

Part 2

The room is silent in the wake of the guttural voice. A dreadful recognition had come over Daniel, Boris, he had survived. As he turns to see the twisted once human form a dread overtake Daniel . the creature was barely recognizable as the Russian thug that had once tried to kill Daniel, the soul eaters ministrations had kept mutating the man since their last encounter. He was lanky and sallow skinned like a worm, his eyes had sunken into their sockets and glaired out at the world accusingly. A necrosis had started attacking his flesh around his shoulders, pitted and rotting skin was spreading like a disease. However, as Daniel looks the creature over it is clear that something is wrong, something in the creatures eyes or stance is different. .

“You aren't Boris,” says Daniel. He steps back putting his blade between them. Risking a glance at epitaph Daniel see fear in here eyes.

“Daniel that.....” her words cut off as Boris raises his hand dismissively. Epitaph tries to speak but she has no voice.

“What are you?” asks Daniel tightening his fingers on his blade. The familiar blue glow of the ancient weapon makes Boris's skin glisten and glow.

“I found this wretch following you into the citadel. My name is Karas, a knight of Illyria, or at least I was when I still possessed physical form” says the creature with an awkward bow. Karas gives Epitaph a look and she disappears with a flash of light.

“It would be best we have this discussion alone”

“You're possessing Boris?” asks Daniel attempting to ignore the rising panic he feels at Epitaphs sudden disappearance.

“This wretch is little more than a husk” replies Karas dismissively,

“I have been watching you since I managed to escape the maw of the soul eater, thanks to you and your blade. I have seen how the decision to become a knight has tormented you, i know you long to free yourself from your blade. As a thanks for freeing my soul i have come to offer you what you so deeply desire, I can free you from your bond.” Daniel is speechless for a moment. Epitaph told him the bond was irrevocable. Had she lied to him? It was possible, she had proved willing to betray his trust if her freedom was at stake. But even if what this, thig, was offering was legitimate, did he even want that anymore? Daniel tried to reach out to epitaph to talk to her, but his mid bounces off a wall. It felt like a sponge. He tried to push through it to epitaph, he could feel her muted just beyond the ephemeral barrier but his mind simply bounced off the wall.

“What did you do to Epitaph?” asks Daniel trying not to panic. The creature, spirit, thing inside Boris began pacing around the great hall, looking at the withered and decayed beauty of the Knights of Illyria. Daniel keeps his blade between them never letting his gaze waver from Karas. He didn't like Epitaphs reaction to this thing. He had never seen her scared, even when they faced the soul eater she was always calm, collected.

“Don't be so pedestrian knightling, your weapon is too present, it shows no decorum. A true knight takes command, and a dutiful weapon lets them. You know I lost friends to that blade. Talented and virtuous squires deserving of the honor of bonding with a blade” the creature spits its words at Daniel a barely contained rage flowing from it. Daniel expects an attack but as quickly as it came it recedes.

“I offer you freedom from it. This blade is a failure of the knights, long since buried with good reason, surely you do not wish to spend eternity bound to a failure?” Daniel is surprised by the protective anger that surges at Karas' insulting Epitaph. Less than a week ago he would have begged the creature to free him but things had changed. Epitaph was his partner now. Even if their agreement was new and untested that didn't make it any less valid. Daniel had broken his word and his honor before, and he would not do it again. He grips his blade tighter the cool leather creaked in his fingers. He didn't care if this Karas could sever his bond, he had made his decision, he is Daniel Black, last knight of Illyria, and whatever it was standing before him it felt evil.

“What are you?” asks Daniel his voice far more steady than his nerves. He begins probing at the creature with his mind. Daniel's psyche is untrained and stumbling but he can feel enough to immediately recognize that whatever is standing before him was the hungry searching presence of the previous night. This was no Illyrian, Knight or other. This mind was beyond alien, cold and reptilian. Boris' body was little more than a marionette, a figurehead standing in the room talking for the creature.

It sighs, as though regretting its impatience.

“I suppose that would have been too easy. I would have even let you live mortal. But I suppose beggars can't be choosers” as the creature's words drift off Daniel is assaulted mentally by Karas. A mighty psychic wave that drives Daniel to his knees at the strength of it. This was a mental sledgehammer pounding away at his mind. Desperately Daniel tried to block the blows but they eat away at his pitiful shields. The soul eater had been a subtle blade in comparison to this brute force.

Daniel tries to scream, to breathe, to attack the creature but all is futile, he wishes Epitaph were with him, she would know what to do.

Daniel can feel every nerve ending lighting a fire with pain as the creature enters his mind wholly and aggressively. He tries to shut it out, to fight it back like he had the soul eater's powers but this was too strong too unknown he had no way to fight it. He was being pushed aside and shuffled to the back of his own being as the entity hollowed out a new home for itself inside Daniel.

And all he could think was “fuck, this again?”

Space aboard the Carrion Ascendent,

The crone cooes over the newborn on the floor before her. It is the unmistakable visage of Teh'Ran, fully formed and adult if missing his cybernetic enhancements, but he is a newborn. The process of melding with a blade is the purest form of a fresh start any sentient being could consent to. If the blade chooses you worthy you are reborn fresh and unblemished, remade at the height of your own possible perfection, enhanced even. Their stories were muddled at best, but the legends of feats from the age of glory all spoke of incredible things. The crone had carried the bound blade for centuries, her path of sorcery and old magics had long since closed off the possibility of bonding with the blade, so she had waited. While her path led to other powers, that did not mean she was foolish enough to ignore the possibilities of a blade bearer loyal to her. She could see the emerald energy of the blade attaching to the captain's aura, the energy patterns were coalescing and flowing along his nervous system. The bond was almost complete.

The crone laughs at the soft and weak form at her feet. She had never seen the captain in his natural form, free of his cybernetics, red-skinned, great horns framing the crown of his head. It was so exciting, she had been looking for a worthy bearer for so long, a being strong enough to survive the bond. The crone had tried several times but this was the furthest any of her candidates had come. Humming a tuneless melody she runs her fingers over the captain's brow in an oddly motherly gesture. This boy would be her path to dominance. Long has she sought the path to the throne of etheria, and this pirate would be her strong right hand in the quest, even if he never knew she was his true master, no that would hurt his pride far too greatly. She could sense the battle taking place on the astral plane, much was being decided. The intelligence contained within the dark blade was old, very old. And now it was free to touch the world once more. She doubted the captain would be strong enough to wrestle control away from it but time would tell. If he survived victorious their path to godhood would begin, if not, well he would be another casualty and her search would continue.

The guards were cutting through the doors, their sensors had noted the captain's death but were not yet privy to the revelation of his rebirth. Settling to a seated position looking at the newborn the crone sighs at her creaking bones. A lifetime in space had done little to ease her arthritis and weak joints. This body really was a frail thing.

She focuses on Teh'Ran, readying her magic for a killing blow if necessary. Soon all would be revealed she could feel his energies surging as the captain's return to the waking world became imminent.

The captain gasped in breath suddenly, and violently. Taking his first inhalation of air like an addict rediscovering their favorite poison.

He begins pulling himself to a seated position. A longsword had appeared on the floor next to him. The crone had not noticed it until this moment. It is roughly four feet in length adorned with horned skulls. A gorgeous weapon, fit for a barbarian king.

"My lord" says the crone ready to strike if it was not Teh'Ran in control.

"You didn't warn me it would fight me crone" says the captain. So he was stronger than she expected. Good, the pirate was a warrior in spirit after all, she had begun to fear his weakness in recent months.

“That was not allowed my lord” she lies. She could have told him, but that would have done little to aid her test.

“The human who humiliated me is down there, I can sense him” says the captain looking at the planet they are orbiting. She can feel his freed mind searching the orb for his prey. That is unfortunate, he is learning his new abilities already. That would have to be controlled less he grow too powerful.

“How could he have survived my lord?”

“He is a bearer now. I suppose it is fitting we shall meet as equals.” shock fills the crone, a bearer, here? The mecanations of the universe were rarely so heavy handed, this was not a coincidence. It seemed some form of kismet was drawing the captain and this boy into each other’s orbit. curious.

“That isn’t possible..... The illyrian swords were all lost. How could he have found a blade that accepted him?”

“How should I know crone, but his presence speaks clearly to his new station and powers. I shall go to meet him and then my crew will know I am still to be feared.” with a gesture the doors to the throne room slide open allowing the guards who had been attempting to force their way in to tumble through the entrance. Seeing the captain alive and changed takes a moment to sink in but the captain is already spitting orders. The crone tries to find a way to hold the pirate king, if the human boy was truly a bearer now he was not prepared.

“My lord, please consider your actions! If he is truly a bearer this is rash.”

Teh’Ran turns on her snarling in rage, the crone realizes her mistake. She had questioned the captain in full view of his lieutenants.

“Forgive me lord, I know not what i say” says the sorceress prostrating herself before the pirate. It cloyes at her to bow to her lesser but it would not due to alienate him at so crucial a time. She must simply hope the boy was not his match. Dismissing the crone with a snarl the captain turns back to his lieutenants.

“I require a shuttle. Equip a warbird and have it waiting. My foe is on that planet and i mean to taste his blood.

“Yes my lord” replies one of the gathered crowd still in shock at his king’s rebirth.

Moments later an armed warbird salvaged from the same battlefield the carrion ascendent had been found launches from the battered cruiser Teh’Ran at the controls. It is battered and badly repaired. In truth the vessel was barely spaceworth, but the pirate paid little mind to this. He rockets toward tartarus, his fears forgotten at the new power surging through his veins. The blade was feeding his warlust, he could tell, but he did not fight it. No this was a time to take action.

He would have satisfaction for how this human had slighted him. And his crew would bear witness to their king victorious.

Astral plane.

It is dark here. Darker than Epitaph had perceived since the Illyrian elders sealed her away. One moment she was with Daniel, and that creature which was not what it seemed, then, she was thrown here.

How was that, thing, powerful enough to do that? None save a full wizard should be capable of coming between a knight and sword. Epitaph feels a certain level of panic as she tries to reach out to Daniel. It is like there is a wall between them. She could still feel him as though from across a chasming void, he was afraid. For her to feel it that distinctly despite the barrier set between them he must be in trouble. Typical of the human. He was useless without her. The urgency of the situation becoming clear she began pounding at the wall with all of her strength, but it is soft and spongy, absorbing her attempts to break through. With a mighty effort she sends a psychic blast at the wall with all of her strength but to her horror it rebounds at her. She is barely able to throw up a weak shield to stop her own power tearing through her. She falls to her knees panting. Strange how quickly her non physical form took such mundane habits from the mortal realm. She has neither lungs nor oxygen, or even knees for that matter. Every aspect of her form is an assumed guise, yet it has become so ingrained to her she is reacting without thought. The human was giving her bad habits.

Epitaph tries to fight back her welling frustration as she glares at the wall impotently. Subtlety had never been her strong suit, and unfortunately this was clearly not a problem she could solve with force alone. Falling into a lotus position Epitaph attempts to marshal her patience, gently she begins to probe the wall, looking for a weakness, it is like poking at jello, there is no place firm enough to force her way through, and she can sense continued attempts to force herself through could cause her serious harm. There were no hard surfaces or edges to claw at, nothing to find a firm purchase on. Epitaph had reached a new level of frustration what was creating this damned thing?

Epitaph is so fed up with the wall she is about to start cursing at it when she is seized with the dreadful realization she is no longer alone in this void. There is a hulking presence approaching, it had not been there a moment ago. Even as she tries to marshal her weakened energies to run or fight it is too late, the creature Slinks from the shadows. Its eyes glow white in the darkness before her. A snake like tongue flickers out to sample the air. Hardened interlocking plates cover its long sinuous neck running to twin sets of shoulders.

By the first knight, a dragon?

“Greetings Illyrian” says a voice like razors rasping through velvet. The drake comes close enough for her to see its snake like scales and sweeping crest of horns. A visage straight from illyrian legend.

“Karas.” the name hangs in the air heavy with the weight of its history. Her panic transitions to fear.

“It is nice to be remembered. It has been so very long since I have walked the worlds of this plane I feared perhaps I was forgotten.”

“This is impossible, How are you here?”

"In the spiritual, physical or historic? That is a very open ended question my succulent new friend, please be more specific" Karas lisps each s with a slithering tongue as his long neck begins to encircle Epitaph. She ducks to the side narrowly avoiding being ensnared in the constricting coils of the dragon's neck. He seems to grin evilly. Epitaph attempts to school her features into a dead calm, she perhaps even succeeds a little.

"Here on Tartarus?"

"Tartarus is it now? You use the name the humans gave it? How odd."

"Answer my question" says Epitaph attempting to sound authoritative, it barely came out as a squeak.

"So commanding. It's quite simple really, I was bored, and before I could find a tasty war to occupy my attentions a very unexpected thing happened, a New blade took form on the forgotten forgeworld of a dead empire. That bares investigation.

"It was you controlling that poor wretch the soul eater got its claws into."

"Boris, yess he was following your knight, it was a simple matter to hollow out what little of a mind he had left to fit into. But his meat was nothing compared to your companion. This Daniel fits like a wed warm glove" says Karas with a disturbingly orgasmic sigh.

"I know your games Dragon, The first wizard banished you in the times of Illyria, you have no power here." even as she speaks the words Epitaph knows it was a mistake.

"Banished was I? The little wizard tried to kill me, to destroy my beautiful body and usurp my kingdom, but all he managed was to make me more powerful and undying. He freed my mind to walk the etherian pathways. This is the spirit world child, and I have any power I wish here." as the dragon speaks his form expands and grows seeming to fill the chasming void until his eyes are the size of planets. A terrible molten light burns in his throat as dragon fire begins to spill into his mouth like the flames of hades.

"You bore me Illyrian, I think I no longer want a plaything, I want dinner" the dragon's voice is harsh and his eyes glisten in the darkness Her nerves finally shredded Epitaph screams in fear and frustration and runs from the dragon. The titanic creature chases after her dragonflame lighting up the darkness as the creature toys with her. As She flees Epitaph claws at the wall between her and her knight even more desperately searching for any weakness and chance of getting to him. Alone they had no chance against this ancient creature, together they may at least survive it.

