

Chapter 28: The Rite of El'Ran'Kasheen

“Now what?” Perfection quietly asked. Surrounded as they were by soldiers and sorcerers, Brittany saw that there wasn't much of a choice in the matter.

“What can we do?” Brittany asked in return. “The Dark Lord wants me. If I surrender, he might spare your lives.”

“Not likely.” Montfallion interjected. Of course, he had been killed by the Dark Lord's command once before, and so had reason to be distrustful. “He'll just kill the rest of us once he has you.”

“Probably,” Brittany reasoned, “but isn't near-certain death from surrender still better than the absolute-certain death by fighting. Unless you see that as preferable.” She finished, glancing over at Mal'Zyn. He caught her gaze.

“I will follow you wherever you may go or whatever you choose to do, regardless of my own thoughts on the matter,” he answered. “If you wish to surrender, then I will support you.”

“We should decide quickly.” Lazarus spoke up. “Those dark creatures seem to be getting restless.”

“Alright then, we surrender!” Brittany spoke up to wherever the Dark Lord might be concealed. The moment she spoke the dark creatures stopped advancing and parted to allow passage beyond them. Brittany and the others had no real choice but to move forward into the Dark Lord's clutches. As they passed through the corridor, the dark creatures gathered close together to completely surround them, cutting off any form of escape.

They came to a large staircase leading towards subterranean chambers, proving Brittany correct in that there were basement levels. Here, however, stood a man in all black robes, blocking the stairway. Brittany immediately recognized him as the sorcerer who had attacked them on the other continent and who killed Whitebridge, the one she had burned. As before, this man wore two swords strapped across his back, in the same manner as Mal'Zyn. Mal'Zyn, for his part, recognized the man as well and spoke up.

“I know you, and soon enough they will too.” he said to the disciple, “Why are you doing this?”

“You can not understand,” The disciple spoke in a hoarse voice that betrayed the extent he had been injured by Brittany's fire. “You mean nothing to me. I have already moved beyond

your petty moral concerns.”

Mal'Zyn looked about ready to attack the disciple, prompting the guards to move even closer to him. Brittany wondered how it was possible for Mal'Zyn to apparently have some type of history with this disciple. Perhaps the albino warrior had a past she never knew about.

“Come along.” the Disciple spoke, turning around and beginning to descend the stairs. “The Dark Lord is not one to be kept waiting.”

After being prodded by the guards, Brittany and her companions began to follow the disciple. Brittany tried to catch Mal'Zyn's gaze, but he stared at the ground ahead of them and refused to look up. Long minutes passed in silence as they continued down the staircase, following the shadowy form of the disciple ahead of them in the darkness. Brittany was beginning to wonder just how far this stairway went when it came to an end.

The room they entered into from the stairs was quite large, looking as if it had once been a natural cavern carved out on the sides to make it even larger. Massive stalactites hung down from the uneven cavern ceiling like fangs, guarding the entrance to the Dark Lord himself. The entrance was up ahead, two large steel doors polished to gleaming brilliance that almost shone with an internal light. Two guards moved forward across the cavern and opened the double doors, allowing entry into a new room, this one much smaller than the first.

Brittany immediately noticed the walls of this room were lined with sorcerers and guards, all looking as if they were ready to instantly jump into action. At the far wall was a raised dais, with a large throne where the Dark Lord sat in his serrated armor. Now facing him once more, Brittany could not prevent herself from shivering ever so slightly. Standing beside the Dark Lord was another disciple in dark robes she did not recognize, and the disciple who had led them in immediately went to the dais and joined the Dark Lord as well, leaving Brittany and her group in the center of the room.

“So, you have decided to be sensible about this.” the Dark Lord began, “Perhaps even have begun to accept the inevitability of my success.”

Brittany just shrugged, still trying to find some last-minute way out of this.

“I am sure you or your little group are planning some way to attack me.” the Dark Lord continued to rasp, “Notice that these walls are lined with sorcerers ready to do my every bidding. If you attack me, they will kill you. If you try to escape, they will kill you. If you...”

“We get it already!” Perfection exclaimed, already tired of the Dark Lord's speech.

“Then realize that if any of my rules are broken,” The Dark Lord replied directly to her,

“I will personally rip you in half.”

“I feel so honored.” she retorted, even though Brittany could tell that the Dark Lord's words made her just a little frightened.

“So I am assuming the preparation for the Rite of El'Ran'Kasheen is nearly complete?” Brittany asked.

“Of course.” the Dark Lord answered, “The spirit's orb was the last artifact I required, with the exception of yourself. I was a bit surprised that you decided to walk right into my hands instead of trying to put up some type of epic, valiant fight.”

“That would take a lot of effort,” Brittany replied, although she didn't know if she would have had the power to lead a successful defense against the Dark Lord, as weak as her magick seemed to be right now. Somehow the Dark Lord seemed to pick up on her thoughts.

“Your magick is weakening, and you do not know why.” he addressed her. “That would mean that my splinter is working, at least partially.”

“Splinter?” Lazarus spoke up.

“The spell is commonly called a psionic splinter,” the Dark Lord helpfully answered. “I prepared it especially for Brittany, and unleashed it the moment she appeared on my island. Ideally it would have rendered her unconscious, but she has proven too strong for that. All it did was to sap her magickal powers and consequently render her skills useless.”

“While that's all greatly interesting.” Montfallion spoke in a voice that sounded infinitely bored, “what's going to happen to us?”

“You will be held here to ensure Brittany's good behavior during these next few minutes.” the Dark Lord answered, motioning one of his spiked gauntlets towards their group. “If she tries anything, I will have you all killed. If I am allowed to perform the Rite of El'Ran'Kasheen with no difficulties, then I possibly will allow you to survive.”

“I don't believe you.” Montfallion replied, “You may remember that you had me killed once before. Back then I had no chance to fight back. If I am to die once more, than I would prefer to be grasping at your throat as I do!”

Montfallion instantly drew his sword and lunged at the Dark Lord before anyone could react. This was quite unexpected, as the Dark Lord had been quite adamant in the fact that they would all die if an attack of this nature occurred. A moment passed as Montfallion rushed the throne, and Brittany could not decide whether the man was extremely brave or incredibly stupid and possibly brain damaged from his earlier death. Then she was rushing to help him.

The Dark Lord had been correct in thinking that Brittany's powers were severely weakened, but this time he had underestimated her. Brittany was a sorceress, and now that she had a few minutes of rest, her strength seemed to be back to normal. She was confident her spells could handle a roomful of sorcerers. The Dark sorcerers surrounding them quickly began to unleash devastating spells against the group, but Brittany proved quicker. Before any of the spells had a chance to be cast, unnaturally green soulfire tore through the room, filling it with the agonized screams of sorcerers burned to death where they stood.

The dark creature guards were unaffected and rushed forward to dismember Brittany's companions. They only took a few steps before ripped open by the ice spell Brittany had used earlier in their initial attack on the temple.

When the fire and ice cleared, every guard and sorcerer was lying dead on the floor. The Dark Lord, however, was sitting in the exact same spot, still flanked by his two disciples, completely unaffected by both of Brittany's spells.

“Very well. I suppose you really do want me to kill all of you.” he rasped out. Montfallion, who had paused to watch Brittany's firestorm, now leapt back into action directly at the Dark Lord. He never even reached the dais before the Dark Lord motioned with a single spiked hand and blasted the mercenary across the room. Montfallion slammed into the wall with enough force to crack the stone, and fell to the ground in an unmoving heap.

“No!” Perfection screamed, pulling out her weapons and starting towards the dais. In moments she too was blasted back, striking the battered wall with an unhealthy crunch of bone. After a momentary shriek of pain, Perfection lay silent on the floor. Brittany could just barely see blood trickling out of the corner of her mouth.

“Kill them.” The Dark Lord commanded his two disciples. “I will deal with Brittany myself.”

As the two disciples began to move forward, the Dark Lord stood up and motioned over to where Brittany stood surrounded by her remaining companions.

“Come, then.” he rasped, “The initial preparations for the Rite of El'Ran'Kasheen are ready. All I need is you. Follow me, then, if you still hold some belief that you can actually win this war.”

The Dark Lord turned and walked to the back of the dais. A tap on the stone wall opened up a secret doorway which he passed through. Taking one last look at Lazarus and Mal'Zyn, Brittany ran after him, ignored by the two disciples approaching her companions.

As Brittany passed through the doorway, her world disappeared into absolute darkness. As she sought to gain her bearings and find out the layout of this new room, torches ignited all along the walls. Brittany saw that she was standing in the center of a room much like the first, only much larger. Instead of guards and sorcerers, this room was lined with various esoteric items. In one corner Brittany saw a massive diamond, sitting next to a live dragon chained to the wall. Seeing the small black dragon, Brittany realized that these were all the items the Dark Lord had taken over the preceding months in order to enhance his power for the spell.

The Dark Lord himself stood at the far end of the room, at the center of a massive pattern carved into the floor. He held in his hands a large glowing ball that Brittany figured was the Spirit's orb.

“Too much courage and not enough sensibility, I see.” The Dark Lord spoke to her. “You should have used that opportunity to escape. Now we shall discover how powerful you really are.”

The throne room was in controlled chaos as the two disciples attacked Lazarus and Mal'Zyn. Surprisingly, only one of them tried to use dark spells, while the second disciple instead attacked Mal'Zyn with his two swords. Even though Mal'Zyn was a trained swordsman, it appeared to Lazarus that he was having some difficulty in evading the disciple's blows. Surely the albino warrior wasn't tired already?

Seeing that the throne room was too small for a four-person battle, Mal'Zyn suddenly turned and sprinted out of the main doors into the hall beyond, the disciple in fast pursuit. This left only Lazarus, Dobby, and the first disciple remaining in the abandoned throne room. The disciple, to Lazarus' mild surprise, did not immediately continue his earlier magickal attack on Lazarus.

“My Lord is correct.” The Disciple said, “It would have been far better for you all if you had just surrendered.”

“I believe our consensus is that we would rather die than surrender to the likes of your Dark Lord.” Lazarus explained, preparing a paralysis spell in his mind.

“I don't believe that one bit,” the disciple answered, “especially not from you.”

Lazarus immediately unleashed his spell, and watched as the disciple automatically called

up a shield to protect himself, dissolving the threads of Lazarus' magickal attack. For a moment afterwards the two men and one elf stood there watching each other in silence.

“What do you mean by that?” Lazarus finally asked. Under the hood of the Disciple, he could barely make out a smile appearing on the man's face.

Mal'Zyn tore through the dark hallway, unsheathing his two swords as he ran. The second disciple followed right on his heels, his own two swords ready for the kill. Two unlucky sorcerers happened to be in their path, and were almost instantly cut down as Mal'Zyn passed them by, searching for a more open area where he could make a stand against the disciple. Inwardly though, Mal'Zyn knew the man chasing him, and so realized any sort of fight against the disciple probably would only end with his death. Still, he had to try.

The hallway ended in a set of double doors, and Mal'Zyn cut right through them into the space beyond. He found himself in a large storeroom full of what looked to be grain. Massive columns in the center of the room held up the high vaulted ceiling. Reaching the center of the room, Mal'Zyn stopped and turned to watch the arrival of the disciple. The man slowly came forward, cautious now that Mal'Zyn intended to fight.

“I was considering allowing you a quick death,” the disciple began as he came forward to where Mal'Zyn stood, “but that would be too forgiving of me.”

“I have never wronged you, and you know that.” Mal'Zyn answered, “I think you just hate me for my mere existence.”

“That is true,” the disciple admitted, using one hand to loosen the cords that kept his robe on. “But it was always so much more than that. Every time I looked at you, every time we fought, I always could tell that you were not worthy of being an Adept. Look at you now! Here on another realm, having failed in the duties given to you. I would never stand to have a worthless warrior such as you become a rival to myself.”

“That remains to be seen,” Mal'Zyn replied as the disciple finished undoing his cloak and let it fall to the floor, “But remember, Dahn'Rhyll, you have also abandoned our race. You are on this realm too.”

Mal'Zyn's ex-brother-in-law stepped away from his cloak, readying his swords as he did so. He wore form fitting leather similar to that which Mal'Zyn sported, with light armor on his

lower arms and legs.

“But honor is relative, isn't it?” Dahn'Rhyll asked Mal'Zyn. “I am capable of achieving so much greater things than you. With the Dark Lord's power, I will be given control of entire realms. I will come back to our race as a savior, as power personified within a living being.”

“I was not aware that the Dark Lord would allow you that much leniency in your actions.” Mal'Zyn noted.

“If the Dark Lord is capable of performing the rite of El'Ran'Kasheen, then so should I.” Dahn'Rhyll replied, coming to a stop just outside the range of Mal'Zyn's swords. “It may take years, perhaps even centuries, but my subjective position here is quite temporary.”

“I will not allow you to do that while I still have breath within my body.” Mal'Zyn said.

“I know.” Dahn'Rhyll answered, raising his two swords. “We have fought many times before, and I am growing tired of our conflict. Let this, then, be our final battle.”

His words were barely out of his mouth before both the warriors were lunging at each other.

Brittany could feel the power as the Dark Lord began his spell. The runes carved into the floor around each object began to glow with a light that soon grew too intense to look at. The Dark Lord's armor reflected the intense light, casting a brilliant shimmering glow about him that would be better suited to artistic depictions of angels or even god himself.

“I suppose you will want to attack me in some valiant attempt to prevent your doom.” The Dark Lord spoke to her. “Come on then, lets get this last stand of yours over with.”

Brittany was more than willing to oblige, and with a thought a massive firestorm erupted in the middle of the room, the metal form of the Dark Lord at its nexus. Brittany kept this blast up until she felt herself weakening. She did not want to be unable to cast any more spells in future. Looking over to the charred ruin of her spell's targeted location, Brittany saw that the Dark Lord still stood there, not even a singe on his armor.

“I face attacks like that almost every day from my own sorcerers.” he rasped to her. “The whole lot of them are backstabbing wretches, but useful. You'll have to try a lot harder than that.”

Brittany did so, hoping she could somehow disrupt the Dark Lord's plans by destroying

the runic patterns carved into the floor. The magickal blast she conjured had no effect, however, as the Dark Lord blocked it with only a slight motion of his hand.

“Enough.” he spoke. “All this time I assumed you to be far more powerful than it seems like you actually are. I have given you an attempt to defend yourself, but now the Rite must begin!”

Brittany knew what was coming, and so attempted some type of defensive spell to protect herself. It proved to be useless, as the Dark Lord's attack slammed into her and flung her all the way across the carved floor back to where she had first entered from. Brittany tried once more to stand, but none of her limbs seemed to be working properly. She could only watch as the Dark Lord raised his arms above his head and began to chant in some dark and archaic language. The glowing sigils on the floor now began to change color into a darker and far more menacing red. Brittany could feel the waves of the spell gain in strength, and she knew that all hope was now lost.

“You know quite well what I am talking about.” The disciple continued, “Deep down you realize the truth to my words, down in dark places of your soul that you don't want to admit ever exist.”

“What are you saying?” Lazarus demanded, “That I am like you?”

“Yes.” the Disciple continued, “All your companions, they might be upstanding heroes who really do want to bring an end to the Dark Lord's menace, but not you. Maybe once, but not anymore. All those weeks you posed as a dark sorcerer have changed you.”

“You know of that?” Lazarus asked, surprised. He had believed that his masquerade had remained a secret.

“Of course we knew!” The Disciple laughed. “The Dark Lord knew your plan from the very moment you wrapped that black cloak around your shoulders. Every move you made, we watched. We've waited. And we succeeded.”

Lazarus hit the Disciple with a spell that would tear through his mind and blast him into gibbering insanity, but this too was easily evaded.

“How have you succeeded?” he asked.

“Do you really need to ask?” The Disciple asked in return. “You can feel it. That desire

for power, for magick, regardless of the cost. It affects all of us to some degree, but the Dark sorcerers have surrendered fully to that desire. Dark magick is so seductive, so alluring. You can feel it call out to you, right?”

After long moments Lazarus finally gave a slow nod, hating the fact that The Disciple spoke the truth.

“Every time you use dark sorcery, that desire will increase. Your need for power will increase. Soon it will overwhelm you and you will have no choice but to give in. Friends, family, all will be cast aside in your quest for power.”

“What makes you think I will be as weak as you and will give in to those desires?” Lazarus asked, preparing another attack in his mind.

“Everyone wants to give in to their desires; that's why they're there.” The Disciple replied. He paused for a moment, poised as if he were listening to something.

“Do you feel that?” he asked. Lazarus nodded. He had noticed the increasing magickal waves too. “The Rite has now begun. It is only a matter of time before our victory.”

The battle was fought fast and with fury, the type of fight where neither combatant is willing to retreat so much as an inch. Rune covered blades clashed off one another with shrieks of metal as Mal'Zyn and Dahn'Rhyll attacked each other. For long minutes nothing was spoken; each warrior concentrated only on defending and attacking in turn.

Dahn'Rhyll lunged forward with a feint to the left, then brought his right blade back in an arc that would have easily taken off Mal'Zyn's head right at the neck. Mal'Zyn kicked off one of the columns and flipped himself over the blade. Dahn'Rhyll's sword sheared the massive column in half as it completed its arc. While in the air Mal'Zyn tried to deliver a kick to Dahn'Rhyll's face, but he was too fast and evaded the blow.

As Mal'Zyn landed from his flip, Dahn'Rhyll spun around and delivered a crushing kick to Mal'Zyn's upper chest. This blow sent Mal'Zyn flying across the room and crashing into the sacks of grain that filled the area. Jumping back to his feet, Mal'Zyn braced himself for another immediate attack. To his surprise, however, his ex-brother-in-law was still in the center of the room.

“Can you see how inevitable your defeat is?” Dahn'Rhyll asked from where he stood

watching Mal'Zyn, "I am the superior swordsman, the superior sorcerer. Every time we have fought before, I have never been defeated by you. You have only had one year of training. I'll bet you don't even know a thousand sword forms yet."

"It does not matter." Mal'Zyn answered. "I will still fight you."

"I know." As Dahn'Rhyll spoke, he turned his head towards the entrance to the room, as if trying to pick up on something difficult to hear.

"The Rite has begun." he announced, looking back at Mal'Zyn. "The magickal waves proclaim it. The Dark lord has easily taken care of that woman of yours."

"That 'woman' singlehandedly defeated you back at the spirit's cave," Mal'Zyn replied, moving forward.

"So she can succeed where you can not." Dahn'Rhyll replied. "It only acknowledges your weakness in that you need to ally yourself with her."

"You know nothing of relationships." Mal'Zyn retorted. "You allowed your own wife and children to die at the hands of your new master's army. Dal'Kara loved you; your children loved you; and you repaid their love with the worst kind of betrayal. You can not speak to me about love and honor when you have none."

"I did love them." Dahn'Rhyll replied, readying his swords once more. "My hatred for you did not extend onto them. But love is not everything. Love means very little. It will not prevent one's death, and sometimes will only serve to hasten it. The Dark lord knew my family would die in the attack, he told me this, and I made my decision. I crushed my feelings down and led his army right into the city. You see, although love may feel nice, it is ultimately worthless."

Mal'Zyn's eyes had narrowed throughout Dahn'Rhyll's speech. the mention of his sister had reopened a number of old wounds he had thought to be long-closed.

"You soulless bastard." he softly cursed. "I will kill you."

Dahn'Rhyll only laughed as he attacked once more.

The Dark Lord's chanting continued until it seemed to be the only real thing in the entire world. Brittany could no longer see the room around her; everything was shrouded in darkness except for the fiery designs racing along the floor, lighting the Dark Lord and his artifacts from below with a hellish glow. Those runic inscriptions seemed to writhe and dance as the Dark

Lord's spell continued on, almost becoming living beings under the force of the Dark Lord's magick.

Brittany could barely move; it took all her energy to just turn her head and watch the Dark Lord. Part of her began to feel detached, as if she were floating just outside of her body watching all of this from a safe location. Brittany knew that if she allowed herself to detach completely, then she would be helpless as the Dark Lord used her for completion of the Rite. She could not let that happen, but there seemed to be absolutely nothing she could do. The Dark Lord could easily defeat any spell she cast at him.

The runes around the objects flared brighter as the Dark Lord began to draw power from them to amplify his own. Brittany figured that powerful as he was right now, the Dark Lord probably wouldn't even notice a magickal attack on him. She was doomed.

The Rite of El'Ran'Kasheen continued, and Brittany began to feel something pull her away from her body, trying to finalize the detachment she already felt. It suddenly dawned on her that this was part of the Dark Lord's spell; he was trying to mentally destroy her. This revelation caused Brittany to instantly pull back and fight against the Dark Lord; Perhaps on a mental plane she was his equal.

The Dark lord continued on with even more force, and Brittany could feel her mental grip begin to slip and fall away. Now only seconds away from her impending death, Brittany could not think of any regrets about this situation she found herself in. She did not think about herself, or her family, or anything of her earlier life before all of this actually happened. Instead she found herself feeling sorry for the fact that she had gotten her companions killed as well along with her. They had all deserved better than to die in this subterranean lair, especially Mal'Zyn. She would miss him; how he had placed all his honor and trust in her, how he vowed to protect her from all harm. She would even miss all those times Mal'Zyn made her practice with weapons...

Weapons.

Brittany's eyes widened as she realized that during this entire time, she had been gripping the handle of the blade Mal'Zyn had given her. Looking up at the Dark Lord, she saw that he was still looking upwards while in the throes of his spell, leaving a small gap below his horned helmet where his skin shone through. Brittany closed her eyes tightly, trying to fight off the Dark Lord's spell long enough to gain control of her arm. With a supreme burst of willpower, she wrenched her arm out, grabbing the blade and flinging it directly at the Dark Lord's throat, praying to every God she could think of that her feeble aim was true.

It was. The knife plunged through the gap in the Dark Lord's armor and deep into his throat, instantly spraying dark red blood out of the wound. The Dark Lord hoarsely screamed and quickly clutched at his throat, dropping the spirit's orb to the floor. It broke into jagged pieces as it hit the ground, releasing put-up energy in all directions. Brittany was almost physically blown backwards by the explosion, and tried her best to shield herself from the intense light.

Caught in the magickal light, The Dark Lord fell to his knees as he tried to pry the knife out of his throat. Watching him from a distance, Brittany heard the most disturbing sound: the Dark lord was still chanting, even though his words were reduced to little more than a wet gurgle. Even as the Dark Lord was bleeding to Death, he still continued on with the Rite.

It did not seem to be enough. Now that the Dark Lord's concentration was broken, now that one of the power objects was destroyed, the spell began to fluctuate out of control. The fire running along the carvings in the floor grew more intense and seemed to run along the floor madly, with no one to control it. Brittany could feel the power of the spell beginning to build up, now that the Dark Lord's guiding hand no longer was there.

The spell finally reached a critical point and exploded, tearing through Brittany's mind and fling her back against the wall. As she hit, she felt a splinter of agony cut itself deep into her mind. She could then think no more as the spell passed through her and beyond, leaving only darkness behind.

The time for talk was over. Lazarus and the Disciple now only concentrated on their spells, trying to destroy the other with their powerful magicks. For long minutes the two of them looked to be evenly matched, even if Lazarus had Dobby's help. Every spell he created, whether light magick or dark magick, was instantly defeated and countered with a more powerful attack from the Disciple.

Lazarus could feel himself weakening, and knew that if this fight continued much longer, he would inevitably lose. Sometime he would be a fraction of an instant too slow, or would make a mistake and cast an ineffective spell. Then the Disciple would destroy him. Gritting his teeth, Lazarus continued to deflect and attack with his magick.

The Disciple suddenly let forth a new series of powerful attacks, something Lazarus was completely unprepared for. Managing to barely guard himself, Lazarus nevertheless was

slammed backwards and fell to his knees. He could feel himself bleeding in at least a dozen places and it was becoming difficult to concentrate.

Miraculously, the Disciple did not attack once more. Glancing up, Lazarus noticed that the Disciple was no longer paying attention to their battle.

“No. That's impossible...” the Disciple gasped as massive magickal waves began to hit the both of them. Lazarus immediately knew that the Dark Lord's spell had gone horrifically wrong. The result would be anyone's guess.

Taking the advantage, Lazarus made one last effort, sending a mental knife blade of pure magickal power directly at the Disciple. The man was so distracted that he did not even try to raise a defense against the attack, instead only violently convulsing as Lazarus' spell hit his mind with full force.

For a moment, everything in the room was still. Then the Disciple coughed up some blood, and then fell backwards. He was dead before he even hit the floor. Lazarus lasted only seconds longer, succumbing to his grievous wounds and falling into deep blackness as he too hit the floor.

Mal'Zyn knew he was going to die. Dahn'Rhyll had proven himself to be the superior warrior by far. Mal'Zyn now lay broken and bleeding on the floor as his ex brother-in-law slowly approached to deliver the finishing blow. The fight had actually been rather one sided, as Mal'Zyn was unable to put up a decent defense against the Disciple's strong attacks. He could no longer see out of his left eye, and every movement was pure agony from his twenty broken bones.

“Are you ready to die?” Dahn'Rhyll asked as he stood over Mal'Zyn, both of his blood-covered swords in hand. Mal'Zyn could only spit up some frothy blood as his answer.

Dahn'Rhyll only smiled, and quickly impaled Mal'Zyn with his sword. Mal'Zyn gasped as the blade tore through a number of vital organs before striking the ground he lay on.

“There.” Dahn'Rhyll spoke, kneeling down to get closer to Mal'Zyn. “I have won.” His words trailed off as they both felt the wild magickal waves exploding throughout the lower level. Dahn'Rhyll looked confused, obviously realizing something had gone wrong. Mal'Zyn, however, began to revive his faint hope that Brittany would defeat the Dark Lord. Perhaps this was a sign

that she had been successful.

Mal'Zyn turned his dying gaze towards Dahn'Rhyll, staring at the man with hatred in his eyes. If Brittany had won, then he would surely attempt to kill her. Mal'Zyn would not let that happen, even in his death. With sudden speed and strength that surprised even him, Mal'Zyn pulled himself up along Dahn'Rhyll's sword, reaching out to grasp Dahn'Rhyll's head. Try as he might, his ex-brother-in-law could not break his hold.

With a final surge of strength, Mal'Zyn quickly twisted his hands and Dahn'Rhyll's neck snapped with a sickening crunch. The warrior fell over dead next to where Mal'Zyn still lay impaled onto the floor.

Thinking of nothing else except Brittany's safety, the albino warrior lay back and closed his eyes, patiently waiting to die.

