great priest had tried his hardest, he was still a mortal man, and was not able to see his task through to completion. When he died, every single being created was in attendance to guide him to his afterlife, bidding him a final farewell. But before his spirit had left his body, the priest had passed the leadership of his mission on to his first apprentice, the boy, now man, from the river. Taking the role with honor and pride, he promised to finish what his Master had started. But peace between the four apprentices' was not to be, for the second, the boy, now man, from the desert caravan grew jealous of the first's given leadership, and began plotting against the New Master.'

Still in the dark realm, it seems like someone has pushed the fast-forward button, and it has gotten stuck in place. Images are flashing by, at times so fast you cannot see what is going on at certain times. One of the first scenes shows three grown men playing with, and teaching, a young girl. In a few seconds, they had grown older, but all still in their prime. Again the scene changes, and this time there is only one man. Sitting on the darkened ground, he studies from many tomes, and tries many spells. After failing a more complex one, he throws the old books he had been holding away, and slams his fists into the hard earth. Muttering words under his breath, he gets up and stalks away, eyes glinting with rage and hatred.

'After many weeks of planning, the jealous apprentice finally had his chance. The New Master was out by himself in the world of shadow...'

On an empty plain that was shrouded in shadows, a man walked alone, save for the medium-sized red bird sitting on his shoulder. The two seemed to be conversing as they went.

'Coming up behind the Master, the apprentice issued his challenge for power. Though, he was reluctant to agree to this, not willing to use the power within him to fight. But the apprentice had already started his assault.'

Hearing a brief shout, the man turns around to see a long time friend of his. Beginning to give a greeting, he was cut off by another shout, this one holding the challenge. The Master stepped back, surprised at what was said. He reached out his arms, hands open, to try and talk sense to his friend, but it was no use. He had already started reciting a spell. A ball of light was forming in his hands, but it was different then usual. Instead of pure, white light, this ball's center pulsed with a red glow, that faded into darkest black all around.

'The Master knew well the spell the other was conjuring, though he would do nothing. The old master

has taught them about this spell, but had made them swear never to use it. It combined the power of creation with the power of destruction, and he did not wish to break the promise he had made to his master. But then, something happened that forced him to act.'

Leaping from his shoulder, the red bird ruffled its wings and lunged forward, trying to stop what the jealous man was doing. Pointing to the bird, the man smiled an almost evil grin. The ball of colored light before him crackled, before shooting out a lance of power that looked like a bolt of lightning. The bird screeched as the bolt struck its body, the light exploding on impact. The bird fell, its feathers slightly charred and smoking.

A cry escaping his throat, the Master ran to the fallen beast, and kneeling beside it, picked it up gently. Holding it tightly, he rose and faced his old friend, now enemy. A new fire burning in his eyes, he began chanting and moving in correspondence with the spell as well. A light burst into existence before him, burning brighter than even that of his rival. This ball pulsed in white, changing into an iridescent blue at the center.

*'What his jealous rival had done was the last straw. He had purposely injured, **hurt**, one of the very beings they now lived to create. To make matters worse, the creature had been hurt trying to stop the other, to protect **him**. He had to do something if the other was willing to go that far. Using everything he had inside, and maybe even a little bit more, he created something to battle back what the other was creating.'*

Reciting the last of the spell, both floating orbs let out a burst of energy, a shock-wave that blew both people back. The balls expanded until they were as large as the two people, and getting even bigger. They both began to take on a very similar shape. Becoming more defined, the light receded to reveal scaly hides of black and white; a long tail, four powerful legs, and two spanned wings on each. The one before the apprentice opened its eyes to reveal ruby red set in an ominous black face, and it roared, claws flashing and tail turning up dust. An equally powerful sound was emitted from the beast facing it, the one that stood before the New Master. This one's ocean blue eyes gleamed with determination as its white scales glowed fantastically.

'And so began the first battle of these beasts. The two powerful Dragons, one created for destruction, the other for protection, fought for their individual Masters. After a harsh battle that lasted many hours, the good won out over the evil.'

The black Dragon fell, unable to rise, while the white stood above it and gave a cry of victory, before backing down to stand behind his Master. Full of anger beyond compare, the apprentice waved his hand, and disappeared from sight. Reserving to give him one chance, the New Master let him go where he would, before turning his attention to the fallen beast before him. It had hurt him greatly to watch them fight, and he refused to let the power of his master be used and wasted.

After healing his white Dragon, he knelt before the other creature's head, and healed its body and mind,

erasing all evil put there. After it awoke, he gave both orders to do as the other Guides did, and bid them farewell. Taking the bird, now healed, that had originally protected him, he walked away from the place of the battle, never looking back.

'But the apprentice was far from done. Before he even challenged the New Master, he had already created a new creature. But for this one, he wrapped it up as it was coming into being, forcing it into a solid state of pre-maturity. In doing so, he allowed the creature within to gain more power after every new being thereafter was created. Hiding the 'Egg' in a deep cave, he kept it foreverly warm to await his next chance to over-throw the New Master.'

Returning to the cave where he had hid his 'trump card', the angry apprentice fed it almost all the power he had, making it ever stronger. Sitting down, he began to meditate, regaining his strength in order to feed his unborn beast again.

'Many weeks passed before the apprentice left the cave. In that time, he had fed all his energy to his beast. Then, when he sensed the time to be right, he sent it an extra boost of power, and cracked it open. The creature within crawled out of the shell, young and powerful, but keeping it's strength hidden inside. Following its Master out of the cave, it kept time with him perfectly, but stayed behind. They walked in silence until they met with the New Master and the other two apprentices, where in, he issued yet another challenge for power.'

The apprentice stepped into the clearing, a beast on four legs walking behind. He yelled his final challenge, bent on only one leaving victorious, and alive. The other apprentices', the young man and the even younger yet woman, stepped forward and in front of the New Master, willing to protect him with their lives, as the other ordered his creature forward. The New Master, though, would not have this.

He walked forward, between the bodies of the other two, to stand directly in front of the beast, and the beast's Master. As this happened, all other beings in the area gathered behind the three good masters, on their side. The creature hesitated, its tail swishing back and forth, at seeing all the other beings behind the enemy. **HIS** enemy... Wasn't he?

Seeing the hesitation, the apprentice frowned, and twisted the tip the creature's tender wing. Whimpering, the creature stepped forward again, getting threateningly close to the New Master. Said Master felt sorry for the little thing, seeing that his once fellow apprentice was hurting it to get it to do what he wanted. Slowly dropping to his knees, he reached out a hand in a friendly gesture.

It stopped short, its bright green eyes blinking in surprise. His enemy was being nicer to him than even his Master was! It didn't know what to do. Smiling, the New Master reached his hand further, seeing the poor thing's confusion.

Anger blazing in his eyes, the apprentice's arm whipped out, quickly and painfully grabbing the creature's twining tail. Savagely pulling back, he yanked his beast away from the New Master, his iron-like grip pulling at the soft scales. The creature yelped in pain, and tried to pull away, but his cruel

Master's grip only tightened, long nails digging into the exposed flesh between the scales.

This time, the creature utterly screamed, and with tears welling up in its eyes, it wrenched its tail out and away of the grip. But in doing so, its flesh and scale was ripped and pulled back to the end of the length. Tears over-flowing, it fled the clearing in sorrow and pain, its heart ripped in two, and its instincts thoroughly shredded.

The two men left facing each other rose up to their full heights, one with dark blue blood staining his hand, the other with waves of anger rolling off of him. Gesturing in the direction of the hurt creature, the New Master silently asked one of the Guides gathered behind him to seek it out, and one silently complied. He then turned his full attention back to his rival, who was wiping his hand off on his robe in disgust. His anger flared up higher. Pointing an accusing finger at him, he spoke, his voice starting at just above a whisper, then rising up at a yell as he went on, the apprentice smirking at his words.

The Master could no longer give him chances to redeem himself, and give him time to hurt again. The apprentices smirk suddenly changed to a look of horror as the Master began chanting a spell. Feeding his words with his anger, the Master finished his spell, power lashing out towards the apprentice. A black hole, darker than even their surroundings, appeared behind him, and the lances hit him full force. He yelled as he was pushed back into the hole, successfully banishing him for all eternity into the deepest and darkest part of the Shadow Realm.

The Master dropped fully to his knees, weak after expending all that energy in a spell that had to be done. His friends caught him before he could fall fully forward. He smiled his thanks as they hoisted him to his feet. Then he looked around, trying to see the being he had sent to find the creature his rival had created. There no sign of them yet, so he leaned back against a tree to rest.

'During which, the little injured creature could not get very far away. Wincing with every step it took, it found a small outcropping of jutting rocks. Crawling inside the little cave it made, the creature got as comfortable as it could with its pained tail, and began licking away the blood.'

*A fresh bout of sobs racked its body as the happenings of the past while sunk in. Its creator, its **FATHER**, had horribly hurt it, and it's enemy was trying to give comfort! It did not understand! But then, light sounds alerted it to the presence of another. It pushed itself as far back as it could into its little shelter, and hucked down into a battle stance. Hearing the foot-falls getting closer, it bared its long fangs, and narrowed its eyes.*

The tips of a pair of feet came into its sight, and it readied itself for a lunge, if it was needed. But what happened totally surprised it. As, instead of the expected attack, a kind face came into view. A face framed by blue-ish, purple hair, and bright blue eyes that, though icy in color, were radiating warmth.'

A human like being was crouched before the entrance to the other creatures hide-away. The person was male, wearing purple armour complete with head-gear, and long pieces of purple fabric hanging down from his waist on the front and back.

He reached a hand into the entrance of the small cave, trying to touch the creature there, but suddenly

pulled it back, as the thing had snapped at him. Taking a few steps back, but still staying crouched, he held out his arm again, and beckoned to the creature. He smiled reassuringly, trying to get it to trust him.

At first, only the tip of the creature's blue snout came into view. It paused before bringing its head fully out of its safe little hole, green eyes sparkling with uncertainty against its blue hide. Slowly stepping back again, the man effectively coaxed it out of hiding.

It trembled in fear before him, and shut its eyes tight, not sure of what was happening. Though, the man in purple ceased these tremors with a gentle touch, hand resting softly on the side of the beast's long face. Opening its confused eyes wide, its gaze was met with the kind orbs of the other. Giving a relieved cry, it leapt into the man's embrace, rejoicing in the safety of his warm body.

Finally able to get a good look at the abused creature, the man in purple saw it was a Dragon beast, one whose body had many color contrasts. Its wings were a blood red, body of cerulean blue, talons of a sandy gold, and eyes of deepest green. All the colors usually would not go together well, but on this Dragon, they all flowed into one. The poor thing's tail, though, was in horrible repair. As of now, all the flesh and scale was folded up at the back, leaving almost exposed muscle on most of its length.

The Dragon purred, and snuggled in closer to the man, who, being mindful of the hurt tail, gathered the little body up in his arms. Holding it secure, he stood and turned around, walking back toward the clearing with a dozing Dragon in his arms.

'Gaining the trust of the abused Dragon, the purple armored man took the young one and brought it back to his Master, knowing that he would not condemn it as its actions were fueled by its jealous and evil Master.'

Entering the clearing, the purple-clad humanoid noted that the menace was gone, leaving only his Master and friends. Spotting his Master leaning against a tree, the man sensed that he was exhausted. Stepping forward again, he felt the bundle in his arms tense. Stopping, and looking into the eyes of his charge, he saw fear seeping into them again. Whispering reassurances, and promising that he would not be hurt further, the Dragon relaxed, though was still weary.

Walking forward once more, he stopped before his Master. The other two humans shook his shoulders, awakening him from his meditation. Opening his eyes, he saw the Guide with the Dragon before him, and he smiled. Returning the smile, the man in purple crouched down, and deposited his bundle in the ground in front of his Master. The Dragon looked back into its first friend's face, and the man rested his hand on the little blue head, before getting up and backing away from them.

Nodding thankfully to the purple being, the Master knelt in front of the Dragon and, putting his hand under its chin, tilted it up to look him in the face. Emerald green met sapphire blue, and through those eyes, each saw into the other's soul. They both found a good spirit in the other. The Dragon snuggled into the hand, and purred contently. Smiling happily, the Master scratched under the slender snout, before pulling the creature closer to examine its tail wound. The probing of his gentle hand stopped at the beginning of the rip. The creature underneath whimpered softly, and the man frowned. It was much worse than he had expected.

'The Master wished deeply to be able to help the little Dragon, but he knew he could not do so. His power was still greatly drained, and it would take much more time to recover. He did not know what to do. He could see the Dragon was greatly pained, and he could do nothing. But then, he received some un-expected aid...'

The man jumped slightly when he felt pressure on his shoulders. Lifting his head up, his gaze was met with his friend's, the other male apprentice. Turning again, he was met with the tear filled eyes and reassuring smile of the female apprentice. Questioning them both silently, they nodded their heads to him, and he understood. Closing his eyes, and gathering his concentration, he drew the power from his friends, the power freely given, and brought it into his body. Both people behind him fell to their knees from the drain, but their faces shone with happiness.

Raising his now strong hand to hover above the Dragon's injury, he moved it slowly overhead, all the while chanting a spell. The dark blood's flow slowly ebbed, and flesh began to grow. The Dragon fidgeted a bit, as the treatment tickled, though a firm hand on its back ceased the struggling. When his hand reaching the folded skin at the tail's end, the master paused to think. Bringing up his hand from the blue back, it took the place of the other in its slow movements of running back and forth over the tail's length. The other stayed above the tail tip, and fed the part power, numbing away the pain before he closed the hand around the folded skin.

He squeezed softly, but firmly, and then stretched the tip out slowly, making it longer while healing it at the same time. Letting go, he then concentrated on the junction of the now stretched tail tip, and the length of the entire tail. After a few more seconds, he raised his hands up, above the healed appendage.

He breathed deep, exhausted from performing the tiring spell, and leaned back to examine his work. The Dragon's tail was now longer, and thinner in some places, but it was fixed. Though the tip was now left in an arrow-head shape, it was still usable. Testingly swishing it about, the Dragon gave a happy cry, and leapt into his face, licking it readily. Laughing heartily, the Master hugged the Dragon's body to his, as his friends smiled with joy at his sides.

'This was indeed a happy time for everyone, as this victory put everyone at ease. But as it always happens, happiness does not last forever, and this was no exception. The Master and apprentices knew evil existed in every man, and were forced with a heart-wrenching decision.

Though it hurt them inside, they made the choice that was in the best interest of their creations, and resolved to close all doors that led to the dark realm from the light one. Before they did this though, they made their last handful of Guides, some made to keep the peace, and some others where given the power to create something new from what they already had. This was the last gift they where able to give to their creations, their friends, before shutting them off for what they thought would be forever.'

On a vast, seemingly never-ending plain, there where creatures of every shape, size, origin, and species. They all stood at attention as they all faced the same direction. Some were crying, others held

back their tears, as others still were wearing fake smiles. Every single member of these masses were paying all their attention to just three humans, two males and one female.

Gesturing to each of the gathered beings in turn, the said being stepped forward, and held small conversations with them all. After every being had stepped forward, the three turned slightly and cast a spell, opening a rip in the air that was bathed in light. Fully facing the gathered again, they waved to them, their faces full of pain and grief. Giving them one last look, all three turned and jumped into the rip at the same time. Not a second after, the rip closed, not to be opened again.

'Having finally completed the task that had taken up most of their lives, the Masters departed. On that day, all of the beings of the dark world grieved, for they would never see their creators again, save the moment that they would cross over for the next life. The Masters had shut all the doors to their world, in order to protect them from humans who wished to use their power for evil and selfish purposes.'

'Though they had done all they could to help their creations, the fates had something else in store for the Guides of souls. Many years passed, changing to decades, then growing into centuries. All of their Masters long dead and in their afterlives, the Guides still continued to work as they were made too. But then, something that had never happened, happened. A strange soul entered the dark world, one... that was out of place.'

In the dark realm, on the border between a plain of endless grass and a lush forest, stood a young man, who seemed very confused. He wore the attire of a soldier, helmet on head and sword at side. He appeared fearful, but stood his ground. Suddenly, there is a rustling in the trees, and the soldier crouches, hand on his sword hilt.

Another man then walks from the trees. This one wears a sword, cape, and helmet, all in shades of green and brown. His helmet seems to have a small set of wing-like objects on it, and it sits on a head of perfectly cut blonde hair, his ears sticking out from underneath, both long and pointed. This new man starts to greet the soldier, but when he gets a good look at him, he stops and takes a step back. He blinks his golden eyes a few times, as great surprise is apparent on his every feature.

'For this soul was different from all others that had come before it. This one shone with an un-earthly light. All souls lost this inner light when their bodies died, but this one retained it. The Guide that was to lead this soul was surprised and confused, and didn't know what to do. So, it decided to see what some other Guides thought. Maybe they would have the answer!'

The scene that from before had again changed, this time to show a small meadow surrounded on all sides by trees. The soldier was there, though he looked calmer and seemed to semi-understand what was going on. In front of him stood the man in green and brown, along with two others.

One had short hair, and held a glowing sword. The head-band and clothes he wore were of all darker colors. The other one's gender can't really be seen, though it looked more male than anything. He was covered in head to toe with purple 'skin', though it may have been armour, and it had what looked like an

animal pelt thrown over his shoulders, the claws of it hanging over onto his chest. He had small eyes, a toothy grin that seemed to be permanently plastered on his face, and he held a jagged sword.

These three were all talking amongst themselves, every now and then stealing glances at the spirit man behind them. They too looked confused about this soul, and the one who had originally met him was more distressed then ever.

'Alas, the other Warrior Guides had no idea what this strange soul meant, or why it was there. They were stumped, so they had to think of something else. Some time passed, when the one with the glowing sword struck on a thought. After debating it, they all decided to enlist the help of others that specialized in strange and un-natural happenings. They went to the Spellcasters.'

In what looked like an ancient ruin, over-shadowed by a mountain, several figures stood on a stone expanse surrounded by large slabs of standing stone. Along with the shining soul and the three Warriors, there were three females.

Two of which looked very much alike, like twins. They were slender, had long hair, and flowing robes. Though they were look alike, it seemed the colors and tones of their clothes, and themselves, were inverted. Where one wore blue, the other wore red, where one was purple, the other was yellow. The other also wore long robes, but she adorned a large headdress. Her clothes were all in shades of light red, purple, green, and blue. She had a kind face, and a smile seemed ever present on her face, even as she talked.

'Although again, these Guides could not fathom the significance of the spirit, they were able to find a way to find out how. For, though these beings were created to help the spirits of the dead, they had more skill that was not restricted to guidance. Their creators had given them special, and unique talents. If, and once, pooled together these talents could do phenomenal things. Things that could not be done alone.'

Beckoning the soul forward, the Guide with the headdress gave him a reassuring smile, before the others enclosed him in a spaced-out circle. At his side, the kind woman took his hand, and muttered something in-comprehensible, all the while watching the soul with sparkling eyes.

At his other, the elfin Guide held his sword out, and the soul gripped the handle at the hilt with his free hand, while the Guide held the end of it. Exchanging a glance and a smile with him, the soul calmed visibly, seeming to let out a long held breath.

The twin women stood in front of the spirit-man, and standing side by side, hand in hand, placed one hand each of the blade's outstretched, gleaming surface. They shut their eyes in unison, and began chanting together.

Behind the soul stood the magician swordsman, and the purple skeleton swordsman. The magician held his long sword up in the air, in front of his face, and said a few select words. The blade erupted in blue

flame, the fire shooting up and around, creating a barrier that surrounded their small circle.

The purple one thrust his jagged sword deep into the ground, and hands on hilt, concentrated thoroughly. The ground rumbled slightly, and from the earth that was enclosed in the other swordsman's protective blue bubble, burst forth ribbons of green light. This light filled every space inside the bubble that was not already taken up by Guide or soul.

After a few seconds, the intense light inside the dome dimmed enough for sight, and the sight was one to behold. The spirit was glowing brighter than before, if that were even possible. It stood straight up, back arched and head thrown back slightly. Right hand still held by the kind woman, and left still holding the sword hilt, these were the only things holding the soul up as it rose higher, up onto its toes, as if in blinding pain. A piercing scream filled the air as a bright, glowing orb was ripped from the spirit-man's chest, and it fell back, dropping into the arms of the magic swordsman. Smiling his thanks up to the Guide, and receiving a kind nod in return, the soul struggled to his feet with the man's aid. The long-eared Guide seemed concerned, but the spirit waved him off to look at the thing that had come out of itself.

'Combining their powers and talents, these Guides were able to draw forth from the spirit the one thing that would answer their questions. The destiny of this specific human that the Fates had decided upon at his birth, and also, what the man had done in his last days of living, in the Light Realm.'

The lighter elf twin touched the top of the orb gingerly, and ripples shimmered through it, before images began forming inside of it. Peering inside of it, the seven watched through the man's eyes as he walked down a street in his home, a bustling city sitting upon seas of golden sand. The spirit gasped in recollection, watching his own memories fly by.

Inside the orb, the man continued down the street until he reached the end of the road. Stalls full of merchandise went off in two directions, to the left and right, where another road disappeared into the distance on each side. The wind shifted as he turned to the right, meaning to go that way, but then something caught his eye.

The sun had hit the blade of a new sword off to the left, and its design interested him. Walking over to inspect it, he was debating on purchasing it when he saw something else further on to his left. Turning to look, he watched as a woman, a commoner by clothing, backed away from two hulks of men. The two seemed to be laughing, jeering at the frightened woman.

A yell streaked through the air, and a little boy darted out from an alley between two stalls, and charged the men. But before he could land a blow, he was thrown aside and onto the ground by one of the men. Crying out, the woman ran to the fallen boy, and with a last fearful glance at the men, picked him up and ran to the alley the boy had come out of. The two men laughed again, then gave chase. Watching all of this happen, the man's face set itself in a grim frown, and with hand on his sword hilt, ran after them as well.

Down the alley, a few turns left and right, and the man found himself facing not what was expected. The woman and child had been cornered in a large out-cropping in the alley, the only other exit from this spot

blocked by a new man. Another was just ahead of him, blocking this way out as four others, the original two and a new pair, advanced on the shaking woman, the stern faced boy. She was holding him slightly behind herself, but was having a hard time of it, as he was trying to get out, little fists up and ready to fight.

The man found himself smiling at the boy's courage as he bowled into the thug with his back to him, sending him sprawling, and unblocking that exit. Still running, he first slammed into the right advancing man, then the left, pushing them both into their comrades at their sides, before skidding to a stop in front of the woman. Turning quickly on his heel to face his opponents, he drew his sword and watched them regroup silently. They were all on their feet now, and all of them drawing various weapons of their own.

The odds were not good, 6 to 1, but the man would not let these thugs have these seemingly innocent people. If the woman was a thief, there would have been a fuss in the market, and from the way she was acting, she was not any sort of tavern-whore. To not have done anything could lead to the possible rape of the woman, and beating of the child. He would not allow it, it was not right.

Sizing up his opponents as they advanced on him now, he took on a defensive stance, and making sure the woman and boy were both still behind him, waited. The two on the left struck first, using a sword and daggers. The man easily blocked them and struck back, but missed.

Then came two on the right, followed by another on each flank. These had swords, lances, axes, and daggers. He took down one, disabling him for the rest on the battle, but took a slash on his left arm as consequence. Wincing at the deep gash, he kept up his defense, parrying, blocking, and attacking when he could.

By the time he had taken out one more, and seriously injured another, he had a sliced arm, leg, and chest, along with a dagger embedded deep in his shoulder. By this time, he had lost a lot of blood, and was getting weak. Just as his knees began to tremble with fatigue, he heard many foot-falls, coming their way. The thugs heard it too.

As his eyes began to cloud over, and the grip on his sword began to loosen, he had a frightening thought. 'What if the people coming were there to aid his opponents?' Then he, along with the two he was protecting, had lost, and they would then most likely die. But all thoughts of that, and all fear that accompanied it, were driven away as soldiers in the palace arms came into view. The last thing he could do was smile gratefully, before falling face first into the dusty ground, hearing the cry of the woman he had saved as he passed into eternal darkness.

'As it was, something happened that had not meant to be. The man, a soldier in his life, had seen something he was not supposed to see. Things had gone down-hill from there. A breeze of wind had changed destiny.'

The spirit was trembling, having re-lived his last minutes of life like that had seemed to shock him. The green Warrior laid a comforting hand on his shoulder, and the kind woman, who was in tears at witnessing those brave moments, kissed him chastely on the cheek. The light twin in front of him smiled, and turned her head to her sister, who nodded. Reaching out, the dark twin tapped the top of the orb,

and it shimmered again. Images began forming inside once more, but these pictures were not seen through someone else's eyes, instead showing everything about. These were showing the pre-decided destiny of the soul.

An important looking man was going down the street of a sandy, gold washed city, a feline sitting in his lap. He sat in a chair with a length of fabric stretched above him to keep away from the sun, that was suspended on two, length-wise poles. A strong looking man stood at each end of the pole, holding them up and walking at the same time.

Surrounding them on all sides were soldiers, all in shining armour and weapons. Each side of the street they were traveling on was packed with people, all bowing, or at least scrambling to do so. Continuing on, the man whose destiny they were viewing came into sight. He walked behind and to the side of the important man, looking to be of no importance himself.

A sudden commotion erupted at the front of the procession. A battle had broken out. A band of men, their faces masked by strips of black cloth, were trying to get to the man in the chair. The front soldiers were holding them back, but just barely. The man in the chair had leapt to his feet, the cat also, who now stood facing the intruders, hissing.

The back soldiers rushed up to help their comrades defend the man. The spirit-man was staying back however, close to the chair, and was torn between looking forward and back, like he expected an attack from behind. The soldiers up front appeared to be driving back the attackers, and the spirit-man looked relieved, before something caught his eye, and his smile changed to a gap of horror.

One of the bandits had gone unnoticed, and had jumped onto the counter top of a stall by the gathered people. Standing straight, the man had notched an arrow in his bow, and was pointing the deadly shaft at the man on the chair. The sun reflected on the arrow's head as he got ready to let it fly.

With a cry, the spirit-man jumped up onto the platform on which the chair, man, and cat stood just as the bowman released the string. Diving in the way, the arrow plunged deep into the man's chest, easily punching through the flimsy show armour he wore. As he fell heavily on the platform, clutching at the arrow, the man behind him looked shocked, knowing full well that that arrow had been aimed at his heart. Dropping to one knee beside the fallen spirit-man, he yelled for a healer as his soldiers dispatched of the last of the attackers.

'Indeed, this answered why this spirit still retained his living glow, for he was supposed to be still living. This one mortal was essential to the future of that place, for he was to save the life of a great leader, one that would begin a golden age for that world. If this man was not there, that leader would die, and things would fall into chaos. The spirit that stood with them was not supposed to be dead, was not supposed to see the glint of sunlight on a sword's blade, was not supposed to act upon the harassed boy and woman. The Guides were in over their heads, way over, and they had few usable options.'

If the spirit was shocked before he was frozen now. The happenings of the past were almost too much to handle, but such a future? His face was pale, and he shook uncontrollably. The kind woman stayed and reassured him as the others conversed.

They had to get him back so that the Fate's course would not be interrupted. But a soul had never been allowed back to the Light Realm. It was possible to do so, but there were reasons as to why it was not done. If the mortals knew of their Realm, there was no telling as to what would happen! But all strings of speech were swiftly quieted at the up-held hand of the green Warrior, the soul's Guide. He then spoke to them, un-interrupted and thinking through everything he said.

'The spirit's designated Guide spoke up to them all, pointing out things the others had not stopped to consider. The man was indeed needed in the Light Realm to fulfill his destiny, but he also judged that the spirit deserved to the chance to live again. Even though it was not meant to be, he had given his life for another. A brave, and courageous soul this was, and the Guide thought he had, by far, earned a second chance. After listening to this the other Guides agreed. The soul had earned the right to live out his life. So, they would let him go.'

Back at the place where the soul had first appeared, the small group of seven gathered. The spirit and his Guide were a little ways away from the others, for they knew that the two would need room for this to work.

The green Warrior drew his sword, and swept it in a wide circle in the air, then slashed it back and forth between, like he was writing something. The air that was inside his circle seemed to tremble, then fell apart, like broken glass, to reveal a small, portal like opening. The Guide stepped back to let the spirit closer, and gazing inside, he saw many indecipherable, blurred images.

Turning to face the other Guides that had helped him, he nodded to each of them in turn, a smile on his face. Moving to face his Guide, he grinned in thanks, and held out his arm. The green Warrior laughed, and clasped his arm firmly in his, their hands tightly gripping the other's fore-arm.

Looking straight at the other's face, the Guide's mouth moved, saying something to the soul, his face serious. The soul nodded his head immediately, and replied, just as serious. Dropping the other's arm, he laid his right arm across his chest, hand fisted near his opposite shoulder, and nodded again.

With a final smile, his arm dropped and he turned, walking into the portal without fear. It swallowed him up, and shut quickly behind him, leaving the Guides to look after him, hoping for the best. It was only then that the final words exchanged between the two were heard, echoing across the whole of the Shadow Realm...

"Swear to never speak of this place."

"Never."

'Returning to the Realm of the Light, the soul was back in it's body, now again living and breathing. He was surprised to find that he was in the palace healers, the woman and boy by his side. He was shocked all the more when his Pharaoh entered the room.'

It turned out that the boy was the Pharaoh's son, the Prince of Egypt, and the woman his nanny. The Prince had snuck out, the nanny having only enough time to tell a servant boy to fetch the Guard before running after him. A group of bandits had seen and recognized the Prince, and were set to capture the boy when he had intervened. He was told that he had held them off long enough for the Palace Guard to find them, but he was badly injured.

He had baffled all the healers, who had thought him to be dead for sure, though he told them nothing of his time in the Shadow Realm. He remembered promising the green Warrior to say nothing of it, and he would not betray their trust. It took time, but his wounds healed, as they all do, and for his act, the Pharaoh made him apart of the Palace Guard as a reward.

*In less than a year, the Pharaoh was attacked, just like was shown in the Shadow Realm to him, and he, being of the Palace Guard, was there to take the hit as he should. In a way, it seemed that saving the two, going to the Shadow Realm, and coming back was all apart of his destiny, that he **was** indeed supposed to do the things he did. But, it is impossible to tell, as the Fates need no reason for what they do, and do not answer to anyone to justify their actions.*

After taking the arrow meant to strike the Pharaoh's heart, the soldier was immediately tended to, but that could not stop the jumps between fevered consciousness, and nightmare filled unconsciousness.'

--oO*Oo-- --oO*Oo-- --oO*Oo-- --oO*Oo-- --oO*Oo-- --oO*Oo-- --oO*Oo--

Walking down a brightly lit corridor, the Pharaoh Amenhotep[1] contemplated the events of the past while. When on procession through the streets of the city surrounding the palace, there had been an attempt on his life, and that soldier, that **same** soldier that had saved his son, had saved him. He was greatly indebted to this one man, one of the most brave and loyal soldiers he had ever seen. He smiled, and had to wonder what the Gods had in store still for this man.

Reaching the hallway that the healers worked in, he heard the sound of struggling, and then a sudden, sharp yell. Amenhotep cursed mentally. He had no Guards posted in these halls! Damn his negligence! Running to the door the sounds were emitting from, he recognized it as the place where the injured soldier was. Throwing the door open, ready to draw the blade that rested at his side, the Pharaoh half expected to, at least, find what was left of the assassins trying to finish off the soldier that had saved him, their quarry, but had to stop with a laugh at what he **did** find.

The soldier, still caught in the last grips his fever, was fighting against the restraints of two healers, while one tried desperately to spell him into calmness. He was swearing lightly, repeating over and over that 'he wanted out of that hot, Ra be damned bed!' Wiping tears from his eyes, the Pharaoh walked to the foot of the bed. The healers were torn; bow to their king, or tend to their charge? Waving them off and to their work, he turned his attention to the scowling soldier. "Stop struggling, and let the healers work their magic, man! You'll never be up and about if you carry on so!"

He made a face, but consented, lying back. "But I feel **fine**, sire! I need no more babying!" As he said this, he visibly relaxed from the spell the healer cast.

"The 'babying', as you put it my friend, is needed. You were lucky that the arrow missed everything important." Amenhotep watched as one of the healers brought forward some fresh gauze.

The soldier started to laugh as the healer began to change the bandages around his wound. "No luck! I knew what was going to happen! They showed me everything. Knew exactly where to be, I did!" He looked rather proud of himself.

"What?" The Pharaoh was surprised, to say the least. 'What was he talking about?'

"Don't worry, sire, it's the fever talking. He's been spouting such nonsense since he was conscious long enough to be able to." One of the healers chuckled.

"Nonsense?!" He sat bolt upright in the bed. "Do not judge what you do not understand, *healer!* They were no nonsense! Three were swordsmen better than our greatest fighters, the other three better magic users than you'll ever imagine! They were honorable and kind, helping me find my way!" He glared at all the healers, positively outraged.

"That is quite enough, you need to rest!" One of the healers spoke, then reached forward. Touching the top of his head, his hand glowed briefly, and the soldier's eyes fluttered closed as he fell back onto the pillows. "Excuse my straight-forwardness sire, but he needs to rest in peace to heal properly. He has already over-exerted himself already, and without any disturbances, he will sleep the rest of the day. If it pleases you, my lord, would you?..."

"Of course." Waving them off again, he strolled out of the room quickly. Heading back to his chambers, he thought about what the soldier had said. He had to admit, some of the things had perked his interest. In the time he had known that soldier, he knew he was not prone to lying, even when delusional. Some of those ramblings must have a true source, and he was intent on finding that source. He would ask the man once he was fully healed, he thought, and smiled as he entered his room.

'For, in his fevered state, pain and confusion over-riding everything else, he had spoken of the Shadow Realm, and of the Guides inhabiting it. The healers that had tended to him dismissed them as fever-speech, but the Pharaoh thought they might hold some truth behind them. And so, the Pharaoh questioned the soldier, and the soldier, being loyal to both his king and his promises, did not know what to do.'

The giant golden doors clanging shut behind him, the soldier walked into the Pharaoh's throne room. It was empty save for the Pharaoh sitting on the gold throne, which was strange. There was usually at least two of the High Royal Guard always in the room, and the advisors to the Pharaoh were missing as well. Slightly confused, he walked to the front of the podium where his king sat, and dropped to one knee, arm across his chest in a sign of respect. "You wished to see me, High Pharaoh?" he asked, head bowed.

"Rise, good soldier." He complied. "I did wish to see you, and you responded well, and with haste. I am pleased." The soldier smiled, but did not say a word. "I want to reward you for your actions as of late, so I promote you to my High Royal Guard. You have proven yourself many times over to hold this rank."

The soldier was speechless, for what a great honor! "But it seems, that whenever you rise among my ranks, you risk yourself more and more for me." The Pharaoh had to pause as he laughed. "And so, I will grant you one more thing, whatever you desire! But I wish for you to think this through, for decisions made quickly are often regrettable."

The soldier was able to find his voice. "T-thank you, sire! You are most generous!" He fumbled as words finally found their way to his mouth, and bowed again, as the Pharaoh watched with a smile

The king gestured to the chair to the right of his throne, the one usually occupied by his High Priest. The soldier was surprised, and began to decline, but the stern look on his king's face was undeniable. Stepping forward, he sat on the edge of the chair, unsure of what was happening.

"I've been meaning to talk to you, my good man, ever since I heard you speaking when you were bed-ridden. Tell me, were they really, **truly**, just 'fevered ramblings'? The things about dark worlds, great fighters, and even greater magicians?"

The soldier stiffened in his seat, eyes wide. 'How did he know?! When had he said... The **Fever!** He'd babbled! Everything!...'

"I...Well...Sire..." He fidgeted. 'What do I do?!'

"Answer me, soldier. I want to know." The Pharaoh said sternly, watching the man beside him as he fought a battle inside himself.

'Obey my king, or honor my promise?!'

"Sire, I can't..."

"Why? What is wrong?"

"I-I promised... Promised not to say a word..."

"Promised **who**, my friend?" When the soldier stayed silent, looking at the floor and hands fisted, resting on his knees, the Pharaoh sighed. "Listen to me," The soldier looked up to meet his gaze, "I understand that you promised **someone** not to speak of them, and I respect that. I know you are an honorable man, and you are not one to betray anything. But what if I said this. If you tell me what happened, I shall not utter a word to another soul."

The soldier gaped. "Sire? But, I... Can't ask that! It's not..."

"Right? Worry not, for you are not asking, I am offering. What do you say to that?"

The soldier was surprised beyond belief. The word of the Pharaoh was law and truth. He would not break this oath. His secret would be safe with the king. And so, decision made, he told of the dark realm, the Guides, and what they are, do, and act, only hoping that the beings would forgive him.

'Indeed, as it was, the Pharaoh learned of the realm that co-existed along with theirs. He was greatly interested in this place, and deeply wished to see it as his soldier had, and to return alive. He set about

searching with the soldier, who wished to return as well, for anything that said, or would lead them to the strange place.

Turning out temple after temple, going through countless scrolls and stacks of papyrus, they searched on and on until they reached one of the oldest temples in Egypt. This temple turned out to be the actual work place of the Master, the very first. In the aged, crumbling, and dilapidated scrolls, they found drawings, spells, opening spots, and a long and large directory of strange names and symbols. It was here that they found their way into the Shadow Realm.'

The green and brown elf Warrior, known throughout the Shadow Realm as the Celtic Guardian, was lying back on a large slab of rock in a beautiful meadow surrounded on the rim by trees. Gloved hands behind his head, he relaxed with his golden eyes closed, sword propped at his side. A short distance away from him and his rock stood a solitary tree, separated from the rest around. In the tree, hanging upside down from one of the many branches, was a fairy.

But, she was not like the other fairies. While she retained a happy demeanor and fragile looking wings, it is common knowledge that looks can be deceiving. This fairy rarely flew, only when it was absolutely needed. Her wings looked flimsy, but were very strong. Her hair was long, green with splashes of brown, the shade matching her clothes perfectly. In her hair, behind her ears, was a strange charm, or hair piece, in which was set a crimson orb, and a matching, glowing jewel sat in the middle of her forehead. Elaborate markings lined her face, and her name was Gyakutenno Megami. The two seemed to be talking with each other.

"Anything due for you this pass, Megami?" The Guardian asked, lifting his right leg up to rest on his left in a relaxed position.

"No, nothing at all Celtic. What of you?" Her voice chimed like bells, and her long hair swayed too and fro beneath her, almost touching the ground.

"I have one in the next, but that is all. What should we do with all this time to ourselves?" He asked with a chuckle, stretching his neck and successfully cracking it.

She raised a small hand to her chin, and cupped it, as if in thought. "Free time such as this is pretty rare. I have not seen my friend Hibikime as of late. I may seek her out later."

Celtic Guardian laughed, "Yes, visiting old friends would be a wonderful way to spend this pass! I may well join you, I have been meaning to speak with Hibikime."

"Why is that?"

He groaned. "That noise she makes! I'm not saying it bad, just unceasing! It echoes throughout the entire forest, and it hurts my ears so!"

It was Gyakutenno's turn to laugh. "You and your big ears!" But suddenly, her laughter ceased as she cocked her head to the side, eyes narrowed and wings fluttering lightly. The Celtic Guardian had heard it as well. A twig had snapped, then there was utter silence. Someone was trying to sneak up on them,

and no one snuck around the Shadow Realm. All the Guides knew where the others were, if they cared to search for them.

In a flash, the Guardian was on his feet, sword in hand, and in a fighting position. Megami was at his side faster than the eye could follow, crouched down low and eyes scanning the trees around.

"Show yourself now! You have been heard!" Celtic called out, his strong voice resounding off the trees. His command was answered with silence. A sudden movement to the left caught their eyes, and they turned to face it, but the shadow had darted behind a tree.

"State your name and type!" Megami called, shifting on her feet.

"Marloth, Soldier of the Royal Guard!" A male voice answered this time, and a figure stepped out from behind the tree, though he stayed in the dark shadows.

"Marloth? It can't be..." The Celtic Guardian blinked in confusion, lowering his blade slightly, though Megami kept up her guard.

"But it is, my friend. It is good to see you again." The figure stepped forth into the pale light the moon above offered, revealing the Soldier, the spirit man.

A smile broke the Guardian's face, and sheathing his sword, he trotted up to the man. They clasped fore-arms in greeting as Megami followed up behind Celtic, who was a fountain of questions.

"How did you get here again Marloth? Don't tell me you died again, and so soon! Have you accomplished your task?"

"Slow down, I can barely understand you!" Marloth laughed.

"Slow down? Ha, not possible!" Megami giggled. It seemed had she decided that this new man was not a threat to them, maybe by how Celtic had reacted, or by some other reason.

But Celtic's eyes flashed with something, and he placed his hands on the man's shoulders. "Marloth. How did you get here? You can't be dead, I have no navigations due this pass. And from the look of you, you aren't even a spirit this time!" He looked the Soldier in front of him up and down. "Why... No, **how** are you here?"

Marloth looked away from the Celtic Guardian's piercing gaze, staring at the ground to his left. "I'm sorry, I... Couldn't..." He stopped, and Celtic kept his eyes on Marloth's face, searching for any sign that would betray his sudden appearance in this realm.

"Do not question him so, Warrior. It is no fault of his as to why he is here." Another strong, confident voice rang out.

"What?!" Releasing Marloth, Celtic Guardian's hand shot to his sword hilt. "Who?..." He hissed out, surprised when Marloth laid a hand on his shoulder, shaking his head with a frown on his face.

"It seems your friend brought along one of his own. Show yourself, mortal!"

Marloth seemed to gap slightly at Megami's words, as the fairy crossed her arms across her chest and smirked.

"You have a sharp tongue for a woman." The voice retorted, as the owner of the voice walked from the trees, arms also crossed defiantly.

The new person was male as well, though he kept himself differently than Marloth. This one had a powerful aura, almost a glow that seemed to engulf his very being. Instead of the attire of a Soldier, he wore soft, but sturdy cloth, and a golden circle etched with foreign symbols sat around his neck and draped across his shoulders. He turned to face Megami, and looked her up and down.

She did the same, and her smirk broadened. "A sharp tongue, hm? At least I have wit enough to match it." She said calmly. Celtic almost had to hold Marloth back, who it seemed, could not believe such a conversation was taking place.

"Have you any idea with whom you speak?" The man asked, his eyes narrowing.

"Actually, no. And it seems that it is none of my concern either."

"Why would that be?"

"From what I can tell, we are not compatible. I am not like you, you are not like me, so it is rather unlikely that I will be your Guide in the future. That said, I can assume that you are not, or ever will be, one of my charges, and therefore, I need not know **who** you are." Megami stated, as though it was common knowledge. "Am I right, Guardian?" She said, turning her head to look at said person.

Celtic Guardian, meanwhile, was trying in vain to hold back his laughter. "Indeed, Gyakutenno, I whole-heartedly agree."

There was silence as all that was said sank in, then the man's calm face cracked, and he burst out laughing. At his reaction, Marloth seemed to breathe easier, as both Guides exchanged comical looks.

'As it was, the Pharaoh Amenhotep and the Soldier Marloth met Celtic Guardian and Gyakutenno Megami on their entrance to the Shadow Realm. Being who they were, the Guides did not know of the Pharaoh's importance, and treated him as they would any other. The Pharaoh himself was surprised, but turned to like this change of pace. Even after Marloth explained who this 'Pharaoh' was to the Guides, they did not change their attitude towards him, and the Pharaoh did not seem to object.

He, in turn, wished to see more of the Shadow Realm, and Marloth wished to meet with the kind woman who had helped him so during his first time there. The Guides agreed, but both seemed a bit withdrawn, thinking their own thoughts as they lead the way through the shadowed landscapes to where the kind woman was currently at.'

The small group stopped when Celtic raised his arm, staying silent as they watched two figures in front of them. One was a woman in gaily colored headdress and robes, a pretty smile on her face; the kind lady. The other was a young boy, hair mussed and clothes ragged, but a smile on his face that rivaled the one on the woman before him. Though, between the boy and woman, there was one key difference. The boy's body was tinged in gray, and seemed slightly transparent. He was a spirit.

As they watched, the two spoke to each other, smiles still present. An aura of light began building itself around the two, but they didn't seem to notice. Within this aura, but behind the figures of the two, a portal opened up from nowhere, not a tare or a rip, a portal. Even from their fair distance away, the group could see pretty clearly as to what was inside. It was full to all sides with a lush, green forest, and a pond could be seen through the tall trees.

Saying some final words, the kind lady took the spirit boy into a soft, kindly hug, which was heartily returned. After the two released each other, the kind lady planted a kiss on the boy's forehead, and he smiled, tears in his eyes. The lady beckoned him to the portal, and turning toward it, the boy nodded thankfully to his Guide, before jumping into the opening. As it closed, the boy, now clean and clothed in finery, was wrapped up in the embrace of another, slightly older man.

The light faded away as the woman watched the last of the portal disappear. Her shoulders slouched slightly in the movement of a sigh as she turned to face the group. When they came into her sight, her face lit up, and she waved happily. The group moved forward again to meet the oncoming woman half-way.

"Gyakutenno, Celtic, what brings you here?" She said, voice soft and chiming. The two mortals were behind the addressed, so she had not yet seen them.

"We bring guests, Lady of Faith, one of which seeking you." Celtic replied, turning and extending his arm behind him.

"Oh?..." The Lady leaned to the side to view the person that was supposedly looking for her. Marloth stood still, grinning from ear to ear as the Lady of Faith gasped in surprise. "Marloth?! Is that you?!" She laughed, then rushing through between Celtic Guardian and Gyakutenno Megami, grabbed up the man in a joyous embrace. Marloth returned it with vigor.

"I missed you, fair Lady, how have you been?" He asked as she relinquished her hold on him.

"As good as to be expected, dear Marloth. But, how did you get here? You are not a spirit this time!" Her questioning face looked up into his as her hands laid on his arms.

"It would take too long to explain, fair Lady, but indeed, I am not here as a spirit this time. I came back, to visit all of you, and to help my lord."

"Your lord? What do you mean, **lord**?" She looked around, and finally noticed the regal man standing off to the side with his arms crossed, watching intently.

"Lady of Faith, this is my lord, the Pharaoh of Egypt, Amenhotep." Marloth introduced his king, who just smiled and nodded to Faith.

She, in turn, moved to face him directly, eyes narrowing as she thought. "Pharaoh? I have heard that term before..."

The man smiled, "Finally, someone here who has."

"But it was a long time ago. Old Master said it many a time, yes." She raised her hand to her chin, and took a step towards the Pharaoh. "Very important mortal. Master always said 'he had to get back before the Pharaoh missed him'. My Mistress was scared of the Pharaoh. She always told me he was a great and powerful man, and might take her away. She did not want to leave us, and it hurt her greatly when they had to go and close us off. I felt her grief, as did all the others she made..." She paused to look at Megami. "You felt it too, correct Megami?" After the fairy nodded her accent, she turned her head and looked away, pain in her eyes.

Faith looked to the Pharaoh again and saw surprise in his eyes at the recent development. "You are not that Pharaoh from long ago, but you seem as my Mistress said. Strong, confident, powerful."

Lady of Faith was now only steps from being toe-tip to toe-tip with the man. "And yet..." She looked up into his bewildered eyes, and raised a hand, placing it along his cheek. "You don't seem that way."

"A kind ruler, you are, one that will lead his people to greatness. You are the important man in Marloth's destiny that we had for seen years ago. We had to send him back to save your life like the Fates had planned, for without you, chaos would reign. You are one to be trusted, dear Pharaoh. I see what you wish for us to do, and I, along with many others, will help you in any way possible."

The Pharaoh was almost speechless at this unexpected twist, while Marloth looked on, some what confused. "W-What? What do you..."

"Lady of Faith is never wrong, Pharaoh." Megami stepped up, placing her hand on the Spellcasters shoulder.

"Thank you, Lady, we knew you'd help us decide with your sight." Celtic stepped up on her other side, and Faith smiled up at him warmly. "You have our support, and assistance, Pharaoh Amenhotep, in both the Realm of the Shadows, and the Realm of the Light, wherever it is possible."

"...But, how can you say this, when you are but three? From the scrolls we found in the temple, there are so many more of you! How can you speak for all in this realm?" The Pharaoh asked, shocked.

Megami grinned. "We were all created by a single group of Five. The first Master, and the first apprentice, who became the new Master when the first passed on..."

"The second apprentice, and the third..." Continued Celtic.

"And the fourth apprentice, the first female priest, or priestess." Faith finished. "These Five were as close as anyone could get, like a family with different streams of blood. They lived, worked, and died together, and in turn, passed on such things to us."

"The talks we have just shared have been spoken throughout the Shadow Realm, and everyone agrees." Megami said.

"But, **how** is that possible?" Marloth asked, immensely curious.

"We are connected because of the close ties of our individual Masters, so as we spoke, all Warriors heard through me..."

"All Fairies through me..."

"And all Spellcasters through me. In turn, the Spellcasters passed it on to the Fiends..."

"From the Fairies to the Winged Beasts..."

"And from the Warriors to the Beasts. There on, the Beasts spoke with the Insects..."

"The Winged Beasts to the Dragons..."

"And the Fiends to the Zombies. We are all connected through one link or another. Even the land we stand on speaks to us, passing our talks on to the Desert, Mountain, and Sea, who then spoke with the beings we could not, whether they be in, on, or under their being. Everyone has heard, everyone has thought, and everyone has agreed. We **will** help you, whenever and wherever you need it."

The Lady of Faith held out her hand to the Pharaoh, and, with a wide grin, the Pharaoh grasped it firmly, sealing the pact. And though neither knew it, or would ever begin to fathom it, this pact, this handshake itself, started the cycle of the Shadow Games into motion.

'Though they had meant the very best, this pact would later lead to the almost very worst.

The Pharaoh kept his word, respecting the Guides, many a time seeking their advice, and he never told a soul of them. Until, with their permission, he enlightened his son, his heir, the Prince of Egypt, the one Marloth the Soldier had saved long ago. He, as his Father, kept their friendship throughout his rule, and when his time came, he told his heir as well, as did he later on. All were happy, and at peace, though, it would not last for long. long.

For, the next in line to rule did not respect the Guides as his fore-fathers did, for there was no one left alive who had witnessed their great kindness, loyalty, and helpfulness first-hand, no one to pass on the story to him. He was greedy, and twisted the friendship of the beings of the Shadow Realm around. He started by asking them for help, and his requests gradually grew larger, and more horrible.

From deciding the boundaries of his land with them, to finally going down to solving petty fights by using the Guides, forcing them to fight one another. Their images painted on papyrus, they were categorized and called forth to battle for their harsh masters, for they had become property. As low and usable as slaves.

They were labelled under new names, divided, then used again and again. These new names were

Monsters, Magics, and Traps, each with a different attack and defense. These poor creatures, created to help and guide, now fought and hid, though they did not want to. Neglected and betrayed, they hid away in their world, avoiding contact with mortals whenever possible, and keeping their pain to themselves. But, as people know too well, anger, hate, and pain can only be held back to a certain degree. When it passes that degree, not even the Gods have power enough to stop it.

These are the stories of the neglected, the used, the abused. It is only a matter of time as to when things held back will come to a point, and all shall be followed here. When will these happen, when shall this all come to pass, you ask? Well, only fate, and time, will tell...'

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[1] Means "peace of Amon" from the name of the Egyptian god Amon combined with hotep "peace, satisfaction". This was the name of four pharaohs of the New Kingdom, including Amenhotep III, known as the Magnificent, who ruled over Egypt during a time of great prosperity. (From www.behindthename.com) I don't know exactly *when* this guy ruled, so please don't bug me about it. I just wanted an **actual** Egyptian name, and 'ruling during a time of great prosperity'? It fit the bill better than I had hoped for!

Okay, by now someone you are probably going, 'What the heck?' While I am going, 'What the heck, they read all that?' I'm sorry if you got confused with any of the POV's, I even got confused sometimes. O.o That's not a good thing... Drop me a line, or put it in a review if you have any questions, and they will be answered, as long as they don't give away any of the plot. And there **WILL** be plot, I assure you. This was so freaking long because I wanted to give some background before I start utterly boggling everyone's minds. The next chapters will not be as long, I hope, and they will be more interesting, never fear!

And just because I want to get this onto a good start, I'm going to have a contest. In this prologue I mentioned and described many Monsters, but only actually named a few. There are about 10 left to your imagination. If you can name all 10 of these unknown Monsters in a review, and leave your e-mail address and the name of your fav. Yu-Gi-Oh character (Or any other if you really want too), you'll get a prize. ;)

And, I would like this to be some-what interactive. All chapters after this one are going to be about specific Monsters. Give me your ideas for some, and I may use them, mentioning you for your idea of course. I'm not that stingy. =3

And unlike a friend of mine, I don't beg for flames. Please, try to keep to constructive criticism, it would help a whole lot more. Nice reviews (if I get any...) would really help me write faster. ;) Thanks very much in advance!