Crusade 3

The sun rises on a small Dravanian village hidden in the trees as a band of worn men slug into a tavern. The rugged man in charge of the group slams a handful of gil on the bar, and the barkeep quickly snatches all the money and waves one of the servers back to the kitchen.

“Where don’t you have ashkin stationed, old man?” the rugged man sighs, leaning back on the barstool, “I thought you’d have more important matters to attend to than riding my ass for updates.”

The barkeep’s eyes glossed over into a milky grey hue, and a sophisticated accent coughed from his throat.

“Just making sure I get a return on my investment.”

The server returns with food for the group of men, but quickly turns timid upon seeing the barkeep’s condition and hurrying back to the kitchen. The rugged man and a couple of soldiers quickly down the drinks in their mugs.

“You said we just had to clear the household; a couple of dampir women and children and that’s it. Right?”

“That was the gist of it.”

“Well there was a viera male dampir there as well… and one of the scouts said a couple of miqote guys were snooping around after we cleared out!”

“A viera male you say? I’ll deal with him, the miqote men you’ll have to handle on your own if need be.”

The barkeep’s eyes deglaze and return to normal as he sluggishly returns to counting his gil.

Aolani and Rowan wander onto the grounds of a small house in the residential district of Ishgard. The former gently knocks on the door, and Star sleepily answers.

“H-Hey!” he exclaims, trying to tighten his robe, “What’d you figure out?”

Aolani shoves the pipe from her bag towards his nose. His nose shrivels up slightly upon smelling its contents, but otherwise is unfazed.

“Even yours is too diluted?” Aolani scoffs. She pulls a dagger from the bag and knicks Star’s finger, the wound bubbles for a few moments but eventually begins to heal on its own.

“You gonna take me to dinner before poisoning me?!”

“—If that’s your way of asking.” Aolani jokes. Star instantly regrets his comment and blushes.

“Very forthcoming you two, I’m so proud.” Rowan chimes in, Aolani immediately matches Star’s shade of red.

“—anyways, your blood is less voidsent than Rowan’s, so you and the kids are safe for the most part.”

“Great! But how do you know the kids are safe too?” Star inquires; Rowan rolls her eyes and crosses her arms at the question. And Aolani shrinks as she clears her throat to answer.

“I… fed… Mina some…” she whispered.

“—huh? Well, I’m glad we figured out the kids are safe!” he beams optimistically, “Now we just hafta make sure Rowan has some defense against it.”

Aolani turns red again and Rowan calms her frustration after hearing Star’s positive outlook on the situation and then they head inside.

They discuss the possibility of the larger Halone groups making such a direct attempt to hunt a voidsent, but can’t find any evidence that would make sense. Eventually, Rowan shoots up from her seat, anxiously scratching at her skin enough to draw blood. Star meets her at the corner of the room and comforts her, but the frustration has reached Aolani as well.

“I can’t just wait for them to attack us— attack me again.” Rowan sighs.

“I can start looking now…” Aolani says, looking at the map of Coerthas sprawled across the table, “Bun, you’ll just have to stick close to Rowan and Gabriella, in hopes they do get targeted again.”

“We’re not agreeing to let you look for a cult alone… again.” Rowan protests, Star nodding in support, “This time, we’re doing this together.”

A low growl and rubbery rip sounds as an inky tear in the space between them opens. A murky cloud oozes from the hole and swirls up Aolani’s leg and hovers over her shoulder.

“Still no plans of telling your spouse this time?” Skyrr taunts. Rowan frowns, but quickly loosens her look and tries to ignore his comments.

“I take it you have an idea of where to look?” she sighs as a sharp grin cuts across the voidsent’s face.

“A question for a question… you first.”

“She’ll know as a last resort, we should be fine now that I’m healed.” Rowan nods.

“You’re the one in the most danger, should the weapons of your hunters find you… mmmm… there are some planted here in the residential areas, sprinkled throughout the city guard. And I believe they’ve formed a small supply camp in the frozen corners of Coerthas.” Skyrr swirls around and settles next to Rowan, “That is assuming that we can trust that old man’s senses.”

“Oddly cautious for a voidsent, you’re not like any I’ve encountered…most wouldn’t voice any concern and would just let us walk into all forms of danger.” Star inquires, “What’s the long game for you?”

The voidsent smiles, making an X over his mouth with two of his claws.

“My lady has sworn me to an oath of secrecy whenever our agreement is a topic of conversation.”

Aolani taps along one of Skyrr’s claws, then he begins pulling open a tear in front of him and motions the group inside. The former casually disappears into the void, followed by Star who looks back to Rowan, and they nod to each other before anxiously inching inside.

At the same time, back in the Dravanian town, one of Rowan’s assailants is violently slammed through some of the furnishings of the tavern. A pale skinned Viera with maroon hair came into view, urging the man on the ground to try and crawl for safety. His expression was that of true terror as he scanned the room to see a pair of his comrades eviscerated along the walls and floor of the bar. The rugged man nervously grabbed at his neck, and looked into his mug to avoid making eye contact with anyone else. The viera slowly plodded forward, brutalizing the man on the floor spawning a shower of blood and a chorus of screams. As the room grew silent, a well-dressed elezen man sauntered to the bar alongside the rugged man; the barkeep mindlessly slid a fresh cup of tea to him and shuffled from the room.

“I just came by to make sure we have this understanding…” the man says sipping his tea, “…what I’m busy with is truly none of your business.”

He firmly places his hand on the back of the rugged man’s neck, and the man nods.

“We have this u-understanding, tell me what our orders are…” his humbly sighs, collecting his things.

“I’ve changed my mind. We’re going to work together instead of trying to divide and conquer; we’ll take them out all at once.” the elezen snapped his finger and the viera stood at attention. “…Amida will deal with his brother, and we’ll take care of the voidsent, the diver, and their

spawn.”

“And of the girl and the two miqote?”

“They’ll join the slaughter of their own accord…”

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