

# Regear

"General Sterling."

"Sergeant Thosl. Call me Max. I'm not so tight as your previous commanding officers. If it's all the same I'd likewise prefer to drop the sergeant."

"Finally." Thosl hissed. "Max, I am in need of things. I did not want to make it obvious that I was leaving so I am entirely without any of my effects. There was nothing that I cannot replace, though I guess that Kleese will miss his brush."

"I could get your things back." Max said.

"I highly doubt there is anything to get back. You do not know Granmarljin. Never have I known such a petty being. Gran was seriously angry when I left. <Thosl smirked showing her razor sharp teeth.> I do not think he liked my parting gift very much."

"I don't think I want to know." Max said. "What do you need?"

"Mostly I need to replace my ritual components. I did not have many to begin with. Gran was rather limiting of my capabilities. I hope it shall not be a problem Max."

"What sort of rituals are we talking about?" Max asked.

Thosl gave him a look and answered, "Summoning."  
"Sacrifices?"

"As needed."

"Animal or human?"

"There is paltry returns on sacrificing the CS humans. I do not know about their canine-men."

"To be honest Thosl I couldn't give a drek either way. I mean it makes no difference to me."

Thosl took a big chance. "While we are being honest, I may have to resort to the sacrificing of things that you might describe as allies. Demons and such to be precise. Again with d-bees it is often not worth the bother."

"As long as you summoned them in the first place you have my express permission. There is one thing though. <Max paused.> All of this has to be kept quiet. Not everyone under my command is so... liberal. I also suggest that you not use any of our actual allies."

"Yes, sir. I understand, Max."

[Sometime later.]

Max sought out Thosl. He ushered her aside. "I have some things for you."

He proffered a long thin chain of silver. On the end of it was some sort of charm. She took it from Max and clutched it tightly. Floating just to the left of Max's head was a sphere of pale energy. A second one joined it. She said, "Come closer."

Max looked at her, but the two spheres immediately came to right in front of her. She passed her claws

through them. Max raised his only eyebrow. Thosl put the amulet over her head and let it slide down her long sinuous neck. Max had another item. It was a gold coil that ended in an unbroken ring. Max handed it to her. "This one needs a little explanation. It's for emergencies. It casts a spell that creates mystical wings. They will last for three hours. It can only--"

Thosl interrupted, "Three times and then it becomes a bauble. I did not know that we were in the stage of our relationship for jewellery, General."

Max did not rise to her bait. "I also have a cred card for your trip to Tolkeen. I can arrange transport to the city."

Thosl donned the spiral putting it on her right wrist extending up her forearm. "I had intended to take the form of some flying creature and make my way there by myself."

"Good. I was going to suggest that you take some time. It's not every day someone hovers at the edge. At least it was in battle. Though we headhunters prefer to do it with the other guy's heart in our hands when we do."

"Is there something that you would like to say Max?"

"Not really, but I guess you want to hear it. You cut and run from your group, you went behind your commanding officer's back. Maybe General Granmarljin was wrong, maybe he was right. It doesn't matter. What matters is that I need to trust you. General Granmarljin

would dearly love to have your head attached to a metal plate and hung someplace in his tent. Nim gave you a chance. I am going to give you a chance, but I need to know I'm not wasting my time."

"You should not..." she began with more than hint of menace. "You should not, worry."

"Good. You can head out whenever you're ready." Max said and then turned and left.

Thosl's eyes flashed red a moment. Where these humans attained their audacity she would never know. Even more perplexing was how Nim could put them in charge. There was only so far she trusted even his judgement. The so called 'true' dragons often lacked because of their supposedly superior powers.

Kleese found Thosl. He rubbed up against her. She reached out and ran her claws carefully through his fur. She said to him, "I have to journey to the city of Tolkeen. There are items that I need for my castings."

Kleese whined. Thosl added, "Yes I will obtain a hair brush for you.

"Now Kleese, I wish you to remain here. Do not stay in the camp. Stay outside of it. Stay in the woods. Do not stray from the ley line. I will ask 2nd Lieutenant Walker to keep an eye on you. He will most likely do so with one of his orbs of seeing. You behave now, Kleese. Perhaps I will return with more than a hair brush for you."

She ruffled his fur a moment then bade him to go

into the woods. "Orbs of seeing, huh?" said a voice startling Thosl.

She turned, her eyes awash in red light. She blinked. "2nd Lieutenant! I was just going to seek you out."

"Bear-sitter. That's alright. If I didn't know better I'd say that Kleese was a pet and not a familiar. Or is he more like a child to you?"

"The bond between Shifter and Familiar is a deep one. Now, 2nd Lieutenant I intend to return to the camp not only with new spell casting components, I also intend to come back with a couple new spells. I must insist that you learn one of them."

"If you insist on teaching me something then I suggest that you had best stop calling me 2nd Lieutenant. What sort of spell is it?"

"It is a powerful spell meant to heal, pardon the term, powerful beings. Never in my wildest expectations could I have ever have considered that I might not be able to heal my own wounds. I intend someone here to be able to do something, rather than expect another team to step in. From speaking with Pokeri he expended a lot of magic in casting his spell and it was not ideally suited to the task at hand. I will find a more appropriate spell. I have known a few beings that have such a spell. With it you will be able to heal me, Kleese, the tentacled being that saved my life, and should it ever be necessary your own dragon."

"Okay, I'm sold."

"If you would excuse me Chris I have to change for my trip."

"Metamorphosising into something? I've seen G'lishi do it several times."

Thosl thought it over for a moment. The Ley Line Walker would learn eventually. If she were to entrust even a small part of her life in him he should know at least a few things. "I must cast a spell to do it."

"Oh... May I see if yours is different than mine? I can metamorphise into any animal I've seen enough of."

"If you wish, then."

Thosl took off the talisman that Max had given to her. She laid it on the ground at her rearclaws. She began to cast her spell loud enough for Chris to hear everything. She finished the spell and turned into a Drakin. She flexed her leathery wings and dug her razor sharp talons into the hard frozen ground. The Drakin was somewhere in between a bat and a bird. Its head was like an eagle's almost. Its body was almost humanoid and with no tail. Using her new Drakin beak she tried to slip the talisman on one of her ankles. It would not fit. She asked Chris to hold onto it for her. The voice was her own though she knew the Drakin to be incapable of speech normally.

Chris picked it up and said, "That's a much different set of incantations."

Thosl said, "I will be off now."

Chris waved and she flapped her wings sending a

sheet of snow flying past him. She rose up above the trees and turned in the direction of Tolkeen. It felt good to fly on muscle power alone. As she flew she thought about what the General had said. In his own ignorant unknowing way it was not all his fault. He could not know that it was Ketszajakzyce will that she leave the first string of the Monster Squad. The General thought it was all about Shisen and his crusade. She would not abuse him of that notion. It seemed to give him some comfort that Shisen had acted with reason, even if he knew not of what he really spoke. Perhaps he was not so insignificant.

[In Tolkeen City.]

Thosl moved through the marketplace. She had most of the ritual components that she had set out to purchase. The mood of the crowd was sullen. There were a number of beings on the street with their offspring. As inconspicuously as she could she watched them. They held hands when they had them. Others carried the offspring in their arms or tentacles. It was not something that she had not seen before, but something felt different. The normal loose, and often tenuous grips, were now tight and tense. The offspring were eerily silent. They kept their heads low and their mouths were silent.

The entire marketplace was subdued. It was perplexing. To her understanding the war was going

well. There should be celebrating and the baring of closed teeth. The offspring should be a cacophonous force in the streets. They should be running and hopping about like other small crazed mammals. Thosl nuzzled her foreclaw with her beak. She stopped at a table full of common dwelling items. It had empty metal containers in different shapes. There were glass containers holding edible items. Some of them she recognised as the same from the magic stalls.

The owner of the stall was a human. He eyed her suspiciously. She ignored him for a moment. She cleared her throat and tried to speak in as soft a pitch as she could. "I seek a grooming item. I have not seen a merchant who has such things. Can you assist me? Please."

The man looked at her uncomprehendingly. She went over what she had said. She could not recall any errors in her American speaking. She stood and waited a moment. Perhaps he was so filled with terror he could not speak. She realised her error, his hand was moving inside of a small opening in his clothes. She spoke and she knew her other error. She repeated her request in Dragonese. While she did so she took a closer look at him. Perhaps he was actually an elf. She did not know. He stopped and pulled his empty hand out of the opening while mulling over the question. He replied, "There is a man, red skin, spikes of bone instead of hair, around the corner there. He is in the ninth stall on your

right."

"My thanks."

She turned and sauntered off to find the stall. It was where she had been directed. The merchant had a variety of items. Thosl looked them over. The merchant talked to her as soon as he finished with another customer. She told him, "I seek a grooming item."

"What sort might that be?"

"I have need of a good hair brush."

The red skinned demon-man laughed and said to her, "I don't see anywhere that you need it. Are you sure that is the word that you meant to use? Not a scrub brush, or a bath brush, or a horse brush."

Thosl pointed a claw at him. "That last, but something for thicker, longer, hair. Thick, heavy, fur. I need a brush that is big and sturdy. It is for a bear."

The merchant looked at her a moment. He shook his head and told her, "I had a couple of small hair brushes but they were sold several days ago. I have a selection of combs still but I doubt they'd be of any help. I mostly deal in cosmetics. I don't even think I could order in any."

"Why is that?" Thosl asked trying not to sound menacing.

"Luxury items have been dwindling for months. I don't even know how much longer I will be able to keep open. My inventory is not much greater than what you see... So, you have a bear?"

"Yes. He is my travelling companion. He likes to have his fur brushed. The brush also gets out the bits of Coalition soldiers."

The merchant's eyes widened. "You're a soldier!"

"Yes." She ventured, "I am a Sergeant."

He stood up straight and elbow out sharply brought his hand to the side of his forehead. She stared at him uncomprehendingly. He lowered his hand. She asked him, "Can you direct me to someone who might have such a brush as I need."

The merchant shook his head. Thosl left immediately. She moved purposely down the street until the first juncture in another direction. She turned into a narrower street where no one was. She cast a spell and communicated with her entity minions. When queried they responded that the red-skinned merchant was calm and friendly. He did not have an adverse reaction to her presence or to her questions. He had been proud when he spoke the word soldier and respectful when he made that gesticulation.

Thosl returned to the main street. She decided she would look for a short while longer. The search proved fruitless. Thosl exited the market section. There was an eatery with take away boxes that made something Thosl had a taste for. It was the strangest thing, made from something dug out of the ground. They cut it in strips and heated it in a liquid. Then they got rid of that liquid, put a granulated powder on it, and a new liquid. Thosl

reached the location. It was down at the end of a narrow street with tall windowless buildings on either side. The eatery, which had sported large glass windows and two doors, one large and one small, was boarded up. A sign written in several languages declared that the place was closed indefinitely.

Thosl inhaled a large breath and let it out slowly. She did not see the point of that action but she found herself doing it more often of late. A motion to her left caused her to turn in that direction. She saw her reflection and paused. There was nothing to reflect her image. She stared hard at the other basilisk. It had its head cocked to the right and was looking back at her. Her spell had yet to cease. She asked her poltergeists what they saw. They had no answer. The other basilisk spoke and it spoke in Thosl's voice, "I'm going to die. That borg from the C.S. is going to finish me off."

"It was Ketszajakzyce's will that I not die." said Thosl.

"Ketszajakzyce's will? The C.S. cares not for Ketszajakzyce. We will die at the deadly nozzle of the human technological might."

Thosl could see through the other basilisk. Things fell into place. Concentrating on her spell instead of her tongue she said to the doppelganger, "Where we are concerned there is no might to the human technology. The only might is ourself and Ketszajakzyce."

The doppelganger blinked and then faded from sight. It was as she had thought, a haunting entity

caught up in her experience at the edge of life and death. She could see the entity with her new amulet. It was floating away. She bid her poltergeists to coral it lest it get away. She began to cast a spell to work on top of her commune with the spirits spell. The spell completed she began to bend the haunting entity to her will. It nagged at her how this was as disturbing as it was fortuitous.