

Tooth and Claw

“Psst.” The small sound came from behind Baldar. It sounded like a thousand legs crawling all over the trees around him. He dared not open his eyes. “Psst. Ginger.” The voice came again, slightly louder as the sound of raindrops and wings continued to grow louder and louder. Baldar could hear the creaking and aching sounds of the trees. He squinted as he slowly peeled back his heavy eyelids. Sovoris was crouched behind a rock with his wand in hand. Scanning the treetops around him.

“Wha-what?” Baldar attempted to speak but was cut off by Sovoris swiftly placing his finger on his lips. He gestured upwards towards the treetops as he saw the horrors that awaited above. The night was still. The moon peeked through the leaves and shone down, casting light onto the black leathery wings that were above them. Cocoons of darkness hung from the trees, as they could hear the sounds of flesh being ripped apart. Baldar jumped back as a large piece of torso fell down on top of him. Dodging quickly out of the way he let out a small squeal, quickly covering his mouth as not to get any attention. The creatures above span their heads towards his sound, their eyes glowing in the waning moonlight.

Baldar looked over to Sovoris, who was staring up into the treetops. He pointed his wand and nodded towards Baldar, gesturing his head. Baldar turned to face the canopy and rubbed his eyes as he caught a glimpse of Ashena, perched on top of a branch just above the feasting monstrosity. Her dagger was drawn and prepared. She looked down towards Sovoris and nodded back.

Baldar looked around for his axe, he found it sat next to the dwindling fire. Picking it up carefully her turned back around. Ashena had her hand raised to the sky in a closed fist, the forest was quiet bar the sound of chomping and the occasional thud of falling bones. She then dropped her fist quickly as Sovoris emerged from behind the rock. He looked confident as he held the wand aloft and recited a verse from his spellbook.

“Nah’hasdra de Il nostra.
Gu’ildro a ilimus.
Handare de ilnostrus
Vampiri del corsava!”

He screamed the verse with all his might as the whole forest erupted with blinding light. The shockwave was sent high up into the trees where the creature was feasting. It turned and dropped the carcass which could now be seen was one of the groups horses. It fell merely a few feet from Baldar. The creature screeched with a wail, staring directly into the light Sovoris had summoned, the unnatural glare shone brightly off the large teeth of the bat like creature. Its skinny torso looked like a cobble of bones and sinew, its leathery wings began to beat as it launched itself from the tree and descended towards Sovoris.

Almost as quickly, Ashena landed on its back, plunging her ornate dagger into the shoulder blade of the creature. Blood spurting onto her face and chest as she hung onto the now flailing being. It screeched once again with a deafening roar, Sovoris and Baldur clenched at their ears, as the light faded. The shadowy figure flew up into the trees once again.

Ashena hung on as the creature flew faster and faster, gaining speed as it weaved its way through the thin trees of the forest. She attempted to climb onto its head by using the dagger as she climbed. Each strike angered it more, as its flight became more erratic and out of control. Slamming into trees and branches, Ashena had to duck to keep her head on her shoulders.

The beast flew directly upwards, bursting through the canopy, stretching out its bony tendrils to fill the sky with darkness from its sheet like wings. Ashena dug her daggers deep into the wiry haired back as it began to spin in mid air, diving towards the treeline. The screeches were deafening. Ashenas daggers were beginning to wear as she began a maneuver to escape the vampiric beast. Thrusting the daggers from the back she leapt from the bat, flying into mid air, slowly flipping as the peaceful moonlight bathed the treetops.

“Get behind me!” Sovoris screeched at Baldur, the dwarf spinning from behind the rock and stretching out his legs to take his next piece of cover behind the shaking wizard. Sovoris held his hands up and thrust them down at an almost impossible speed. The thick canopy above split open just as quick, revealing the face of the beast. A harrowing sight, human features mixed with that of a bad, mismatched and scarred, missing teeth and one eye. It was looking straight at him as it fell from the heavens. Sovoris could see Ashena above and knew what he was to do. Again he held his hands up towards her, focusing his power and praying to the gods for his strength. The beast was almost upon them, its mouth wide open, saliva dripping down onto the leaves below, the sound of imminent death upon them both. Baldur cowered behind his axe, unable to do anything. Sovoris closed his eyes and tilted his head backwards, whispering gently.

“Austru’li nomadra,
Mobilisa du frenestra,
Almarda del ungro,
Marsdel chel timus crescar.”

The world seemed to slow down around them, the flies and birds that were watching the affair had now become sluggish and paralysed. The very air around them became heavy, a blanket of lead that swam inside their lungs. The vampiric creature floated in mid air, meters above Sovoris, wtil holding his hands out, beads of sweat covering his tensed forehead, a small droplet of blood coming from his nose. He let out a struggled command.

“Now, Baldur.” He whispered, the laboured request getting through to the dwarf. He looked upwards towards the now falling Ashena, heading like a torpedo head first to the ground, towards the back of the beast. He picked up his axe and took a run up, jumped off a nearby

stump and onto Sovoris' back, before jumping again, axe held above his head, a great battle cry rang out into the night.

The two struck the fallen angel with incredible precision, striking almost simultaneously. Baldur buried his axe deep into the beast's skull, just to the left of his right eye. A cry of pain escaping the lumbering creature. Then came the rain of Ashena, a lightning bolt of pain, slamming into the back of it from above, a strike so fierce she pierced through the right wing of the beast. The very moment she made impact Sovoris fell down in a pile of robes and beard hair, the creature with them, hitting the forest floor with a loud thud.

As soon as they could react the beast was back up on its feet, axe still buried deep into its skull. It swung its enormous tail around and whipped them to the ground. Ashena leapt to the side and grabbed a nearby tree. Grasping its branches she clambered up to get a height advantage. Baldar reached out to retrieve his axe. He was knocked back when the creature flicked his head in a wave of fury and spit, smashing into Baldar's skull and knocking him back, hitting a stump and being knocked out cold. Ashena clambered up the trees some more to escape the chaos below. The beast turned to escape, flapping its wings and launching itself from the forest floor. Ashena knew she had to react fast, and used all her elven agility to jump between trees as she followed the vampire, not wanting to lose another one this time. She scrambled up the last tree and leaped across, taking a chance and reaching for her dagger still lodged in the beast's shoulder. Landing on its back, she held on as it flew into the distance, the sun started to rise on the once again peaceful forest.

The sunlight kissed Sovoris' face, caressing his bruised and broken body as he awoke in the serene setting of the forest floor. "Shit. Shit shit shit!" Sovoris exclaimed, scrambling to his feet as he realised what had happened. He grabbed his pack and started to close his eyes, thinking of a plan. Running over to where Baldar was lay, the dark iron helmet dented into the tree. "Baldar! Wake up!" He exclaimed, slapping the ginger dwarf's face. Baldar began to open his eyes, drowsy and concussed.

"Wh-what happened?" He slowly responded.

"Were fucked that's what happened! That thing took her! And the Gods only know where!" The wizard replied frantically.

"That can't be right. We-we have to go get to her." Baldar claimed, climbing back up to his feet.

"And how exactly are we supposed to do that? Huh?"

"I..I dunno, use your tricks or something."

"Tricks?" Really?" Sovoris replied, the tone in his voice shifting. His eyes started to turn dark green as he stared at the frantic dwarf. "I can't just turn this shit on and off you know! It takes a lot!"

“Yeah but we need it right now! She can’t be too far, vampires don’t hunt too far from their lairs.” Baldar explained, pleading with Sovoris.

“Look, ok. I might know something but I am not sure if it will help. It hasn’t been perfected yet, it could be dangerous, we could-”

“We need to try.” Baldar interrupted, knowing the gravity of their situation. Sovoris let out a sigh and grabbed his bloody face, wiping down the dirt and leaves that were hanging from his scraggly beard.

“Come stand here.” He gestured down towards just in front of him. Closed his eyes and stared into the forest. Baldar could feel the rumble of the trees around him and the sound of branches and roots as they began to move and shift all around them.

Sovoris raised his arms slowly as the sound continued to rise, becoming a din the whole forest would be able to hear. The roots began to expand and move along the floors, swimming beneath their feet as vines and branches stretched their tendrils out ahead of them. They all came together to slowly form a large structure, looping around one another in a delicate dance of nature, weaving and flowing like water itself into the shape of a door. The flowers sprouted around them and the grass began to grow on the door in front of them, conjured from the very ground itself. Sovoris then fell to his knees and stopped himself from falling. Out of breath and tired he looked at Baldar, who was now eye level.

“Wow. Didn’t think that would work.” He said, relief in his voice. He leaned on Baldar's shoulder as he pulled himself up.

“Well done! I knew you could do it! Now, let's go find the boss!” Baldar exclaimed as he walked proudly up to the door. He grabbed the handle which was formed of a bulb of a large plant, turned it with a crunch and opened it. They both stepped through.

The smell of ale and the sound of music filled the air. Stepping through into a tavern they had never seen before, they both looked at each other. The door slammed shut behind them, they looked from one another into the tavern, where a large man in a dirty apron was stood, cleaning the pipes of a cask that was sat on the wooden, chipped bar. Sovoris turned back to the door and opened it. He was met with nothing but a mop and a bucket that had seen better days.

“Fuck.”