

Fire Emblem: Reign of Darkness

By Song_of_a_Phoenix

Submitted: January 21, 2006

Updated: April 1, 2006

Nina, a young shaman from Etruria, is suddenly thrust into an adventure with her best friends Selinia and Cadoc. She must solve the riddle of the Ruler of Darkness, as well as avoid being captured.

Provided by Fanart Central.

http://www.fanart-central.net/stories/user/Song_of_a_Phoenix/26872/Fire-Emblem-Reign-of-Darkness

Chapter 1 - Prologue: A Child on the Doorstep	2
Chapter 2 - Chapter 1: Old Friends Reunited	3
Chapter 3 - Chapter 2: Arrival	8
Chapter 4 - Chapter 3: A Mysterious Attack	12
Chapter 5 - Chapter 4: Captured	18
Chapter 6 - Chapter 5: Escape	20
Chapter 7 - Chapter 6: THE Forgotten Prophecy and a Secret Vil	26
Chapter 8 - Chapter 7: Betrayal	32
Chapter 9 - Chapter 8: Secrets Revealed	37
Chapter 10 - Chapter 9: A Night's Rest	45
Chapter 11 - Chapter 10: Sneak Attack	50
Chapter 12 - Chapter 11: Moment of Peace	58
Chapter 13 - Chapter 12: A Fallen Friend	62
Chapter 14 - Chapter 13: Summoned to the Village	66

1 - Prologue: A Child on the Doorstep

A cloaked figure approached a house, a small bundle in his arms. The lightning lit up the dark night sky and a roll of thunder broke the silent air. These people didn't have any other children. They seemed best for raising her. They would take the child in and raise her until she was ready. He put down the bundle on the doorstep. There was a roof above it that would keep the pouring rain off of her so she wouldn't get sick. He began to walk away when he remembered he had forgotten something. Opening the blankets around the child, he took something out of her hands and pocketed it. She can't have it yet. Soon. Soon she will be ready. Until then these people will raise her like one of their own.

2 - Chapter 1: Old Friends Reunited

Nina rushed to finish packing the last of her stuff. On the one day she needed to be ready on time, she had slept late. She checked to make sure she had everything she would need for her week in Ilia.

“ I think that is everything. Oh wait I can't forget my tomes! How silly of me!” She grabbed two black books. “I think I should carry one with me just in case. Flux should be good, I'll just put my Nosferatu with the rest of my stuff.” She put one of them inside the suitcase and closed it up. Nina threw on her black robes, which matched her long dark hair perfectly. “Mom, dad, I'm leaving now!”

“Okay dear. Have fun and be careful.” A voice called out from another room.

“Don't worry mom I'll be fine. See you in a week!” Nina picked up her suitcase and rushed out the door. A few moments later, the sound of wings filled the air. Nina turned her brown eyes toward the sky. Down came a Pegasus and a Wyvern and landed not too far from her.

“Nina!” The girl riding the Pegasus called out. Her green hair came down to her shoulders. She had aqua colored eyes. The girl hopped off her Pegasus and hugged her friend. “It's been what, 2 years since I last saw you?”

“Selinia I'm so glad to see you! I do believe so. Is that your brother over there?” Nina turned to the man on the Wyvern. He had short brown hair. There was a scar on his left cheek just below his brown eye. He was older than her and Selinia, probably about 25. The Wyvern he rode also had scars across its body. It was apparent the two had been in many battles.

“Yep. He was able to come with me to get you.”

"It's nice to see you again, Cadoc."

"You too Nina." He responded.

"Are you all set to go Nina?"

"Yep." Remembering they would be flying on a Pegasus, Nina tied her hair back into a ponytail.

"You can just give your suitcase to my brother to hold. You will be riding with me on Ilmatar."

"Alright." As Selinia got back on Ilmatar, Nina handed her suitcase to Cadoc then hopped on Selinia's Pegasus.

"All right let's go!" Selinia said as Ilmatar took off into the air.

"Let's go Draco!" Cadoc and his Wyvern followed. "So Nina, how old are you now?"

"I just turned 17."

"Ah yes. I forgot you and Selinia were the same age."

"So how are you two doing? Last time I saw you, Cadoc, was seven years ago when you joined with Bern's Wyvern Riders."

"My brother is now a high ranking Wyvern Lord! He is one of the King's most trusted leaders!" Selinia broke in.

“Wow! Congratulations Cadoc!”

“Thank you Nina.”

“I'm not of a high rank in Ilia yet. Hopefully soon I can become a Falco Knight.”

Ilmatar suddenly swerved and an arrow narrowly missed her.

“What was that?!?” Selinia asked, surprised.

“There are archers down there and they are aiming for us! Quickly, hide in that forest!” Selinia obeyed and followed her brother.

Nina knew arrows were a threat to winged creatures such as Pegasi, and became a little nervous. “Why are they aiming at us?”

“I don't know.” Cadoc watched the three of them as one of them let another arrow fly, and easily dodged it. “This won't be very difficult. I will distract them. Selinia you sneak up on them with Nina and stop them. Go!” Cadoc commanded and flew out, getting the attention of the archers. Selinia maneuvered her way around the trees until she was behind the archers. Nina jumped off Ilmatar and got her magic tome ready. She began to chant and cast a Flux attack at one of them. They seemed surprised by the attack and turned around just as Selinia came at them, and they were knocked against a tree. Cadoc flew down and they trapped the archers. Nina ran over as Cadoc jumped off of Draco and grabbed one of the attackers.

“What do you think you are doing?”

“W...we were simply doing a job! We are mercenaries and we were hired to take out a Pegasus and a Wyvern that would be coming from Etruria!”

“Who hired you?”

“Do you think we would tell you and ruin our reputation?”

“You failed to complete your job, your reputation is already stained. Now you can tell me and leave with your lives, or lose them as well.” Cadoc raised his lance threateningly.

“He didn't tell us. He gave us gold, and we said we would do it. If he finds out we failed...oooooh I don't even want to think about it.” Cadoc pushed him down to the ground and the startled mercenary rushed to his feet. The three archers dropped their weapons and fled.

“Why did you let them go?” Nina wondered.

Because I know that they will flee. They had bad accuracy, and were poor mercenaries. They will be too afraid to return to their employer. If they are smart, they will go into hiding. Whoever hired them seems clever, and if they want to live they will not return to him. But if somebody is after us, we should move quickly. Keep an eye out for any more arrows.” The three mounted their steeds and took off.

“I can't think of anybody who would be after us. They knew exactly where we would be, where we were going, what to aim for. It's creepy.” Selinia said.

“We will discuss it when we get back. For now we can just hurry and get to Ilia.”

“Good job dodging that arrow Ilmatar.” Selinia said as she pet her Pegasus.

“You did a good job training her Selinia.”

“We have been working very hard. It would help if I had a Delphi Shield, but they are rare and can't afford to be given simply to soldiers like me. By the way that was a cool flux attack back there. You seemed to have cast it quicker than I have seen most shamans. But why did you choose dark magic? I would expect somebody like you to use Light or even Anima.

“Well, it seemed to come most natural to me. I tried using Fire and Lightning, but when I picked up a Flux tome, it was as if I had been using it all my life. Also, Elder magic is the most powerful and can do things Light and Anima magic can't. Take Nosferatu for example. It drains energy from the enemy and gives it to the attacker. Luna negates enemy resistance, and Eclipse always takes half. Anima and Light magic don't have effects like that.”

“Good point. What tomes do you have?”

“I only bought Flux and Nosferatu. I haven't tried the rest yet, although I want to. Some of them are really expensive because they are rare.”

“It is beginning to get dark. I don't think we should travel any more today. We can stop at an Inn and rest there for the night. If we are attacked in the dark, we won't be able to see the arrows coming.” Cadoc said. Ilmatar and Draco flew closer to the ground and they found a small Inn where they could rest for the night.

3 - Chapter 2: Arrival

A ray of sunlight shone through the window, illuminating the room. Nina woke up and looked around, forgetting where she was for a moment. Selinia was still asleep in a small bed on the other side of the room. Cadoc had slept in the room next door. Nina could see him through the window feeding Draco and Ilmatar. She yawned and quietly left the room. A clock on the wall told her it was 8:00. The door at the entrance to the Inn opened and Cadoc came in.

“Ah, Nina you are awake. Would you go wake Selinia for me? We should leave as soon as possible.”

“Sure.” She went back into her room and softly shook Selinia, who just grumbled and turned over. “Come on Selinia, you have to get up!”

“Yeah, yeah. I'm up, I'm up.” Selinia yawned. They both left the room and walked down the stairs. Breakfast was already on the table in one corner of the room.

“Well good morning.” Cadoc said as the three of them sat down to eat. “From here we head straight to Ilia. I already fed Ilmatar and Draco so as soon as we are done we can get ready and leave. After they had finished eating, they got dressed, brushed their teeth, the normal morning routine. Ilmatar greeted Nina and Selinia good morning as they climbed on her back, and once again took to the sky. The three talked about various things, catching up with all that had been happening. Nina was glad to see her best friend again. Selinia had been training hard in Ilia, her dream to become the finest Falco Knight in the army. They arrived at Selinia's house before the sun had begun to set.

“Home sweet home!” Selinia said relieved to be home and away from danger. She opened the door and let Nina in. Cadoc grabbed Nina's suitcase and carried it into the house. It was a decent size, and very tidy. Nothing was left hanging around. The dishes were stacked neatly in a beautiful glass cupboard, the furniture looked comfortable and expensive, everything was sparkling clean. “Mom, dad, we are here!” When nobody responded, Selinia began checking all the rooms. “Strange...they must have went out.”

“But didn't they say they would be here when we got back?” Cadoc wondered.

“Yeah. Oh well I'm sure they will be back soon.”

“But Selinia, they didn't even leave a note! I'm going to go find out where they went. I'll be back soon. I want you and Nina to stay here.” Cadoc walked out the door and he and Draco took off.

Selinia turned to Nina. “I don't know why he is so upset about it. What could possibly have happened? Anyway, I'll show you your room.” The guestroom was clean, just like the rest of the house. The walls were painted a light blue and had a matching carpet. Beside the bed was a small, round table and on top of it a lamp. A clock was hanging on the wall so that when she was sitting in bed she could see it, and just above the bed was a window. Nina wouldn't need the bareau there were several lovely paintings hanging on the walls.

“Who painted those?” Nina asked her friend.

“My mother.”

“I didn't know she painted! They are beautiful.”

“Yep she is very good at it. She paints for other people too. Doesn't even charge.”

“Really? She takes all that time to paint them and just gives them away?”

“Yep. She says she doesn't paint for the money, but just because she enjoys doing it. The ones she does sell will be for some kind of charity. Once in a while though people will pay her for them anyway.”

“That's cool. Your mother is really kind to just give stuff away when she could be making a lot of gold.”

“Yes. I'm sure if we absolutely needed the gold she would sell them...” The rest of Selinia's sentence was drowned out by the loud cry of a Pegasus. Startled, Selinia and Nina rushed out of the house. A cloaked figure stood beside Ilmatar, who, when he turned over to see the girls coming out of the house, was kicked to the ground by the Pegasus. The figure grunted and vanished. Selinia ran over to Ilmatar. “Are you okay? Did you get hurt?” Ilmatar turned to her side to show a large cut. “Oh no, she is bleeding!”

“What happened?” A strange voice asked. It belonged to a young man, no older than 20. He had long red hair and deep red eyes. At his belt was a sword. He was tall and slightly muscular.

“Somebody attacked my Pegasus! Look, she is hurt!” Selinia said, not even bothering to look to see whom it was she was answering.

The man walked up to Ilmatar and looked at her wound. “Don't worry, it doesn't appear to be too bad. It didn't go that deep. She will be fine. I can help you if you would like. So you have a first aid kit or something like that?”

“Yes, in the house. Let me go get it.” Selinia went back in the house and returned with a first aid kit.

The man opened it up and looked inside. “Yes this will do fine. We should clean her wound first. It might sting a little, she won't hurt me will she?”

“No, Ilmatar knows you are helping.” Selinia responded.

“Ilmatar is it? Well it is nice to meet you Ilmatar. This might sting you a little but it is going to help you heal.” He opened a small bottle and poured some of its contents onto a ball of cotton. He dabbed it on Ilmatar's cut, which made her cry out a little bit, and bandaged it. “There, all done.” Ilmatar rubbed her head on his hand when he reached out to pet her as thanks.

“Thanks for helping my Pegasus....um...”

“Ah yes I haven't told you my name yet, my apologies. You can call me Riko.”

“Nice to meet you Riko, I am Selinia. And that is my friend Nina.”

Nina, who had just been standing there the whole time, unnoticed, waved. “Hello, Riko. Selinia, I think your brother is back.” She pointed up at Draco who was landing near the house.

“Oh Cadoc you are back! So, where is mom and dad?”

Cadoc had a grave look on his face that drained Nina of all hope Selinia's parents were safe. “Selinia, grab your lance, put on your armor, and get Ilmatar ready for battle.”

4 - Chapter 3: A Mysterious Attack

Selinia became terrified. "What?!? Where are mom and dad? Answer me! Why do we need to fight?!?"

"Selinia just do as I say! Quickly!" Cadoc said, impatient and losing his temper.

She did as her brother commanded. "And what about Nina? We just leave her here when she doesn't know the place?"

"I'm not going to risk taking her along. She can stay in the house."

"No, I want to come along. I won't be a burden. I can fight you know. I'm sure my magic will be useful. I'm worried and want to help." Nina told Cadoc.

He sighed. "Fine, you can come along but be careful! I don't want to have to tell your parents something bad happened to you while you were under our care."

"Thank you." Nina rushed into the house to get her tomes.

"It seems something is going on. I wish to help as well." Riko said.

"And who are you?"

“His name is Riko, somebody attacked Ilmatar and he came to help. I think we can trust him.”

“Enough talking. Selinia, Nina, get on Ilmatar. Riko is it? You come with me. We must hurry.” Without any hesitation or conversation, they all did as Cadoc said and followed him. As they went on, Nina noticed there was a large crowd down below. But something was wrong. They appeared to be fighting. Draco flew behind a nearby mountain and Ilmatar followed. Battle cries filled the air and arrows pierced the sky.

“What on earth is going on?!? Cadoc, I want to know!” Selinia demanded.

“I was flying around trying to find mom and dad when I came across some fighting. Almost everybody in the area is down there. I thought they were at some kind of event, but then I saw this. Mom and dad must be down there. I don't know who started or what is going on, but there are a lot of bow and axe wielders down there. Ilia's Pegasus Knights will have a hard time winning this.”

“But mom and dad retired, they don't even have their Pegasus or Wyvern anymore.”

“If they are fighting, they must be fighting with lances and swords on foot. Unless they have been held captive. If we are going to fight, we have to be very careful. Without Delphi shields we are in danger.”

“I can help out a lot then. I'm not as vulnerable to arrows and my magic will do more damage on the axe wielders. I'm probably quicker than axe wielders also, although not that much more.” Nina broke in.

“I can help also. They will be weak against my sword. I also have speed at my advantage.” Riko said.

“Thank you for the help, Nina, Riko. We will drop you off so you can fight.” Cadoc said and Draco and Ilmatar landed at the bottom of the mountain to allow the two to get off. “I will try to keep an eye out for you two just in case you need to be rescued.”

“Thank you Cadoc. I will do all I can to help.” Nina said and Selinia and Cadoc went to join the fighting.

“Let's go.” Riko said to Nina and the two rushed into the fray.

It wasn't long until an arrow came flying by, scarcely missing Nina. She returned the attack to the archer with a Flux. Since he was already injured, the attack finished him. Riko ran to a crowd of Brigands and Fighters ganging up on a couple Peg. Knights. Nina kept her distance, attacking from behind. She didn't realize how many enemies there were until she found herself surrounded as well. Axe wielders surrounded her while an archer let an arrow fly at her. She tried to dodge, but there wasn't enough room to fully evade the attack, and it pierced her left shoulder. To make things worse, she had walked right into a Brigand. He smirked as Nina looked up, terrified. Another one grabbed her arms so she couldn't cast a spell and made her drop her tomes.

“What's the matter. A couple of big, strong guys like you can't handle a little shaman like me? I have no defenses. What fun would it be to battle somebody who can't fight back? Wouldn't you rather fight with honor?” Nina teased, hoping they would release her and at least let her fight back.

“Hahahahaha! The girl thinks that we want to fight with honor!” The Brigand ready to attack her laughed “But thanks for the laugh girlie! Oh well, time to die.” He raised his axe above his head. Its sharp edge glimmered red in the sun. But instead of dropping his weapon upon Nina, he lowered it back to his side. “Hey you are that girl! Heh heh we will get a nice reward now. Change of plans girlie, you get to live. You are coming with us.” The bandit that was holding Nina threw her over his shoulder and the other grabbed her tomes. Nina kicked and screamed, but nothing worked. Nina was ready to give up when she heard a cry of pain and looked over to see the man holding her tomes dead. The one holding her looked back, wondering what happened. Cadoc came flying at him, thrust out his lance and killed the Brigand before he had time to react. Nina fell and landed on top of her captor and picked up her tomes.

“Thank you Cadoc!”

“No problem, just keep an eye out, bandits don't fight fair.”

“So I've noticed.” Nina found herself mumbling to nobody, as Cadoc had taken off before she could respond. She picked up her tomes cast Flux at a sniper readying her bow for an attack. Just as it hit, she

had released an arrow. Luckily, the Flux Nina had cast messed up the sniper's aim, causing the arrow to hit Nina's right arm instead of her chest. She then restored some energy with a Nosferatu and killed the sniper. Nina had lost sight of Selinia, there were a lot of Pegasi flying in the air, but she could see Cadoc, him being the only Wyvern Lord there. Nina figured it would be better to rid the field of all arrows first.

The last of the enemies were defeated as the sun began to disappear beyond the horizon. As nighttime approached, the blood red sky darkened, giving the field an even more eerie look. A few Pegasus Knights had been defeated during the fight, but most of Ilia's army had survived. Cadoc and Selinia landed by Nina. They had suffered some minor injuries, but nothing too bad. Riko approached and Nina noticed he didn't have a single scratch on him.

"Are you alright Nina?" Selinia asked.

"Yes, I am fine thank you, although I wish I could say the same for my tomes. I used them all up. I will just have to buy more. Where are your parents?"

Cadoc pointed not too far from where they were. "I found them during the battle. They are fine."

Nina was relieved. "That's good. They fought too?"

"Yes. Mother was allowed to use a spare Pegasus, but since father didn't have a Wyvern, he simply fought on foot."

Selinia looked around, and began to cry.

"Selinia, what is the matter" Cadoc and Nina asked her.

"I'm...sorry. It's just that...I trained with some of the Pegasus Knights that...didn't...survive."

"I am sorry Selinia." Nina comforted her friend, who had hugged her.

"Most of them are fine. The army doesn't appear to have lost many knights." Cadoc added in.

A Falco Knight landed by them and turned to Selinia. "Five of our fellow knights have fallen. The rest have only minor injuries. Selinia, you did well fighting. I think you have the potential to become a great Falco Knight."

"Thank you Commander." Selinia said. This seemed to cheer her up a bit, and she smiled and waved as the Falco Knight joined up with the rest of the Pegasus Knights and flew back to their homes. One of the Pegasus, however, came down and let a woman and man of its back.

"Selinia, Cadoc, Nina! I'm so sorry you had to return to this." Selina's mom said as she hugged them all. Besides for her long, blue hair, she looked just like an older form of Selinia.

"Mom, dad I'm so glad you two are safe." Selinia said as she hugged her father.

"Good to see you again, Mr. and Mrs. Heart"

"Please, darling, you know you can just use our first names. No need to be so formal about it."

" Thank you, Sariah."

"I think we should head home now, Koen." Sariah said to her husband.

“Yes. Let's go.” Koen said. He had short brown hair like his son, but blue eyes. He had several scars along his face as well as his arms.

“Do you know why those bandits were attacking Ilia Dad?” Selinia asked as they flew back home.

“I'm not sure. Probably just to rob us, they were well prepared though and were tougher than normal bandits. But don't worry, everything is fine now.”

The rest of the way home, they dropped the subject of the battle. Nina told Selinia's parents everything that had been going on from the time they last saw each other. When they returned home, the sun had set and the stars were visible in the clear night sky. Riko, who was traveling hoping to become a powerful swordmaster, was allowed to stay the night. Tired from fighting, everybody got ready for bed. Nina had a hard time getting to sleep, however. Her thoughts kept going back to those two Brigands that had captured her. She felt uncomfortable. It seemed they were after her. Those weren't ordinary bandits that attacked, Koen even said so himself. A terrifying idea came into her mind. She remembered the archers that attacked on the way to Ilia. They had been hired to take them out. What if they were after her as well? She could not figure it out. What would they want her for, and what did the Brigands mean by there being a reward for her? If Selinia and her family would keep getting attacked because of her, she couldn't stay and keep them in danger. It was late before she could finally fall asleep, trying to convince herself that they must have got her confused with somebody else. There could be no other explanation.

5 - Chapter 4: Captured

After breakfast, Nina, Selinia, Cadoc, and Riko went out to take a walk. Nina decided not to tell anybody about the bandit that tried to capture her. It didn't take long before she completely forgot about it.

“So, Riko, you are just traveling around to get stronger?” Selinia asked.

“Well, yes. I'm hoping to become a powerful swordmaster some day.”

“Where are you from?” Nina asked.

“I was born and raised in Ostia. I left home a couple years ago.” Riko responded.

“You could stay with us for a little while if you want. We owe you for helping us.” Selinia offered Riko.

“Yes, that sounds good. I think I will stay a little while, it's tiring always traveling. Thank you,”

“No problem. It's the least we could do. Hey...what's that? I just saw something behind those trees.”

“Be careful. There might still be bandits left from yesterday, I doubt it, but keep your guard up.” Cadoc said. The four quickly found themselves surrounded by a group of people, most of them in hooded cloaks.

“What?!? How did...they came out of nowhere!” Nina said.

“What do you want? You aren't the bandits from yesterday!” Cadoc exclaimed.

Without answer, one of them grabbed Nina from behind. Riko quickly slashed at the one who grabbed her, making him drop her. A battle broke out and Selinia and Cadoc had to fight on foot. Nina didn't have any tomes left, but luckily most of her enemies were also Shamans. She managed to steal a couple tomes to fight with. Her enemies didn't fight back however, and she kept them away with Flux attacks. She looked around and noticed she was the only one not being attacked. Riko was in a fight with a Swordmaster and his sword had gone flying out of his hands. He fell to the ground and was at the mercy of his attacker. The Swordmaster prepared his final blow, and without a weapon to defend himself, Riko would be finished. Without thinking, Nina rushed forward to defend Riko, taking the hit herself. Her arms were both injured and she fell back. Riko grabbed his sword and thrust it through the foe, who died instantly.

The attackers stopped fighting and one of them spoke. “You cannot escape. The long dormant powers will awaken, and the ruler of the darkness will fulfill the forgotten prophecy. You can't avoid your fate.”

When Nina, Selinia, Cadoc, and Riko stopped to listen, they were all grabbed from behind. Nina felt a sharp blow to her head, and everything went black.

6 - Chapter 5: Escape

Nina awoke the dingy smell of some underground chamber. "Ugh...where am I?" Her surroundings were not familiar to her. It looked like a prison cell. The cold stone walls were craked. Dirt completely covered the floor. The torches on the wall were the only source of light, making the shadows dance on the walls. The bed she was on was rather soft, however. She heard voices and walked over the bars trapping her. They sounded awful familiar. "Selinia, Cadoc, is that you?"

"Nina! Your awake!" Selinia answered.

"What happened?" Nina asked.

"It seems we were all knocked out and brought here...wherever here is." Cadoc said. "You okay Nina?"

"Yea, I am fine." She then remembered the attack she took earlier and realized her arms were completely healed. "Is Riko with you?"

"Yes, I am here too."

"So, Brother, how do we get out?" Selinia wondered

"Well, I haven't seen any gaurds or anything, so they must be pretty confident we won't be able to escape. I don't know how we will be able to break these bars though. The keys are hanging up on the wall opposite us. If only I had my lance with me I could probably get them, but all our weapons have been taken away."

"I can pick the lock." Riko suddenly said.

Selinia looked at him with surprise. "What? How can you do that? Only Thieves can pick locks. You said you were a Swordmaster!"

"I said I am training to become a Swordmaster. It is true that Thieves are skilled at picking locks, but anybody can learn how to pick locks like these." Riko answered as he pulled a lockpick from a pocket that nobody knew was there.

"So you are a thief! Nobody else carries around lockpicks!"

"I travel around. You never know when you will be thrown into some kind of dungeon like this."

"So how do I know that you haven't stolen anything from us?!?"

"If I had stolen something from you, don't you think I would have left a long time ago? I wouldn't cause trouble while I am outnumbered and could easily be defeated in a battle."

"Selinia, he has a point. And right now he is the one saving us. I'm sure he has his reasons." Cadoc said.

Selinia sighed. "Fine. But I'm still suspicious."

"I don't expect to have your trust. After we get out, I'll leave if you would like." Riko said as he picked the lock and let Cadoc and Selinia out.

"Thank you." Cadoc said. Riko then grabbed the keys and unlocked Nina.

“Thanks, Riko.” The tomes Nina had taken from her enemies were with the other weapons, so she took them and gave everybody else theirs as well. “Now how are we going to sneak out? I'm sure there are guards around upstairs.”

Riko spoke up. “Everybody, stay behind me. I'll find out if anybody is patrolling the area.” He walked over to a stairway that led to a big wooden door.

“How are we going to get out unnoticed? The door is old and if we try to open it I'm sure it will squeak.” Cadoc said.

“Don't worry about that.” Riko responded as he walked up the steps. He then thrust his sword through the door, making a small hole that he peered into. “There are only three guards out there. They don't do a very good job of making sure their prisoners don't escape.” He opened the door and the guards whirled around at the sound.

“Hey, how did they escape?!?” One of them said.

“I don't know but if we let them out, the Boss'll kill us!”

“Let's get em!”

Two of the guards began to cast Luna while another one ran at them with an axe. Riko quickly dodged the axe and counterattacked with his sword. Nina cast Flux at the axeman to finish the job. Riko was hit with one of the spells, and Cadoc hit by the other. Selinia rushed at one of the Shamans with her lance, who didn't have time to move before she came at him. The other Shaman dodged Cadoc's blow, only to step into Riko's.

“Let's go, quickly! Somebody must've heard that.” Cadoc said.

“Too late!” Nina exclaimed. More guards had just appeared from a door leading to another room.

“There are too many for us to take on by ourselves! We have to run!” Selinia rushed for the way out and the others followed. They ran out into the moonlight, only to find more enemies. “Oh no. This really isn't our day”

“Look, there is a forest nearby, maybe we can lose them in there.” Cadoc told everyone. They darted past the guards, who immediately gave chase. The group didn't run very far before they came across a large river that cut across their path.

“Now what? We can't jump across, it's too wide.” Nina said.

“Then we will have to swim.” Cadoc said and jumped in, followed by Riko.

“You want us to swim across a freezing cold river? You are insane!” Selinia glanced back at the guards only feet away and changed her mind. “Looks like we don't have a choice! Let's go Nina!”

When Nina got in the river, it felt like her whole body froze. The water was ice-cold. She didn't think she could move, but forced herself to swim to the other side. The guards obviously thought it foolish to follow them, because they had stopped at the river's edge. She had almost reached the other side when her foot caught something. She tried to pull free but whatever she was stuck to didn't loosen up. “ Somebody help! I'm stuck! My foot is stuck!”

The others had already gotten to the other side and were out of the water. When they heard Nina they all turned around and Cadoc dived back in. He went underwater to free Nina. He couldn't see because it was so dark, and was struggling to get her out. He finally broke her foot free, and helped her to shore.

“Thanks Cadoc.”

“No problem. At least we got away from them for now.” Cadoc pointed across the shore. “It’s late, we should find a place to rest.”

“B-b-but we are in the m-m-m-m-middle of nowhere.” Selina said, shivering.

“Well we can’t go anywhere. We don’t know where we are and it’s the middle of the night, we will get lost. Our best bet is to make a fire and stay in one place until morning.” Cadoc said.

The got a large fire started a little deeper in the trees, hoping the gaurds wouldn't see it.

“We have n-n-n-no blankets or anything. I’m freezing.” Selinia stuttered. “The only clothes we have are d-dripping wet, and all we have to keep warm is a fire. I think I’m gonna freeze to death. We were b-b-better off staying locked up. At least it was warm.”

“Well we can’t go back now. We will just have to hold on until morning. Hopefully there is a town nearby that can help us.

“I wonder what mom and dad are doing right now. What if we don’t get to see them again? We don’t even know where we are, and we are being chased. We might never get home again!” Selinia broke into tears. “I wanna go home! This is worse than anything we have ever trained for!”

Cadoc tried to comfort his sister. She cried on his shoulder. “Don’t worry Selinia. We will make it home. Remember what I told you. No matter what the situation, you have to stay brave. Sure, things are a bit tough right now, but as long as you don’t give up, everything will be fine. Please, Selinia, don’t worry. I’ll make sure we get out if this. Keep your head up. You are going to be a great Falco Knight one day, remember?”

“Yeah...I can’t give up now. If I want to ever become a commander of Ilia’s Pegasus Knights, then I can at least make it through this. Thanks, brother. It’s no wonder why you are one of the best in Bern.”

“Now let's try to get some sleep. Staying up all night won't help us. You okay Nina?” Cadoc asked.

“Yes, I'm fine. Just cold.”

“Well, goodnight everybody.” Selinia said

“Goodnight.” Everybody answered.

Nina looked up at the moon, wondering about everything that had happened since she left her house. It was all so strange. Something was going on, but why doesn't anybody else seem to think so? Well, sitting here thinking about it wasn't going to help. Maybe tomorrow will bring answers, and hopefully better luck.

7 - Chapter 6: The Forgotten Prophecy and a Secret Vil

The next morning was sunny and warm. Selinia seemed to have regained confidence, and was in a more cheery mood.

“Maybe today won't be so bad! The sky is crystal clear, and we haven't been attacked!”

“Where did your brother go?” Nina inquired.

“He left before you woke up. Said he was going to see if there is a town nearby.”

“I hope so...I'm starving! Last time we ate was yesterday morning!” Nina said as her stomach rumbled.

“If I had known this would have happened I would have taken enough food for us. We could hunt for ourselves.” Riko said.

“Well Cadoc is coming right now! So, find anything brother?”

“There seems to be a small village up ahead. I don't know what it is like there, or if strangers like us will be greeted kindly, but it's the best choice we have at the moment.”

“Well, let's go!” Selinia said.

It was silent for a moment, then Nina thought about what her captors had said. "Does anybody know what those guys meant before they captured us? Remember they said something about a forgotten prophecy. It has been bugging me."

"That's a good question. Now that you mention it, I do remember them saying that." Selinia added.

"They were speaking of an old tale. It has indeed been forgotten...by most people." Riko suddenly said.

"You seem to know of it. Would you tell us?" Cadoc asked.

"There is an ancient prophecy, fortelling the time when the darkness will rule over all. It was said that one being would have complete control of darkness. Fortune-tellers once predicted this over a millenium ago. Most scoffed at them, however. Only a few believed their words, and dedicated their lives to making sure this never happened. They passed down the tale from generation to generation. Some people still believe it, and, just as their ancestors did, make sure this will never happen."

"That is a pretty farfetchd tale." Nina said.

"So, that must make you one of those whom dedicate their lives to preventing all of this? Where else could you have heard the story" Selinia asked.

"I have heard of it before in my travels." Riko answered.

"I find it hard to believe myself." Cadoc said. "One being having the power to control everything?"

"If one has such powerful darkness they can use at will, who will stop them?"

“Are you telling me you believe this, Riko?” Cadoc asked.

“I am not sure. It is not known when the ruler of darkness will come forth, or even who it is. However, if this ruler does come forth, some of us are destined to fight it. This is what I have heard, whether some of it is true or not I cannot say.”

“It's definitely a strange tale. But enough prophecies, we are at the village!” Selinia exclaimed!

It was a rather small place, but very lovely. Surrounded by trees, it seemed very peaceful. Beautiful flowers grew all around. People were tending to crops, doing chores, playing games, and all looked content.

“This place looks nice! Maybe our luck has finally changed!” Nina said.

One of the villagers approached them. She was old, with white hair and a wrinkled face. “Well, well. It isn't often we have outsiders. Who are you and what are you doing all the way out here?”

“Greetings milady. We got lost and came across your village. I am Cadoc, a Wyvern Lord from Bern. This is my sister, Selinia. She is a Pegasus Knight from Ilia. Nina is a Shaman from Eutruria, and Riko is a traveling swordsman.”

“An unusual group. Follow me.” Without question, the group followed the lady. “I am the leader of this village. My name is Ellie, but most just refer to me as the Elder. My husband was originally the leader, but passed away a few years ago.”

“I am sorry to hear that.” Cadoc said.

“Oh what a gentleman. Please, come in.” Ellie's house was more like a hut. It was larger than the rest, and the inside was very well kept. “Are you hungry? We have plenty of food.”

“Yes, actually.” Selinia said.

“Then you wait right here. I will bring out some food. While you are waiting, you should go wash up. Nobody wants to eat with dirty hands.” When the group had finished washing their hands and faces, the table was filled with food. There was meat, vegetables, fruits, bread, soup, salad, and pastries, all of which looked scrumptious.

“Wow this looks delicious!” Nina said.

“Please, help yourselves.”

“Thank you very much!” they all said.

“You have a very nice village.” Selinia said.

“Why thank you. We grow and cook all our own food. The only time we leave the village is to gather things we need from the forest. Everybody works hard.”

“Nobody has ever left the village? You have never been attacked?” Nina asked.

“No. Why do you ask?” Ellie said curiously.

“Oh...no big reason. Everybody is so peaceful and happy.”

“Yes, everybody loves living here, away from the rest of the world. Because we have no contact with other places, we have no reason to fight them. I'm not even sure others know about this village.”

“It must be nice, although you don't get to talk to people from other places. I would have never met Nina otherwise!” Selinia said.

“That is true, but we don't want to get involved in everybody else's problems.”

Ellie discussed various things about her village for the remainder of the meal. They were all stuffed afterwards.

“Wow I don't think I have ever had such a great meal before!” Nina said.

“Yes, it was delicious!” Selinia added.

“Very good, we thank you very much.” Cadoc said.

“I haven't had a meal like that in quite some time.” Riko finished.

“I'm glad you all enjoyed it.” Ellie said, smiling.

“Would you like us to help you clean up?” Nina offered.

“No thank you dear. You must be tired. You can stay a night here if you would like. You seem to be nice people. We don't have any spare beds, but you are welcome to sleep here.”

“Thank you, we will. Just having a roof over our heads is nice.” Cadoc said.

“Well, until then you can do what you want, just don't leave the village.”

“Thank you.” The group said.

Nina found everybody to be very kind. Her and Selinia had played games with the little kids, and even found a couple of people their age to talk to. They learned how to garden, while Cadoc and Riko learned the best ways to hunt. Nina enjoyed every minute of her day. She had fun the whole time, and forgot about everything that had been happening recently. It seemed everyone was having a good time. The children were interested in stories all of them had. By nightfall, they had made a campfire and told stories. Even some adults had joined in. There were delicious treats to roast over the fire. When it came time for everyone to sleep, Nina was exhausted, but happy. Even Riko, who was usually quiet and kept to himself, seemed to have enjoyed the day.

8 - Chapter 7: Betrayal

Ellie made breakfast for everybody when they woke up, and packed food for them on their way back home.

“Thank you very much for letting us stay.” Nina said to Ellie.

“Any time children. Maybe we will see you again someday.”

“Please come back to visit!” One of the children said.

“Hee hee. Don't worry, we will come see you when we can!” Selinia chuckled.

“Hurrah!” All the children exclaimed, making Nina and Selinia laugh.

“Be careful now.” Ellie warned.

“We will be fine, thank you Elder.” Cadoc said.

“Goodbye.” Riko added.

They all waved as Nina, Selinia, Cadoc, and Riko walked away. Pretty soon, trees hid the village.

“So, do you know how to get home from here brother?”

“Yes, one of the villagers told me it should take no longer than a day and a half to get back home.”

“Thank goodness. Your parents are probably worried.” Nina said.

They walked on until the sun disappeared and the moon took its place in the sky. The food Ellie packed for them was just as good as the meal they had eaten at the village. She had even given them blankets to keep warm with. They started a campfire and relaxed. Selinia and Cadoc had already fallen asleep. Nina was almost asleep as well, until she saw Riko still sitting by the fire. He was staring into the flames; his gaze fixed as if he was in a deep thought. Wondering if something was wrong, she got up and sat beside him.

“Are you okay Riko?”

He seemed startled and jumped a little when he heard her voice. “Oh, yes I am fine. Aren't you supposed to be sleeping?”

“I was going to ask you the same. You seem troubled. Something wrong?”

“No. I was just...thinking.”

“About?”

“Just...stuff.”

“Is there something you want to talk about?”

“No. Well...I would like to, but...I can't really...it's just...”

“I understand. You are always so quiet though. I know we don't really know each other well, but if you ever need anything you can just ask. Any of us will talk if you want to. We are all together, and we owe you. You helped us escape. If it weren't for you, who knows what would have happened.”

“You really don't need to thank me. Why are you so trusting of a stranger? I know Selinia and Cadoc aren't.”

“Well, you did seem a little suspicious. But you aren't a stranger anymore. You are a friend, all of us are. If I thought you couldn't be trusted, than I wouldn't be talking with you right now. And if Cadoc and Selinia didn't trust you, you wouldn't still be with us.”

“Right...you are a nice person Nina. You and your friends.”

For a moment there was silence. Only the crackling flames and the songs of crickets could be heard. Selinia mumbled something about burnt toast. Nina stood up. “Well, I'm going to get to sleep now. You should get some rest too. Remember, if you ever want somebody to talk to, we are here.”

“Thanks. Someday, I will tell you, when the time is right. Goodnight.”

“Night.” Nina lay back in her blanket, and fell fast asleep.

“I'm so glad we are almost home!” Selinia had been excited all morning. It was only about an hour

longer before they would all be back at Selinia and Cadoc's house.

"I am too Selinia, but please, be a little more quiet." Cadoc said, clearly beginning to get irritated.

"I'm sorry brother. It's just so much has happened. I wanted to have fun with Nina for the week we could, not be captured and locked up in the middle of nowhere."

A man was standing in the middle of the trail, and the group stopped.

"We have been waiting for you."

"Wh...what?" Nina asked.

The man smirked. "Good job son."

Nina was completely confused. Riko stepped forward, and stood next to the man. Then she noticed that the man looked amazingly like Riko, only much older.

"What is going on?" Cadoc demanded to know. Riko and his father were joined by more people, and far-outnumbered Nina, Selinia, and Cadoc.

"No! Riko, you liar!" Selinia screamed.

"I never lied to you."

“You said we could trust you!”

“I don't recall saying that. If I remember correctly, I had told you that I didn't expect you to trust me. You simply went ahead and gave me your trust anyway.”

“Riko, this isn't happening. You would never betray us. You are my friend!” Nina cried out. Riko said nothing.

“You scoundrel!” Cadoc said.

Riko's father smiled. “Get them.”

Selinia and Cadoc were immediately attacked. Riko's father stepped towards Nina. “We have finally found you. After all these years. You will die here. Riko, you will have the honor to defeat her.” Riko's father kicked Nina down to the ground. Riko didn't move. “What are you waiting for son? Kill her!” Riko unsheathed his sword and walked over to Nina. Nina couldn't believe it. Is this what Riko was talking about last night? She thought she could trust him. Selinia and Cadoc were too busy fighting to stop Riko. Unable to defend herself, and without a weapon, Nina couldn't do anything. She closed her eyes as he brought his blade to her neck.

9 - Chapter 8: Secrets Revealed

Nina opened her eyes. Riko was still standing above her holding out his sword. She could hear Selinia screaming at him. Riko's father looked irritated. "What are you waiting for? Finish her!" Riko lifted his sword into the air, but instead of bringing it down upon her, he lowered it to his side. Nina was more confused than ever. He then held out his hand and helped Nina up. His father looked outraged.

"What on earth are you doing Riko?"

"Father, listen to me. She can't be the one."

"What do you mean? Of course she is!"

"The one spoken about in the legends was evil. Nina isn't that person. She is far too kind."

"It's all a trick son. Don't believe her! Kill her now!"

"No."

"What did you just say to me?"

"I said no. I won't kill her."

“How dare you! I am your father; you are to listen to me! You trained all your life for this moment! You can't throw it all away now! It is our duty to protect the world from the Ruler of Darkness. Now that we have found her, you can't let her live!”

“I told you, she can't be the one! Nina and her friends were very kind to me, and I will not let them die.”

“Fine. I will do it myself!” Riko's father rushed at Nina with a sword. Riko blocked his attack with his own sword.

“ Call everyone back. Stop this fight now.” Riko demanded.

“We can't...”

“I said do it!”

His father hesitated. “Everybody, stop!” The fighting ceased at once. “Son, you better know what you are doing.”

“I will explain myself later. Right now, I must tell Nina and her friends everything.”

“Are you sure about this?”

“Yes. I told you, Nina isn't like what we thought she would be like. Neither are her friends. Something is amiss.”

“Fine. I trust you. Come see me later. Take these Elixers for them in case they got hurt.”

“Thank you father. I will see you soon.”

Riko's father, along with the rest of the attackers, walked away. Riko handed everybody the elixers. “Let's go back to your house. I will explain everything there.”

“You want us to welcome you to our home after that? You tried to kill us!” Selinia yelled.

“I am very sorry. But as I told you, I will tell you everything later. Don't you want to see your parents first?”

“Well...yea...but...” Selinia said no more, and the group quietly made their way to Selinia and Cadoc's home. So much had been happening lately, Nina didn't have the slightest clue as to what was going on. It was hard to tell if Riko was friend or foe, but Nina felt that he was on their side. He must have his reasons. As soon as they arrived, Sariah rushed out of the house, tears pouring from her eyes.

“You are back! Selinia, Cadoc, Nina!”

“Mom!” Selinia ran to her mother and hugged her.

“Oh Selinia! Where have you all been! We have been worried sick! Koen! Koen the children are back!” Sariah then hugged Cadoc and Nina as well. Ilmatar and Draco also came over to greet them.

Koen rushed out of the house. “Oh I am so glad to see you are all safe!”

“Glad to be home mother, father. But we have something important to discuss.” Cadoc said.

“Yes, we want to know where you have been! Quickly, into the house, all of you.” Sariah said.

They followed Sariah into the house and all sat down in the living room. Nina was anxious to learn what Riko was up to, and she could tell everybody else was as well. As soon as they had all taken their seats, Sariah spoke. “Now please, tell us where on earth you have been and what you have been doing!”

Cadoc told their story for them. He told his parents all about being captured, escaping, and finding the village. The whole time he spoke, both his mother and father were bewildered, and Sariah began to cry once more when he finished.

“I am so glad you are all safe! But...I don't understand. Why on earth were you captured?”

“That is something we would like to know as well. Riko seems to have the answers.” Cadoc said, and they all turned to Riko.

Riko hesitated for a moment, then began his story. “Well, there is a lot to it. When I first met you, it was all planned out. The one who attacked Ilmatar was one of my companions. I wasn't sure it would work, but it went as intended. The people that attacked that day weren't bandits. They were also with me.”

Before he could continue, Selinia cut him off. She became enraged, and started to scream at him. “So the whole thing was set up by you! I can't believe it! Some of my friends and fellow knights were killed in that battle! And you are with them!” She had stood up, and looked as if she was ready to kill Riko. Nina pulled her back down.

“Let's hear what he has to say.”

“I don't care what he has to say! He is the reason some of my friends are dead!”

“Selinia, please, let him continue!” Cadoc said. She opened her mouth as if to say more, but closed it again.

Riko began to speak again. “I am greatly sorry for everything, but, please, let me explain myself. Then you may judge me.” When nobody spoke, he continued. “I was to stay with you until I was able to kill Nina. I couldn't while anybody else was around of course, so I never had a chance. I could contact my father, however, and report what was happening. But the ones who captured us... I don't know who they are. That had absolutely nothing to do with our plan. It posed a slight problem at first, but after we escaped everything was fine. My father waited until the right moment, and attacked.”

“But why? I don't understand that at all. Why do people want me dead?” Nina asked, perplexed and afraid of what was happening.

“Remember I told you about the prophecy? It has been passed down in my family since the fortune tellers predicted it.”

“You said you weren't part of them! Cadoc asked you! You liar!” Selinia said.

“Actually, now that I think about it, he never did say that. He only said that he had heard about it during his travels. I don't think Riko lied to us once, but instead has been telling us half-truths.” Cadoc suggested.

“Correct. I had indeed heard about it during my travels. Since nobody questioned me further, it was quite easy to avoid telling the truth. Anyway, we found out that Nina was the one spoken about in the prophecy, or at least I thought so until recently.”

The whole room went quite. Nina couldn't believe her ears. Why would anybody think that? This is why they wanted her dead? “Wh...what do you mean?”

“The one said to have complete control of the darkness. The one that was going to ruin our world, it was suppose to be you, Nina. However, I now question that.”

Nina was shocked. "How can that be? And how do you know who it is?"

"My family has been searching for the Ruler of Darkness. My father was a talented thief, and he could easily find out information. That is where I learned to pick locks. He wanted me to follow in his footsteps, but instead I wanted to become a swordmaster. A couple years back, my father was taking a walk in the forest. During his walk, he came across some people in dark robes. He heard them speak of the prophecy, and became interested. He began to follow them, and collected information. According to what he told me, they knew exactly who the Ruler of Darkness was. Apparently, they were followers of the Ruler of Darkness, and were waiting for the moment when darkness would reign over the land, and bring them to power. They spoke of a young girl living in Etruria with her foster parents. The rest even I am unsure of, but I am sure my father could tell you more. I was sent to find you, and now here we are."

"That is crazy! Nina isn't anything like that!" Selinia said

"I know. I was told she was evil, cruel, and merciless. But after I was around you all for a little while, I quickly found that she wasn't like that at all, and neither were any of you. I hope you can forgive me for everything I have done. I give you my most sincere apology, and I promise I will make it up to you somehow."

"I don't know...how do we know that this isn't part of your plot? To lower our guard and then strike?" Selinia asked.

Nina thought about the night before. That must have been what he was thinking about. Riko did say that he would tell her everything, when the time was right. "Well, he has never lied to us before. I think we can trust him."

"Well...you do have a point there. But I want to know more about this. I can't believe that they thought this "Ruler of Darkness" was you." Selinia said.

"I can take you to my father, he knows more. I'm sure he can explain it all."

Sariah didn't seem very pleased. "You are saying Riko tried to kill you?!?"

"Well, not really. He actually protected us." Selinia told her mother.

"I don't want you going anywhere with him!"

"Please Sariah, I need to find out why they attacked me. And how those other people knew who I was." Nina said.

"Nina, I can't let you go with him! What if something happens?"

"Mother, I think Nina is right. If Riko wanted to kill her, he had the perfect opportunity already. But he didn't." Cadoc said.

Sariah would not give in. "No! I don't trust him!"

"Sariah, I think we can trust Nina and our children. They have been through a lot, and they know whom they can and can't trust. We weren't there, so we don't know exactly what happened." Koen added.

Sariah sighed. "I guess you are right. They are smart, they know what they are doing. Please, be careful. I still don't know what is going on, but I'm sure you will figure it out."

"Thanks mom! Don't worry, we will be fine!" Selinia said as she hugged her mom.

“We should take Draco and Ilmatar with us this time.” Cadoc said. “We can fly there, Riko can show us the way.”

“Thank you. I promise we won't harm you again. I am curious as to what went wrong. My father probably wants to know some things as well. Let's go.”

10 - Chapter 9: A Night's Rest

The two girls flew on Ilmatar while Cadoc and Riko rode on Draco. Riko instructed which way to go. Not too long later, they came across small fortress, similar to the one they had been locked up in before. It too was hidden in a forest. They landed in front of the door. Ilmatar and Draco stayed outside as Riko opened the large doors and let everybody in. It had the look of an old, abandoned fortress on the outside, but the inside was quite different. It looked just as comfortable as her own home. Riko walked up the stone stairs in the center of the room, and the others followed. They entered another room where Riko's father was sitting at a large table.

"So, you are back. Please, everybody, sit down." Riko's father said. They all did as they were told. "Riko, you tell me that this girl isn't the one?"

"I don't believe so. Like I told you, she isn't the person that we were led to believe she was. It is possible we have the wrong person."

"Highly unlikely."

"Could you tell us about the time you first found out about Nina?"

"Hmm...yes, I suppose I should. I had been walking around, when I came across some strange robed men. When they mentioned something about the Ruler of Darkness, I immediately became interested, and followed them. I found out that the one who was to become the Ruler was living in Etruria with her foster parents. Nina, you were adopted, correct?"

"Well, my parents found me when I was a baby. It was during the night, and it had been raining hard. They thought heard a baby's voice crying outside and opened to door to find me lying on the doorstep. They took me in and raised me. I have never known my real parents, but they are just as good as any other parents. They always treated me well."

"I see. Well, they said that soon, the child would be ready. She had not known of her destiny, but had natural skills with dark magic. I sent somebody to find this child. He discovered a female Shaman who lived with foster parents. We figured that it had to be you. After learning that you were headed to Ilia, I had my son go there."

"Wait...so you had been spying on me? For how long?" Nina asked

"Well...it was only a couple of months ago that we discovered you."

"I can't believe it! Somebody was watching me the entire time and I didn't know?"

"We had to make sure you were the right one..."

"But I'm not! Sure I am a Shaman, but it's not like im strong enough to...rule the world or whatever! How can you just believe something you hear from somebody you don't even know?"

Riko looked shocked from Nina's outburst. He had never seen her like that before. His father seemed surprised as well.

"This is crazy! All of this because you think I am some...monster? This week was supposed to be just Selinia, Cadoc, and I. it was suppose to be fun. I haven't seen them in years. And now...now I find out that somebody has been watching me and wanted me dead?" Nina put her head on the table and cried. She couldn't understand any of this. It made no sense. She just wanted to have fun, carefree week with her best friends. Selinia walked over to Nina and tried to comfort her. Everybody else became silent.

"Nina, let's just go back home and forget about all of this. We can still have fun while there is time." Selinia said.

Nina lifted her head, still crying. "But it won't be the same! I j-j-just wanted to b-be with my friends. I should have never come. It's because of me all this happened! They were after me the whole time! That night when we came back, one of the b-b-bandits g-grabbed me. He said something about g-g-getting a reward. I didn't tell anybody b-because I didn't want to ruin it! And n-now some of your friends were killed! We were almost killed!"

"I became too obsessed with what I was doing and didn't care who was harmed in the process. I know nothing I can do will ever bring back the friends you lost, but we will do anything we can to make it up to you." Riko's father said.

Nina wiped her eyes. "I'm sorry. This is just...so much to handle. I could have never thought anything like this could happen..."

It was quiet again, until Selinia spoke up. "Remember how we got captured earlier and Riko said that it wasn't him? If he wasn't the one responsible, then who was?"

"Riko, you were captured?" His father asked.

"Yes. There was a bunch of robed people that attacked us. We were all knocked out and they locked us up. I managed to get us out."

"Then we aren't the only ones after Nina."

"What?" Nina stopped crying.

"It must be her then. There can't be any mistaking it."

“Are you sure?” Riko asked.

“Yes. We should probably find out who those people were that captured you. We will set out tomorrow. You need to rest for now Riko. The rest of you can go home. When we find out more information I will send Riko to tell you.”

“No, I want to go too.” Nina said.

Riko's father looked a little shocked. “Nina, are you sure?”

“Yes. If they are looking for me, I have a right to know who they are.”

“But Nina, you were just saying you wanted to go home.” Cadoc said.

“I know, but I have to find out what is going on. Whether I believe all of this or not, I'm not sure, but I want to go. You two can go back home if you want, I am not going to ask you to come along. I have put you in enough danger already.”

“If you are going so are we.” Selinia said. “I am just as curious as you are.”

“But Selinia...” Nina began.

“I am your best friend, and best friends stick together no matter what. I can't just leave you now. If you go, I go.”

“Same for me.” Cadoc said.

“Selinia, Cadoc...I don't know what to say...”

“You don't need to say anything.” Selinia assured her friend.

“Thank you guys so much! I couldn't have asked for better friends!”

“Well, if you all want to go, I can take you along. Rest for the remainder of the day. You have been through a lot and should stay home overnight. Riko and I will get to your house tomorrow when we are ready.”

“Are you sure you all want to go? It could be dangerous.” Riko asked.

“Yes.” The three said.

“Fine. Just be prepared.”

“Don't worry, we will!” Selinia said.

“We will see you tomorrow then. Sleep well.”

“You too.”

11 - Chapter 10: Sneak Attack

The next morning came all too quickly. After getting ready, Nina, Selinia, and Cadoc said goodbye to Koen and a weeping Sariah. Cadoc had to convince his mother the night before that they would be fine. She eventually understood and allowed them to leave, but couldn't help crying as they began to leave. Riko and his father had arrived riding a wyvern. With weapons, vulneraries and elixers with them, the group once again headed out.

“Thank you for letting us come along Mr...um...” Nina turned to Riko's father, realizing that she did not yet know his name.

“Please, just call me Seth. And it's no problem, just be prepared for anything.”

“Where did the wyvern come from Seth?” Selinia asked.

“He belongs to a friend of mine. I am just borrowing him until we reach our destination.”

“We are heading for that fortress we were kept in before, right?” Nina asked.

“Yes.” Seth responded.

“But there are so many guards there, we barely made it out. Are you sure we will be safe with just the five of us?” Selinia asked

“Some of my comrades already there. About 7 of them I would say.”

"We should have known you would be well prepared." Nina said.

When they got there, the group landed a little ways away from the old fortress. The others were waiting, hidden in the trees.

"Ah, Commander, you have arrived!" A man said to Seth.

"How is the situation?" He asked.

"Well, there aren't many guards around. There are only a handful guarding the entrance. The rest of them must be inside."

"Good. That will make it easier to get in undetected."

"This place is so isolated, it's a wonder why they even have so many guards." Selinia whispered to Nina.

"What exactly are we going to do here anyway?" Cadoc inquired.

"I am going to try and sneak in and get some information. Hopefully we can get through this without a battle, but they may attack. If that happens, we will fight back. Nina, you should stay out of site. If they see you, I am sure they will come after us."

"Is all of this really necessary?" Nina asked.

"Unfortunately, it is. They have tried to capture you before. According to Riko, you were kept in a separate cell from the rest. They probably would have executed everybody else, but they apparently

need you for something. I believe they are the ones waiting for the Ruler of Darkness to finally step forward.”

“Are you sure of this?” Selinia asked.

“Yes. Now if you don't like the plan, you can leave. Otherwise, just stay with everybody else and do as I say. Well, here I go.”

The group watched as Seth snuck his way into the fortress, completely unnoticed by the guards. Nina was about to sit down when she thought she heard something behind her. She looked around but didn't see anything.

Selinia noticed Nina looking around anxiously. “Nina, what's the matter?”

“Nothing. I just thought I heard something.”

“It was probably just an animal.”

“Yeah, I guess so.”

A few seconds later, Nina saw something zoom past her. An arrow hit one of Seth's soldiers in the back of his head. He fell over, dead. Another arrow barely missed Cadoc and pierced a nearby tree. Everybody got their weapons ready. Nina saw an archer hidden in the trees and cast a Flux. As soon as it hit, a large group of guards came out from hiding.

“Where did they all come from? I thought that you checked the area!” Riko yelled.

"We did! We didn't see anybody! I don't know where they came from!" One of them men said.

"Fine, we have no choice but to attack! Make sure they don't get ahold of Nina!"

Nina began casting her spells at the enemies that weren't paying attention. One of the guards spotted her and walked over to her.

"Heh...so, you are back." He said.

Nina backed away. "What do you want with me?"

"Come with me, and I will tell you."

"No. Tell me now."

"You ignorant girl. You will never escape. Make things easy and just give up. If you will just follow me, I will spare your friend's lives."

"Get away from me. I'm not going anywhere with you."

"Foolish child! My ax longs for the taste of blood. If you want to make things hard, I will just finish off all of your little friends right now."

"You will leave my friends alone!" Nina said, and attacked him with her Flux.

"Hmph. You can do better than that. I know you can. But it seems you have chosen to go the hard way. Fine." He turned around and threw his ax towards Selinia, who was already occupied fighting another guard.

"Selinia, look out!" Nina screamed. Selinia turned around and tried to get out of the way, but the ax struck her in her arm. She dropped her lance and her enemy rushed after her. Before he could reach Selinia, however, Riko rushed by and slashed him. The attacker fell to the ground and Riko ran to Selinia.

"Selinia! Are you all right?"

"That ax got my lance arm."

"Stay out of the rest of this battle. I'll protect you."

"Next time I won't miss." The guard said. "Now, come with me."

"No!" Nina cast her spell again, but it didn't seem to do much damage. "Why won't my spells work?"

"You are stubborn, aren't you? You leave me no choice. I'll just have to...gah! What...who just hit me?"

Cadoc landed near Nina. "Are you alright Nina?"

"Yes, I'm fine."

"You dare fight me? You will regret that!" The axman said, and threw his ax at Cadoc. Draco quickly took to the air, dodging the attack. He then swept down upon the man, and Cadoc thrust out his lance. The weapon hit its target.

“ARGH! You...won't get away with that...” The guard swung his ax one last time. It missed Cadoc, but hit Draco, giving him a gash on his left side. The man fell as Draco let out a loud roar. Cadoc jumped off and pulled the ax out of his wyvern.

“Draco, are you okay?”

The wyvern nodded.

“ I won't make you be in this fight anymore if you don't want to. No, don't try to keep going. Just rest here. I know you have been through worse, but I don't want to risk you getting injured any further. Don't worry, I can fight on foot too.”

“Is he okay Cadoc?” Nina asked.

“He will be okay, but if he gets injured any further it could cause some searious damage. Stay here with him, I'm going to help the others.”

Riko came over to them. “I think we have got them all. Are you guys all right?”

“Yes, we are fine. Draco suffered a minor injury, but he will okay.”

“Is Selinia okay?” Nina asked.

“I'm okay. But that ax got me good. I don't know if I can fight with this arm.”

“Selinia, what happened?” Cadoc asked.

“I was fighting when an ax came flying at me. I tried to move, but it hit my right arm. See.” Selinia held out her arm. The wound was already bandaged. “Riko came and helped me. He bandaged up my arm.”

“Thank you Riko.” Cadoc said.

“It's the least I could do.”

“How is everybody else?” Nina asked.

“ Luckily, they are all alive. As for our other friend, the arrow killed him.”

“Oh no...I'm so sorry.”

“We did pretty well considering the numbers we fought. Hopefully father is having an easier time.”

“Should we go look for him?” Selinia asked.

“No. We are to wait until he arrives or gives the signal. I'm sure he is fine.”

“Signal? Are you sure?”

“Yes. I know what I am doing. Well...now we wait.”

12 - Chapter 11: Moment of Peace

They all got as comfortable as they could and waited. The sun began to set, and it grew dark and cold. They couldn't make a fire or they would be found. Selinia suggested they move farther in the forest like they did before, but they had to stay put in case something happened. Eventually nightfall came and still there was no sign of Seth. Selinia fell asleep trying to stay warm in her brother's arms. When Nina noticed everybody else was slumbering, she too lay down and closed her eyes, but she couldn't sleep. Instead she lay on her back and stared at the stars, lost in thought. She still couldn't understand what was going on. Riko and his father insisted that she was this Ruler of Darkness, yet they hadn't presented much proof of it.

“You are still awake, Nina?” A voice said.

She sat up found Riko was up as well. “Yeah. I can't sleep.”

“Are you all right? You seem awful distant. That's not like you.”

“Heh. It's not like you to want to converse either.”

“I know this is bothering you. I thought you might want to talk about it rather than keep it to yourself. I'm partly to blame for all of this anyway.”

“Its just...I'm confused.”

“That makes two of us.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, we all thought you would be so much different. I have been longing for this day to arrive; yet now that it is here, I don't know what to do. I don't doubt that you are the one we have been searching for...but I can't believe it to be true.”

“But how do you know for sure? What if those people that our father talked about were wrong?”

“There is one thing my father left out. He doesn't want others to know. I can't tell you about it right now. But I'm sure he will tell you when the time is right.

“I understand. Thank you...for all the help”

“Help? I caused this. How is that helping?”

“Well...if this is indeed who I really am...I would have found out about it eventually. If it is my fate, it will happen. You could have just killed me that day, but you didn't. You are allowing my friends and I to come along with you.”

“I didn't make that decision on my own. My father approved of you coming along.”

“But at first, he wanted you to kill me. Why did you disobey?”

“I told you already. I wasn't sure if you were the right person. Everything fits into place, but something didn't seem right. It still doesn't. You and your friends...you are all trustworthy and kind. Somebody fit to be the Ruler wouldn't be like your group at all.”

“I just hope your father finds the answers. I don't want to make my friends go through all of this anymore.”

“He will. Our family has been working on this for ages. He is determined to figure it out. I think that this little problem we have run into even made him more interested. He actually seemed excited last night. Anxious yet excited. You know...you can still go home. My father and I can figure everything out on our own, and tell you later. There is no reason for you and our friends to go through with this.”

“I want to. I have to. I can't just sit around while something like this happens. I'm the one who this is about, and I need to take some responsibility. Selinia and Cadoc don't have to stay. I don't want them to get hurt, but they insist.”

“That is because they are true friends. You are lucky to have them with you. They are doing it for you.”

“I know. I'm glad they are here. I don't want them to get hurt...but if they weren't here for me...I don't know what I would do.”

They sat quiet for a moment. Nina thought she heard some kind of whistle coming from the direction of the fortress.

“Riko, did you just-“

“Wait...that's the sign. Father needs us. Everybody, wake up! Quickly!”

Selinia sat up and rubbed her eyes. “Uhn...what is it?”

“My father is in trouble, let's go!”

“Oh no! Brother, wake up!”

Cadoc opened his eyes. “What's going on?”

“We have to help Riko's father!”

Cadoc immediately grabbed his lance. “Selinia, you should stay here. With an injured arm you can't fight.”

“Don't be silly, I can still fight. I will just use my other arm.”

“No, I don't want you getting hurt again.”

“But I have to go. I can stay in the back with Nina.”

“Fine, but try not to fight.” He then spoke to his Wyvern. “Draco, I want you to stay out here. We may need to escape when we come out. Be ready. And watch for enemies.”

“Are you guys coming?” Nina asked them.

“Yes.” Cadoc and Selinia both said.

13 - Chapter 12: A Fallen Friend

Weapons ready, they ran to the fort. When they got inside, Seth was fighting the guards. As soon as the others seen Riko's group come in, they charged at them. Nina stayed in the back at cast spells at enemies from a distance, while Selinia fought off oncoming attacks. Riko ran to his father's side.

"Seems you have gotten yourself into a bit of trouble" Riko said.

"Riko, glad you are here. Seems one of them spotted me. Let's take care of these guys."

Riko slashed at an enemy axemen and killed him. He began to fight another when he was hit from behind and fell to the ground. The foe readied his axe to attack. He rushed forward but Riko rolled to the side just in time. He got up and blocked a second blow with his sword. Seth stabbed the man from behind. As he turned around, a girl with a lance came towards him. She knocked him over and held her lance to his neck.

"Give it to me." She said.

"Give you what?" Seth asked.

"Don't play dumb. I know you have it. I want the gem."

"I don't have it."

"You lie! I know you have it! Give it to me or die."

Riko saw his father was in trouble and went to attack the girl. She saw him coming and stepped to the side. He missed and she jabbed him in the back with the dull end of her lance. He fell face down onto the concrete floor.

"Hmm...perhaps if I kill your precious son you will change your mind." She told Seth.

"Don't you dare touch him!"

"Then give me the gem!"

"I will not let you take it."

"Fine. Say goodbye to your son." Just as she raised her lance to Riko, Cadoc thrust his own lance at her.

"No...I will not die alone..." Before anybody knew what she was doing, she thrust her lance through Seth's stomach, and fell.

"Father!" Riko crawled towards his father. Nina and Selinia saw what was going on and ran over to them.

"Heh...looks like I was...too slow. Riko...you must take care of Nina...and her friends. These people are the ones...that I was talking about. Take the gem...and don't let them have it." Seth said weakly.

"I promise. But you have to stay alive."

"I'm sorry...I will not...be able to...help you...be careful...my...son..." Seth fell limp in Riko's arms.

"Father...no...don't die...I can't lose you too...no...father..." For the first time, they saw a tear fall down Riko's cheek.

"No...Seth..." Selinia said.

"Sorry to ruin the moment, but your father has something we want." A voice said. They all turned around to see a man wielding a sword. "Now, hand it over and I won't have to kill you."

"No. I promised father. You won't have it." Riko said as he stood up. His left cheek was scraped and his nose was bleeding.

"Heh. You're just a kid. And I don't see your father complaining. HAHHAHAHAHAHAH!"

"You..." Riko grabbed his sword.

"AHAHAHAHAHAHAHA...Wha-AUGH!!! How did you...gah..."

"That will teach you to mess with me, and my father." Riko kicked the man as he fell.

A soldier ran to Riko. "Sir! The enemy has been defeated! Where is...no...Commander! Commander are you all right?"

"My father...is dead..."

“Commander Seth...no...”

Another soldier stepped forward. “Commander Riko, we are so sorry. We weren't able to protect Commander Seth.”

“It isn't your fault. You all fought hard.”

“We must give him a proper burial.” Another soldier said.

They walked out into the freezing rain. Riko and his comrades buried Seth. Nina, Selinia, and Cadoc offered to help, but Riko told them to rest. Ilmatar and Draco were already wet from the rain, and kept Nina, Selinia, and Cadoc dry with their wings. When they finished, they were all exhausted. The only problem now was where to sleep. It was too cold and rainy to stay outside, but a fortress with dead bodies wasn't very inviting either. Despite their fatigue, they decided that they would return to Riko's fort and rest there. As they got ready, two people emerged from the trees.

14 - Chapter 13: Summoned to the Village

The two people stood before Nina and her friends. One was young lady. She had blonde hair that fell to her waist. Her eyes were deep blue. She held a bow in her hand and a quiver full of arrows was slung across her back. Both hands were covered with green gloves. She wore a light green top and a matching skirt that went down to her knees. On her feet were small, light brown boots.

Next to her stood a man about 18 or so. He had short, brown hair and green eyes. He held a large axe. His black shirt was tight on his muscular body. His pants were dark brown as were the boots he wore.

Riko eyed them suspiciously. Nina thought they looked slightly familiar, but she couldn't figure out why. The girl spoke.

"I know you. You are Nina, correct?"

Nina was surprised to hear her name. So she had met these people before, but where? "Yes, that is my name. I apologize, but, I am afraid I don't know your name."

"I am Sakura, and this," She said, pointing to the man, "this is Lee. I didn't think you would remember. You and your friends had stumbled upon our village not too long ago."

Selinia spoke. "I remember them now! They are from that village hidden deeper in the forest. Remember?"

Nina nodded. "Yes, I remember now."

"If I may ask" Interrupted Riko "What are you doing here?"

"I wish to know the same thing." Came Sakura's response.

"That...is not for you to know." Riko said.

"Then you don't need to know why we are here either." Sakura replied.

Riko seemed to be getting aggravated. "If you have no business with us, then we will be going." He said as he turned around.

"If you would just wait for a moment I would have you know that we do have business with you." Sakura retorted.

Riko turned around to face her, becoming very impatient. "Fine...then what is it you want?"

"Come with us and I will tell you."

Riko didn't move. "You expect us to just follow you, without knowing why?"

Sakura glared at him. Lee spoke up. "Aw, come on Sakura! You aren't going to make friends like that."

"We aren't here to make friends, we are here on orders."

Nick simply sighed and turned to the group. "The Elder wants you to come with us to our village. She wishes to speak with you."

Selinia looked surprised. "Why would she want to see us?"

"We can't discuss it here." Sakura answered. "You can discuss it with the Elder when we get back."

"Well, I guess we should go." Nina said.

"Commander, shall we go?" A soldier asked Riko.

"I suppose we have to." Riko grunted.

They marched through the forest in silence. Everyone was too tired to talk. Although Nina was exhausted, her mind raced with thoughts. She remembered Seth telling Riko to protect something. What it was she had no clue. The longer she was around Riko, the more confusing everything got. He was still keeping secrets from them, of that she could be sure. Now Ellie wished to speak with them. Once again, nothing seemed to make sense.

Her thoughts wandered to her parents. She missed them, and wondered how they were doing. They didn't know what was happening; to them she was just spending a week with her friends. In fact, her week with her friends was almost up. She would be expected home in a day or two. The way things were going, returning home in a couple of days was not going to happen. Hopefully she would somehow be able to tell them that she was going to be away for a while longer. She didn't want to worry them.

They reached the village shortly before dawn and the rain had stopped. Sakura took their weapons and stashed them away. Normally they wouldn't have to, but with the extra soldiers the village would be concerned. Ellie met them at her door.

"It is good to see you again." She greeted them. Before anybody could speak, she continued. "I am sure you are wondering why I asked you to come here. However, you all look like you are ready fall over

and sleep on the wet ground. I have arranged places for you all to sleep. We can discuss things after you have been rested.”

A couple sheds that were used for storage were set up for a comfortable place to sleep. Ellie apologized for not having room in the house for them to rest, but they were grateful for what they were offered. It was much better than what they had originally planned. As soon as Nina lay down and pulled the blankets over her, she fell fast asleep.