

STORM

Written by

Aaron Carlson

aaron.j.carlson@icloud.com  
(619) 203-3011

FADE IN:

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

A city of soaring towers of gleaming metal, a spire of translucent stone piercing the sky, flowing with coruscating light. A backdrop of snow-capped mountains completes the picture. The city, for all its beauty, is ringed by high walls of similar metal. It has the look of an advanced civilization.

Inside, the town is busy, people going on about their lives. A YOUNG GIRL and her MOTHER walk hand in hand, window-shopping, talking, laughing. Passers-by smile in greeting. It's a happy place; Utopian.

The young girl and her mother pass an inner wall of the great city stretching off both ways as far as they can see, a massive gate adorned with intricate designs marking the only break. Two silent guards flank the portal.

The gate opens, admitting a small group of uniformed men. Through the crack in the gate, the young girl sees people arrayed in a military formation in a sprawling courtyard, shaping ethereal mist into powerful bursts of energy under the direction of stern taskmasters. She lets go of her mother's hand to get a better look.

Noticing her, the guards reach over to close the gate. The mother once again takes her hand and they resume their walk, shooting an apologetic look at the guards. The young girl's gaze lingers on the gate as she is led away. It closes.

INT. YOUNG STORM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

YOUNG STORM, 9 years old, lies in her bed, her mother seated nearby. The lights are low, throwing shadows upon the walls. Bedtime for small children.

Quietly, lovingly, the mother leans in.

MOTHER

Which will it be tonight?

YOUNG STORM

What were all those people doing today?

MOTHER

People?

YOUNG STORM  
Inside that gate. What were they  
doing?

The mother leans back, a reproving look, yet patient.

YOUNG STORM (CONT'D)  
(dismissive)  
I know, I know. When I'm older.  
I'm nine, you know.

MOTHER  
(smiling)  
That's right, and you still won't  
be old enough.

Storm fidgets in bed, pouting.

MOTHER (CONT'D)  
Tell you what, how about I tell you  
a story --

YOUNG STORM  
(sulky)  
I'm not a baby.

MOTHER  
About our people.

Storm perks up. This is new, and now she's excited. She  
rolls back over, eyes sparkling with curiosity.

MOTHER (CONT'D)  
Long ago, before this city was  
built --

Storm pops up on one elbow.

YOUNG STORM  
What's outside the wall?

Her mother stops, smile fading.

MOTHER  
There's nothing outside the wall,  
Storm. The only thing that matters  
is right here. Right here, do you  
understand?

Storm starts to form another question.

MOTHER (CONT'D)  
There is nothing out there. It's  
late. You need to go to sleep.

YOUNG STORM

But what about the story?

Storm's mother gets up, expression softening, and presses her forehead to Storm's.

MOTHER

It's late. We'll do a story  
tomorrow night.

She walks to the door, looking back as Storm snuggles in. Laying there, eyes open, Storm tries one more time.

YOUNG STORM

Was the story about the people I  
saw today?

Her mother smiles again.

MOTHER

Nothing gets by you, does it?

Storm smiles, yawns. Snuggles in deeper. Her mother considers something silently, decides, and delivers.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Our people are special, Storm.  
You're still very young, so it's  
hard to explain, but I think you're  
old enough for a story or two about  
it --

Storm sits up again, expectant.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Tomorrow night.

Storm rolls her eyes, settles in once again. Her mother shuts off the light and gently closes the door.

EXT. RUINED CITY - DUSK

Smoke hangs in the air, guttering flames lick at buildings laying in ruins. A gate, once beautifully adorned with intricate designs, lays twisted on the ground in front of a grand, yet badly damaged, wall.

In the sky above, massive airships float menacingly, their vermillion lights like the eyes of searching predators. From one airship, a single brilliant bolt of energy lances out from a belly-mounted cannon, obliterating a building. Debris rains everywhere as the flames consume what's left.

EXT. CITY STREET - DUSK

A young woman, STORM, 20s, lies unconscious in the street, face smeared with dirt and blood. The faint rumble of explosions in the distance. Her eyes snap open.

She pushes unsteadily to her knees, dazed and confused. She presses the heels of her palms to her eyes, trying to clear the fog. She looks around, confused.

Above her in the sky, the hulking forms of airships hang like waiting sharks. Search lights swing back and forth. The hum of their engines like the growl of great beasts.

She takes two unsteady steps, stumbles to her knees, and vomits.

Wiping her mouth, she again looks around, searching.

STORM  
Hello? Hello?! Is anyone there?!

A low growl, nearer than the hum of the engines overhead. She looks up and sees a hideous beast rounding a nearby corner, wreathed in a strange, colorful haze.

The beast notices her, six eyes gleaming with malice, hunger. It slowly makes its way toward her, its wicked claws and barbed tail carving a trail through the dirt and debris. Its wicked maw opens, revealing rows of glittering fangs.

Storm scrambles to her feet, stumbles, and falls again. She scrambles backward, fetching up against a ruined house. The beast draws nearer, in no hurry.

STORM (CONT'D)  
Stay back!

The beast keeps coming. Storm pushes up the wall to her feet, throwing up her hands.

STORM (CONT'D)  
(frantic)  
Stay back! Back!

The haze surrounding the beast swirls violently and begins to flow toward Storm. It begins to encircle her. She looks at her hands and arms in horror.

The beast, suddenly agitated, breaks into a run, covering the distance in long, loping strides, its powerful back-jointed legs pumping. It moves in, lunges.

## STORM (CONT'D)

NO!!

She throws out her hands, her only defense against the hideous beast. The haze swirls violently around her body and flows out along her arms and hands in a brilliant burst of energy.

The blast hits the beast, slamming it backward. It lands dead in a smoking pile of gore.

Storm collapses to her knees and violently vomits, then begins sobbing uncontrollably.

## EXT. ALLEY - DUSK

Rubble from ruined building choke the alley, smoke hanging thick in the air. A young woman, dressed head to toe in a motley array of battle gear, slinks along, trying to be silent. She is PAX, 20s, looting the destroyed city.

Picking her way through piles of discarded belongings, pocketing a few, she stiffens as she hears a muffled scream from nearby. She ducks into a shadow and moves toward the end of the alley.

She slowly approaches the end of the alley. We hear Storm's scream from just before.

STORM (O.S.)

(distant)

NO!!

A blinding flash of light illuminates the alley. Pax dives back into the shadows. All is silent.

Pax waits a moment, then creeps once again toward the mouth of the alley. Peering around, she sees the smoking remains of a hideous monster, then watches as Storm collapses to her knees, vomits, and begins sobbing.

Pax begins to retreat back down the alley, hesitates, then turns and walks out of the alley toward Storm.

## EXT. CITY STREET - DUSK

Seeing Storm's small stature, Pax begins to walk more confidently. Hearing the crunch of broken stone, Storm looks up, reddened eyes wet with tears. It hits her, and she scrambles back, fetching up against a wall behind her, trapped.

PAX

Easy, now.

Storm starts to scramble to her feet.

PAX (CONT'D)

I'm not going to hurt you.

Storm's hand finds a piece of broken wall. She flings it at Pax. Then she tries to run.

PAX (CONT'D)

I said EASY!

Pax lunges and shoves her to the ground. Storm cringes, finds another rock, not taking her eyes off Pax. Pax takes a step back.

PAX (CONT'D)

Throw another one of those at me and I'm going to thump you one.

Storm hesitates.

PAX (CONT'D)

Good. Now I said I wasn't going to hurt you. What the hell happened to...

She nods toward the mangled beast.

PAX (CONT'D)

...that? You armed?

STORM

Would I have thrown a rock at you?

Pax smiles.

PAX

I saw a flash. Lightning?

Storm drops the rock, then covers her eyes and begins sobbing again.

PAX (CONT'D)

(to herself)

Great. I found a lost puppy.

(to Storm)

What did you do?

Storm rubs her eyes.

STORM

I don't know. It came after me. I thought I was dead, and then...something happened.

PAX

The flash?

STORM

I don't KNOW! There was a mist, and it came from the creature, and it was on me, and then there was a flash and it was dead.

PAX

Neat trick.

(beat)

It's getting dark. Let's find some shelter...uh, didn't catch your name.

STORM

Storm.

PAX

Pax.

INT. RUINED HOUSE - NIGHT

Pax props the door in place, wedges it with other detritus. Storm huddles in a corner, shivering. Pax digs in her pack, produces a small lamp, faintly lighting their small space.

PAX

Hungry?

STORM

Yeah.

Pax brings out two small cloth-wrapped packages. Dried meat and bread. Storm eats ravenously.

PAX

When's the last time you ate?

Storm pauses.

STORM

I...can't remember.

PAX

What do you remember?



STORM

I...

She starts to cry again.

PAX

Oh boy. Ok, just take your time.

Storm composes herself.

STORM

I was having a dream. It was bright. A beach, I think.

Pax eats while she listens.

STORM (CONT'D)

I remember the beach hurting my feet. Then it was like I was shaken awake. I woke up where you found me. Then...

She tears up again.

PAX

That creature.

STORM

Yes.

Pax freezes suddenly and douses the light.

STORM (CONT'D)

What is it?

PAX

Quiet! Listen.

Faint voices and the sound of crunching rock are heard. Pax hurries to a ruined window and peers out, careful not to reveal herself.

A squad of SOLDIERS in mechanical-looking armor, led by a CAPTAIN in ornate, glowing armor searches the streets. Their voices are mechanical.

CAPTAIN

Fan out! That Aether discharge was in this area.

Pax watches the soldiers disperse, slowly easing her weapon, a strange-looking sword, out of the sheath on her back. She looks at Storm.

PAX  
Soldiers.

STORM  
Soldiers?!

PAX  
Quiet! They're searching for  
something...  
(realizing)  
...or someone.

Storm sees the look Pax is giving her.

STORM  
Me?! Why would they want me?

PAX  
Could have something to do with  
that cooked beastie out there.

STORM  
But I have no --

PAX  
You could fry *them*.

STORM  
I don't even know what I did! How  
am I supposed to do it again?

Pax shrugs.

PAX  
Then we run.

The soldiers peer into ruined buildings, getting closer. We  
hear them shouting back and forth.

SOLDIER (O.S.)  
Sir! Look at this.

CAPTAIN (O.S.)  
Readings are consistent. The  
Aether was discharged here. Did a  
number on whatever that was.

Inside the shelter, Pax begins to scan frantically.

PAX  
There!

Pax points with her sword. There's a hole in the wall just big enough to squeeze through, illuminated by the barest bit of moonlight.

PAX (CONT'D)  
Don't just sit there! Go!

Storm scrambles to her knees, kicks loose a chunk of wall.

CAPTAIN (O.S.)  
Over there!

PAX  
Move!

The patrol is closing in. Pax pushes Storm through the opening, then follows.

EXT. RUINED HOUSE - NIGHT

The Captain points, and the door explodes. Makes a gesture, and the squad enters the ruin, weapons up. A moment, and one soldier emerges.

SOLDIER  
Nothing here, sir.

The Captain checks a complicated-looking device. It chirps faintly.

CAPTAIN  
Fan out! I'm picking up traces.

The soldier indicates the direction of the fried beastie with his weapon.

SOLDIER  
Probably from that.

CAPTAIN  
No. This is something else.  
(to the squad)  
Grid search by twos. Go!

EXT. OUTER WALL - NIGHT

Storm and Pax fetch up against a huge, ruined wall. Both are out of breath.

STORM  
I...can't...

PAX

We need to get out of here.

In the distance, they hear more soldiers.

STORM

Why are they doing this?

PAX

They're after...wait, you don't know?

STORM

Know what?

PAX

Danavald. This city. You?

STORM

I can't remember...pieces, but that's it. Like a dream.

PAX

So you don't know anything about Danavald or the Danavellir?

STORM

The Dana...

PAX

Your people? You're from here, right? The magic?

STORM

Magic? What magic?

PAX

The beastie-frying kind?

Realization dawns.

PAX (CONT'D)

(to herself)

Here it comes.

STORM

They're after me?!

Pax takes Storm by the shoulders and looks right into her eyes.

PAX

Yes. And unless you really want to see what those soldiers want, we need to run.

STORM

But where?

PAX

Away from here first, then we worry about what's next.

Storm hesitates, giving Pax a hard look.

STORM

But what were you doing here?

PAX

Not now. Over there! Go!

Pax points to a break in the wall, crumbled rock and twisted metal choking the narrow opening. They run for it, duck through the opening.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

The Captain paces, waiting for results. The meter in his hand is silent.

Behind him, a towering figure in even flashier armor approaches. He is DANTE KANE, 40s, general of the Empire's forces.

The Captain looks around and snaps to attention.

CAPTAIN

Sir!

DANTE

Report, Captain.

CAPTAIN

All squads conducting a grid search. We detected an Aether discharge and investigated further. So far, nothing. I had a faint hit near a structure earlier, but it's since faded. Shall I have them continue?

Dante stares into the distance.

DANTE  
 (to himself)  
 She's gone...and one other.

CAPTAIN  
 Sir? Shall I --

DANTE  
 No. Recall the battalion and  
 embark at once.

CAPTAIN  
 Yes, sir!

The Captain retreats to shout commands into his radio. Dante remains, staring, then turns and walks into the darkness.

INT. IMPERIAL THRONE ROOM - DAY

We are inside an opulent throne rooms, gleaming fixtures and mirror-polished marble gleam everywhere. The chamber is huge, an audience chamber as well.

On the throne sits EMPEROR SORAN, 70s, dressed in flowing robes appointed in bits of gleaming armor, mostly for show.

Richly dressed ATTENDANTS mill about, running errands. One, the CHAMBERLAIN, 60s, and dressed in nearly equal finery to the Emperor himself, approaches.

CHAMBERLAIN  
 Excellency, your son has arrived.

The Emperor's face twitches in annoyance.

SORAN  
 Send him in.

CHAMBERLAIN  
 At once, Excellency.

The Chamberlain beckons to two GUARDS in ceremonial armor flanking the gigantic double doors opposite the throne. They open it.

A young, severe-looking man strides haughtily through the doors. He is STEYR, 30s, the Emperor's son. He is dressed in elaborate armor and carries a pair of elaborate swords.

STEYR  
 Father.

Steyr drops to one knee, bowing his head.

SORAN  
Rise. Approach, my son.

Masking a grimace, Steyr gains his feet and approaches his father.

SORAN (CONT'D)  
How fared you in your campaign?

STEYR  
There was...resistance. I was forced to escalate my response.

SORAN  
Escalate? Your orders were to capture.

STEYR  
Father...

SORAN  
Spare me your excuses. I've already heard the rest from General Kane.

Steyr stares, furious and barely hiding it. The Emperor continues, rage bubbling up.

SORAN (CONT'D)  
I indulged your obsession against my better judgment. Your orders did not include destroying an entire city and killing the population.

STEYR  
Father, many of them esc --

The Emperor stands.

SORAN  
Enough!  
(calming)  
You overstepped. Now leave me. Explore your ill-gotten gains while I still have the patience to allow it.

Steyr turns to leave.

SORAN (CONT'D)  
Rule requires restraint. A balance. You lack both.

Steyr leaves, passing Dante Kane at the doors.

DANTE  
That went well.

STEYR  
We begin at once. My father be damned.

DANTE  
What of the one who escaped?

STEYR  
She'll go where the others did.

EXT. SHINING CITY - DAY (DREAM)

Young Storm is holding her mother's hand. They watch through an open gate as men and women in matching uniforms practice throwing blasts of brilliant light.

Now it's adult Storm holding her mother's hand. Her mother smiles lovingly at her, as though she is still a child.

INT. STORM'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (DREAM)

Storm lays in bed, her mother sitting nearby.

MOTHER  
Our people, the Vellir, are special...

STORM  
How are we special?

Her mother continues speaking, voice muffled, as though she didn't hear the interruption.

MOTHER  
The Aether gives us strength, it --

STORM  
The Aether?

MOTHER  
-- may be shaped to harm or to heal  
--

STORM  
Mother...

Storm's mother looks her right in the eye.



MOTHER  
-- and he wants it.

EXT. RUINED CITY - NIGHT (DREAM)

Storm stands in front of a ruined gate, the city destroyed, fire blazing everywhere. She hears a noise behind her. She turns, facing a massive man-shaped SHADOW.

SHADOW  
You are mine!

EXT. WILDERNESS - DAY

Storm, laying next to the remains of a small camp fire, starts awake, screams.

Pax jumps up, lunging for her sword. Her eyes dart back and forth. She sees Storm, takes a breath, and sheathes the sword.

PAX  
Are you alright?

STORM  
Yes.

PAX  
The dream again? That's three nights in a row.

Storm pulls her knees up to her chest.

STORM  
I know, but they feel so real.

Pax sits back down.

STORM (CONT'D)  
What's Aether? I feel like I should know, but I still can't remember.

Pax pauses a moment, starting. Takes a deep breath, resigned.

PAX  
There are stories...of a people called the Vellir.

STORM

Vellir...like Danavellir? You said that word before.

PAX

Yes. The city we escaped from is...was Danavald. A great city of the Vellir. Not much is known of them, only stories. They keep to themselves.

STORM

And that's --

PAX

Where I found you, yes.

STORM

Why would someone attack? Where are the rest of the people?

PAX

Power, why else? As for the rest, if some got away, there's only one place for them to go.

STORM

Where?

PAX

Odeilla, which is exactly where we're headed.

STORM

My people are there?

PAX

Maybe. Then again, maybe not. You've been out of it for days.

Storm's eyes begin to tear up.

STORM

I...

She begins to cry.

PAX

Not this again.

Storm look at her, now angry.

STORM

What am I supposed to do?! I don't know what happened, I've got bright light shooting from my hands when I get scared, and every time I sleep I have the same terrible nightmare!

Pax sits next to her.

PAX

Learn. I bet if you knew more it would scare you less.

Storm begins counting off points on her hand.

STORM

And how exactly do I do that?! Let's review! The only place I could have done that...destroyed!...full of people who could have taught me anything...dead!...

PAX

Alright, alright, I get it.

She gently takes Storm's hands, lowering them.

PAX (CONT'D)

Then I'm the next best thing. I happen to know a story or two about the Vellir. Maybe it'll help.

STORM

Ok. I'm listening.

PAX

That's better. Now this isn't much, but it's more than you seem to know at present.

Storm wipes her eyes, still listening.

PAX (CONT'D)

What do you know about Aether?

STORM

What's that?

PAX

It's a type of energy that occurs naturally around nearly everything.

(MORE)

PAX (CONT'D)

Most people can't see it, but the Vellir can. And what's more, they can actually do something with it.

Storm looks at her hands.

STORM

But I don't see anything.

PAX

Don't interrupt. The Vellir are a very secretive people. They build grand cities, but you could count on one hand the number of people who have ever been inside one.

Pax moves so she's sitting right in front of Storm.

PAX (CONT'D)

But they're not the only ones who use Aether. Airships use it to fly, and some say the Empire uses it to power some of their weapons. They can't see it or manipulate it the way the Vellir do, but it's still there.

STORM

How do you know all this?

PAX

I get around. Now pay attention.

STORM

Sorry.

PAX

Rumor is that the Empire has been upping their Aether research game. Until now, it was just rumor, but considering what happened to your city, it's obvious.

STORM

What's obvious?

PAX

The Empire sees the Vellir as a threat. Or, they want to control Aether. What better way than to level a city and take what you want? The Vellir wouldn't have just given it to them.

(MORE)

PAX (CONT'D)

Not that it was theirs to give, but  
you get my point.

Storm shoots Pax an inquisitive look.

STORM

So why were you there?

Pax waves it off.

PAX

Not important. What is important  
is that now you know more than you  
did.

STORM

What about the people? I don't  
remember seeing any bodies.

PAX

Maybe they fled. Maybe they were  
taken. Maybe both.

STORM

I have to find them.

PAX

I knew you were going to say that.  
Come on, we need to get moving.

STORM

Now?

PAX

You have somewhere else to be?

Pax digs in her pack and hands Storm a wrapped bundle of  
food.

PAX (CONT'D)

Eat up. We need to go.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

The forest is thick, the sunlight mostly blocked by the  
canopy of leaves overhead. No animals or birds at all.  
Silent.

Storm and Pax pick their way slowly through the trees,  
following a narrow game trail. A noise in the distance  
shatters the silence; a branch snapping. They stop,  
listening.

PAX

It's nothing. Let's go.

They continue for another few minutes, then they hear the noise again, closer.

STORM

Pax, it's getting closer.

PAX

I hear it. This way.

They hurry off in another direction, the trees thinning. The noise begins again, now constant and getting closer. They burst into a large clearing and stop. The noise approaches.

PAX (CONT'D)

Get behind me.

They face the noise, now able to see a form moving toward them through the thick tree cover.

A creature that looks like a huge lamprey bursts out of the trees. It has six legs and a mouth full of needle-like fangs. A stinger on the end of its tail waves in the air like a striking snake.

Pax draws her sword and sets herself into a battle stance.

PAX (CONT'D)

Any chance you can fry that thing?

STORM

What?!

PAX

Look, I need to know if you can do anything or not before that thing skewers both of us.

STORM

I'll try.

Storm sees the Aether swirling around the creature, but this looks different. She reaches out for it, and it begins to flow toward her. As it reaches her, it collects, then dissipates into nothing.

STORM (CONT'D)

It's not working!

PAX

Right. Hard way it is.

The creature surges forward. Pax parries the tail, then cuts a leg, nearly severing it. The creature staggers, striking again with the tail, and she barely meets it in time. She twists away from the mouth, but is tripped by another of the legs. On her back, she gets the sword up in time to stab it through the bottom of its mouth, up into its brain. The creature shudders, falls over, and is still.

Pax rolls the dead creature off herself, wipes her sword on the carcass, and puts it away. She sees Storm crouched, knees pulled up to her chest, thousand-yard stare on her face.

PAX (CONT'D)

What happened?

STORM

I was so close. Didn't you see?

PAX

No. I can't see the same things you do.

(beat)

I'm sorry. I shouldn't have pushed you too early.

STORM

No, I need to do this. What happens when you don't get the monster next time? I can't find my people if I'm dead.

PAX

Now you're talking!

STORM

I'll try harder. I almost had it this time.

PAX

What do you mean "almost?"

STORM

You were right about seeing the Aether. But I couldn't focus. It was there, then it wasn't. It's like focusing on something in the dark.

Storm staggers a moment.

STORM (CONT'D)

It's actually giving me a headache. Can we just rest a minute?

PAX

I don't think that's a good idea.  
Besides, if we make good time,  
we'll be in Odeilla by dark.  
Considering the local wildlife, I'd  
say that's a good idea.

Storm takes a deep breath, steadying herself.

STORM

Ok. Let's go.

EXT. CITY PLAINS - NIGHT

Storm and Pax walk the plains outlying Odeilla, the forest  
dwindling behind them. The lights of the city twinkle only  
scant miles ahead of them, welcoming. They both visibly  
relax.

PAX

If any of your people got away,  
this would be the first place  
they'd come.

STORM

So we're here. Now what?

PAX

Now I take you to someone who might  
be able to help. Nice family.  
You'll like 'em.

STORM

And what about you?

Pax hesitates.

PAX

I have other business to attend to.  
I can't stay.

Storm looks crestfallen.

PAX (CONT'D)

Listen. I get it. You're trading  
one unknown for another. But  
you're tough, and maybe I'll see  
you again soon. I don't have a lot  
of friends, so maybe I'll swing by  
on my way back through.

STORM

Friends? Me?



PAX

Yeah. Maybe. Now come on, it's only a few more miles.

Storms smiles. They press onward.

INT. IMPERIAL PALACE - NIGHT

The elegant halls echo with the sounds of fighting and the death screams of men. Dante Kane prowls, weapon out, as he picks his way through dead and dying men. Rounding a corner, the double doors of the throne room loom, unguarded.

INT. IMPERIAL THRONE ROOM - NIGHT

The gigantic double doors swing open, admitting Dante Kane. Steyr sits on the throne, the blood-soaked corpse of Emperor Soran lying in a heap at his feet.

DANTE

So it is done.

STEYR

He was an old, stupid fool. To think I sat by as long as I did.

Dante sheathes his weapon and approaches, dropping to a knee.

DANTE

Excellency, where do we begin?

STEYR

I intend to send a message. You allowed some of the Vellir to escape, so I intend to give them no refuge. When your quarry goes to ground, leave them nowhere to hide. Prepare to deploy the fleet.

DANTE

And their destination?

STEYR

Odeilla.

Dante rises and turns to leave.

STEYR (CONT'D)

General Kane.

Dante stops, half-turns to regard Steyr, looking out the gigantic window.

DANTE  
Excellency?

STEYR  
I trust this time there will be no  
scattering refugees to account for.

DANTE  
Yes, excellency.

STEYR  
Good. See that there aren't.

Dante stares hard at Steyr's back, turns, and leaves.

EXT. CITY PLAINS - NIGHT

Pax stops suddenly, listening.

PAX  
Do you hear that?

STORM  
Hear what?

PAX  
Listen.

A faint rumbling in the air, almost felt rather than heard.

PAX (CONT'D)  
That.

STORM  
I don't hear --

PAX  
Oh no! Look.

Pax point to the horizon, Storm following with her eyes.  
Three massive airships crawl into view, their red lights  
gleaming like predatory eyes.

STORM  
Where are they going?

They watch. The ship's trajectory appears to take them back  
in the direction Storm and Pax have just come.

PAX  
Not to Odeilla. Danavald.

STORM

Looking for more of my people?  
Looking for me?

PAX

Let them look, just so long as it's  
not here.

They stare at the airships, watching them track across the sky. As they pass by Odeilla, one ship splits off from the group and heads directly toward the city.

STORM

Pax.

PAX

(softly)

No.

The ship begins to circle lazily around the city, blinding search light stabbing down. All hell breaks loose. The flash of cannon fire and the subsequent explosions don't reach their ears for a few seconds.

PAX (CONT'D)

NO!

They watch helplessly as the airship fires again and again. It goes on for many horrible moments, until the search lights finally fade and the ship turns back the direction it came, leaving Odeilla in flames.

PAX (CONT'D)

We have to go.

Storm is frozen, horrified look on her face.

PAX (CONT'D)

Storm!

Storm is still staring at the flaming ruin of Odeilla, a single tear falling. Pax puts a hand on her shoulder.

PAX (CONT'D)

We have to go. Now.

Storm rounds on Pax, slapping her hand away. She grabs Pax.

STORM

Where?! Where do we go now?! I  
have a home I can't go to, a power  
I can't use, and the only hope I  
had just got blown to hell! Tell  
me! Where do we go now?!

Pax just smirks at her.

PAX

Where was this when I was trying  
not to get skewered by that  
creature in the forest, hmm?

Storm lets go, letting out an exasperated huff. She relaxes.

STORM

So what now?

PAX

That's better.

Pax straightens herself out from Storm's manhandling. Storm looks sheepish.

STORM

I'm sorry.

PAX

Don't be. I've been waiting for  
something like this. Now use it to  
focus yourself and become stronger.  
The way we're going now, you're  
going to need it.

Pax turns away from the burning city and starts walking.

STORM

Where are you going?

PAX

We need to go underground.  
Literally. I was going there  
anyway. That business I told you  
about.

STORM

Underground? What do you mean?

PAX

You really are clueless, aren't  
you?

STORM

Obviously. I need to find my  
people, and standing here isn't  
getting me any closer. Now just  
tell me.

PAX

There are vast cities built underground. The one we need to get to is one of the rougher ones, but at least we won't have to worry about airships. You sure you're ready?

STORM

I'm ready. Let's go.

EXT. CAVE GATE - DAY

Pax and Storm emerge from a wide, rocky canyon. Covered in road dust and looking weary, they approach an elaborate gate carved into the side of the mountain, shut tight. Minarets with GUARDS flank the massive structure.

GUARD

Stop! State your name and business.

PAX

Pax Varja, bound for Vindhira to --  
(indicates Storm)  
-- trade.

The guard looks Storm up and down.

GUARD

Her?

PAX

Naturally. Try not to scare her or she might tell Freya you were mean to her.

GUARD

Freya one of your clients?

PAX

Naturally.

The guard turns to address an unknown party.

GUARD

Open up!  
(to Pax)  
Then by all means, proceed.

PAX

Thank you.

The massive twin slabs slide apart, revealing a gaping interior lined with lights. It is impossible to see how far it goes.

GUARD

On you go. My regards to Freya.

Pax nods at the guard, gathers up Storm by the arm, and walks into the mountain.

INT. MOUNTAIN TUNNEL - DAY

The rows of lights mounted on the tunnel wall cast eerie shadows over Storm and Pax. Pax holds Storm's arm until the gate closes with a boom. She looks back, lets go.

PAX

Nice job. For a second I didn't think you were going to play along.

STORM

What exactly was that? What did you mean trade me?

PAX

Flesh trade. Dancers and...other things. Don't worry, I didn't mean you.

Storm gives her a look of pure disgust.

STORM

So you've done this before?

PAX

Look, I trade in...odds and ends. But never people. That guard only believed it because of who we're going to see.

STORM

Freya? Who's that? That's not exactly the kind of help I had in mind.

PAX

Listen, I've had to scrape by most of my life. I don't exactly get to pick and choose the kind of work I do. You get picky, you starve...or worse.

Storm stops.

PAX (CONT'D)  
What the hell are you doing?

STORM  
I need some answers. What are you getting me into? Our first plan literally went up in flames. How is this better?

Pax walks back to her, grabs her arm, and starts pulling her along.

STORM (CONT'D)  
Hey! Let go of me!

The tunnel around them begins to rumble, quietly at first, but enough to cause dirt and debris to fall from above.

PAX  
What the hell?!

Storm looks her right in the eye.

STORM  
(menacing)  
We're under a mountain. I see it everywhere. The Aether. If I wanted, I could bring it all down on top of us. Let go of me.

She lets go of Storm's arm. The rumbling fades, stops.

PAX  
I didn't ask for any of this! I'm trying to help you, so if you want any chance at finding your people and not ending up dead, I'd ask for a little more appreciation. So how about it?

Storm just stares at her, unconvinced.

PAX (CONT'D)  
Look. Freya does deal in a lot of morally questionable stuff. But she also deals in information. That's what we're going to get.

STORM  
Is she going to make me dance for it? Are you?

PAX

Nothing like that. Just don't say anything about where I found you. Word gets around. And one more thing.

STORM

Yes?

Pax looks around uneasily.

PAX

Try not to bury us alive the next time you get mad.

EXT. VINDHIR MAIN STREET - DAY

The Mining Guild City of Vindhir has a Wild West Meets "Total Recall" feel; store fronts, saloons, and residences interspersed along a broad, main avenue. Alleys and back streets branch off from the main drag, reaching back into the shadows. Piercing blue-white lights high above them are the only indication that it is still daytime in the world above.

Storm and Pax make their way down the streets of Vindhir, the underground Mining Guild city.

PAX

What do you think?

STORM

I had no idea...  
(a beat)  
Those lights...

PAX

That's how they mark the days. And how you avoid going crazy living underground.

STORM

What do you mean?

PAX

Simple. Brighter when it's day in the world above. Dimmer when it's night. Helps those of us who don't make a habit of sticking around here too long.

Storm glances at Pax, starting to understand.



STORM

You come here a lot, don't you?

PAX

From time to time.

STORM

You don't like it here much, do you?

Pax shoots Storm a strange look.

PAX

Not especially, no.

STORM

This is a bad place, isn't it?

Pax hesitates.

PAX

Bad enough.

STORM

Then why are we here?

PAX

Information. But mostly because we just watched my preferred source incinerated by airships.

STORM

What makes this place so bad?

PAX

Gangsters, mostly. Amusing that you have an underground element in a literally underground city. They have a piece of everything, from the saloons to the men guarding that gate back there.

A SHADY FELLOW melts out of the crowd and approaches. Pax flourishes her hands at him, as if revealing a gift to Storm.

PAX (CONT'D)

Right on cue.

SHADY FELLOW

Boss wants to see you. Come on.

PAX

And what if we don't want to see her?

The Shady Fellow shrugs. All around them, men are revealing half-hidden weapons, looking for a reason to use them.

PAX (CONT'D)

(cheery)

Well, since you asked nicely...  
Lead on.

Turning without a word, the Shady Fellow leads them into the crowd.

EXT. THE ANGEL'S FEATHER - DAY

The Angel's Feather is an upscale casino crawling with activity. Miners, soldiers, and well-dressed socialites all sit at tables outside the doors drinking and gawking at barely dressed serving women. It is clean and well-lit, but promises darker pleasures within. An animated marquee of a half-naked winged angel holding a feather beckons seductively high above the threshold.

The Shady Fellow leads Storm and Pax up to the sparkling doors and beckons them to enter. He follows, with a knowing look to the burly guards mixed with the crowd.

INT. THE ANGEL'S FEATHER - DAY

Their guide leads them by hot gaming tables and crowded bar areas teeming with people. At the back of the gaming floor they reach a guarded door. He indicates for them to enter.

INT. PRIVATE ROOM - DAY

Storm and Pax emerge through the door into a room shrouded in twilight. A haze of smoke hangs in the air, the denizens moving about as if in a dream.

They proceed toward the back of the room, further into the darkness. The muted chatter is suddenly broken by a harsh voice from somewhere in front of them.

VOICE (O.S.)

My useful little vagabond returns!

They proceed further forward and the smoke clears enough to reveal the speaker. A woman, 50s, sits at a gaming table smoking a hookah. She is FREYA, the owner of the establishment. She has a stern, grandmotherly look, her cold eyes betraying a hungry, predatory danger.

FREYA  
Closer, child...

Pax smiles sweetly.

PAX  
Miss me, Freya?

FREYA  
...so I can check you for weapons.  
Always with that mouth of yours.  
Closer, I said.

They walk closer, slowly. Storm meets Freya's eyes and flinches. Freya smiles, knowingly.

FREYA (CONT'D)  
And who is this, who's smart enough  
to know what I am with one single  
look?

PAX  
Her name is Storm. We are  
traveling North together.

FREYA  
North? Then why come through the  
underground? Surely you know  
better roads that wouldn't have  
brought you to my doorstep.  
Unless...

Freya considers Pax and smiles knowingly. Pax gives in.

PAX  
I found her in Danavald. A  
survivor. We made for Odeilla to  
reunite her with her people, only --

FREYA  
It was destroyed.

Storm and Pax look poleaxed. Freya sees their reaction and smiles.

FREYA (CONT'D)  
Oh yes, I know. Burned to the  
ground by an Imperial airship. I'm  
told that there were no survivors.

She turns her predatory smile on Storm.

FREYA (CONT'D)  
At least not there.

Her gaze lingers on Storm for an uncomfortable moment, then turns back to Pax.

FREYA (CONT'D)  
Is she the only thing of value you  
found in the ruins of Danavald?

Pax hesitates, not meeting her eyes.

FREYA (CONT'D)  
Is she Danavellir?

Pax says nothing. Freya leans forward in her chair.

FREYA (CONT'D)  
Is. She. Danavellir?

Storm looks at Pax, but Pax won't meet her eyes. Pax takes a deep breath, trapped.

PAX  
(quietly)  
Yes.

Freya sits back, content. She turns to Storm.

FREYA  
Where are the rest of your people,  
child?

STORM  
I don't remember anything.

FREYA  
Tell me what you do remember, my  
dear.

Storm thinks for a moment.

STORM  
I woke up and everything around me  
was burning. Sometimes I get a  
flash, usually when I'm dreaming,  
but that's it.

FREYA  
You know nothing of who you are?  
Your people?

Storm remains silent, looking at her feet. A single tear forms in her eye.

STORM  
Nothing.

Freya takes a long pull on her hookah, looking silently at Storm.

FREYA  
Sit down with me, child.

Storm sits. Pax bristles, but seeing the reaction of Freya's thugs, relaxes. Freya sees her reaction and smiles thinly.

FREYA (CONT'D)  
It would be wise to control  
yourself, dear. I wouldn't want  
there to be any misunderstandings.  
(to Storm)  
Now, my dear, let me tell you about  
your people.

Freya takes another pull of the hookah.

FREYA (CONT'D)  
Your people, the Vellir, have  
always been a mystery.  
Incidentally, you being from  
Danavald makes you a Danavellir.  
There have always been stories of  
them and their strange power. The  
power to manipulate the Aether and  
use it as a weapon. Powerful  
stuff...if you believe the stories.

Storm fidgets uneasily under Freya's gaze. It's hungry, as if she's waiting for the chance to pounce and devour her.

Freya takes another pull from the hookah.

FREYA (CONT'D)  
Do you possess this power, child?

Storm sits bolt upright. Pax takes a step forward.

PAX  
Freya, no!

The guards reach for their weapons. Freya exhales nonchalantly.

FREYA  
Well, well. What makes you so  
protective of this one, hmm?

PAX  
She's just a kid.

Freya waves off her guards and turns back to Storm.

FREYA

I asked you a question, child.

There is no hint of the grandmother now. Just pure predator. Storm just stares at her in disbelief.

FREYA (CONT'D)

Perhaps a test then.

She gestures to a guard, who withdraws into the darkness. There is a clattering, and then a shrieking sound from some unknown beast. The guard emerges from the darkness carrying what looks like a hairy snake, hissing and struggling to bite. He places it on the table and backs away quickly. Storm can see that it is wreathed in the same sort of haze as the monster she encountered in Danavald. Freya strokes it lovingly, unafraid.

FREYA (CONT'D)

The vorath is a beautiful creature, and possesses one of the deadliest venoms known to man. I think they're lovely, don't you?

Pax just stares in horror as the vorath coils and writhes on the table.

FREYA (CONT'D)

You see it, don't you? The Aether surrounding it?

STORM

(quietly)

Yes.

FREYA

Show me.

Storm looks at Freya in disbelief.

STORM

Show you what?

FREYA

Your power, of course. That, or you can die from the vorath bite. The choice is really quite simple, dear: kill or be killed.

Pax starts forward again. The guards now draw their weapons. At the table, Freya takes her hand off the vorath and waits. The vorath turns lazily toward Storm and flicks its tongue.

FREYA (CONT'D)  
I said show me, child.

Storm raises her hand. In her eyes, the Aether surrounding the vorath begins to swirl and flow to her. Sensing this, the vorath becomes agitated and begins to writhe and squirm.

As before, the Aether swirls and flows toward Storm, but then begins to break up. The vorath darts toward her as the Aether dissipates. It strikes.

In a blur of motion, Pax sweeps her sword out and down, severing the head of the vorath inches from Storm. The guards surround her, weapons drawn, as Pax stands there motionless, blood running down her blade. The blade seems to shimmer as it passes near Storm, which does not escape Freya's notice.

FREYA (CONT'D)  
I thought as much.

She waves a hand and the guards withdraw. Pax shakes the blood off her sword and sheathes it. Storm just sits, hanging her head.

FREYA (CONT'D)  
Now, now child. You should be thankful your new friend is so vigilant. Tell you what, I can help you. I don't know if any of your people are still out there, but your best chance is to go to Gunnarsholt and have a look.

Storm looks up at her, expectantly.

FREYA (CONT'D)  
Now, now, don't thank me just yet. Pax will take you, but the road is hard...and there's the matter of what she still owes me. She'd be happy to take you, wouldn't you, Pax?

Pax just stares daggers at Freya. Freya's voice becomes hard as steel.

FREYA (CONT'D)  
Wouldn't you?

PAX  
Yes, of course.

Freya switches back to happy grandmother.

FREYA  
Wonderful! You leave tomorrow.

She indicates the Shady Fellow who led them, who had appeared from nowhere.

FREYA (CONT'D)  
LARS here will take you to your lodgings. Rest well.

Storm gets up, and her and Pax turn to leave.

FREYA (CONT'D)  
And one more thing, my dears. I expect what's owed. Come back to me, or I may have to come looking. We wouldn't want that, would we?

At this, Freya waves her hand at a small group of stoic-faced men dressed all in black. They hadn't been there a moment before. They have the look of lethal ghosts.

PAX  
I suppose not.

FREYA  
That's good. That's very good.

Storm and Pax follow Lars out of the room and leave.

EXT. STREETS OF VINDHIR - NIGHT

The lights high above Vindhir are now a warm orange, indicating night has fallen. Storm and Pax make their way down the street, keeping to the crowd. Pax's face shows her worry.

STORM  
So when are you going to start talking?

Pax stops.

PAX  
You sound like Freya. What you do you mean "start talking?"

Storm stands her ground.

STORM  
How does that woman know you? Who were those thugs? Where did they come from. Why is she helping me?  
(MORE)



STORM (CONT'D)

What do you owe her? Should I go on?

Pax raises her hands defensively.

PAX

Whoa. Ok, so you have questions. Let get something to eat.

Storm crosses her arms defiantly.

PAX (CONT'D)

Listen. I'm hungry and I need a strong drink. I'll answer whatever you want, just come on.

Storm gives her an impatient look and hurries ahead.

PAX (CONT'D)

Hey! Wait!

INT. NAT'S PLACE - NIGHT

Nat's Place is a cross between a Wild West saloon and a 1920s New York City hotel. The well-dressed clientele look like they would be equally comfortable in either, and the sparkling lights, dark wood, and immaculate cleanliness form a gilded counterpoint to the fact that every patron has murder on his mind.

Storm and Pax enter through a chrome-plated and glass revolving door into the common room, drawing looks of curiosity and general disinterest. They take a table near the bar, which looks straight out of a prohibition-era speakeasy. A lovely WAITRESS comes to take their order.

WAITRESS

What'll it be, girls?

PAX

Whiskey and food.

WAITRESS

Cheery.

(to Storm)

And for you, sweetie?

STORM

Um...I'll have what she's having.

WAITRESS

Great. Comin' right up.

The waitress withdraws to get their order. Pax unbuckles the sword and props it up against the table, then leans back and closes her eyes. Storm reaches over to shake her.

STORM

Hey. Thought you were going to answer my questions.

PAX

I told you already. Drink first, then questions.

STORM

I hardly think --

PAX

That's right. You hardly think. Now give me a chance to collect my thoughts, dull them a little with whiskey, and I'll sit here and answer your questions all night if you want. But for now, give me a minute.

Storm sits back and sulks, looking around. The waitress returns with two glasses of whiskey and a platter of food. Pax takes a big slug of whiskey and starts to tear into the food.

STORM

Thank you.

WAITRESS

Nice to see one of you has some manners. Just settle up at the bar when you're done.

She leaves, and Storm gives Pax a hard look.

PAX

(mouth full)

What?

Storm just huffs in exasperation, then takes a drink of her own whiskey. She coughs and splutters, clearly not expecting the burn. Pax smiles.

STORM

What is that?

PAX

Whiskey. First time?

STORM

Yeah. How do you drink that? It tastes like burning ashes.

PAX

I just had a thought. Maybe if we get enough of that in you, you'll be able to use your...gift more easily.

Storm gives her a strange look.

STORM

What do you mean?

PAX

I was joking about getting you drunk.

STORM

Drunk?

PAX

You really don't know anything about the world, do you?

Storm sits back and blushes.

PAX (CONT'D)

Oh come on. I'm not trying to hurt your feelings. I was joking.

Storm refuses to look up.

PAX (CONT'D)

Hey.

Storm glances up.

PAX (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

STORM

I can't help it. Don't you think I want to understand? You try waking up in the middle of a war zone and see how well you do. Try getting almost eaten and having some shining nonsense come shooting out of your hands and see how you do.

PAX

Fair enough.

STORM

Now you've had your drink, and you're stuffing your face. Think it'd be a good time for questions, or would you rather get...drunk first?

Pax smiles.

PAX

Nah, go ahead. If I get drunk, I'll be no use to you. Especially if we have to deal with any of Freya's goons.

STORM

First question. Who were those people?

Pax goes white in the face.

PAX

Hell of a first question. Start eating.

Storm starts to tear into the food. Her manners are about as bad as Pax's.

PAX (CONT'D)

Ever heard of...never mind, you haven't. Anyway, Freya is part of an organization...

(lowers her voice)

...an organization called Ebony Sun.

STORM

Why did you lower your voice.

PAX

Pay attention. I'm getting to that.

Pax takes another hard swallow of whiskey.

PAX (CONT'D)

Ebony Sun is a syndicate. They are into everything: weapons, information, protection, you name it. There are other syndicates out there, but Ebony Sun is one of the worst. Those men who appeared out of nowhere at Freya's are called Enforcers.

(MORE)

PAX (CONT'D)

They're not your average thug. They are ruthless, they are silent, and they are invisible. You don't hide from them. Once they're on your trail, it's only a matter of time. Freya plays the kind old grandmother role because she knows that if anyone ever crosses her, she can just set the Enforcers loose. Nobody has ever made that mistake twice.

Now Storm takes a swallow of whiskey. Makes an awful face.

STORM

What do you owe her?

Pax stops mid-chew.

PAX

Why do you want to know?

STORM

You said you'd answer my questions. Freya made a point of reminding you, especially when she asked you if I was the only thing of value you found at Danavald.

Storm leans forward.

STORM (CONT'D)

What do you owe her?

Pax swallows hard.

PAX

She sometimes sends me to get things for her.

Storm grabs her hand.

PAX (CONT'D)

Hey! Let go!

STORM

What. Do. You. Owe. Her?

Pax actually looks shaken.

PAX

Storm...

STORM

Why were you in Danavald? Is that where she sent you to get things?

Pax looks away from Storm. Storm squeezes her hand hard. Pax's eyes swing back.

PAX

She sent me there to find Vellir technology and weapons. Anything that wasn't blown to bits by the Empire. Who could have imagined I'd find you? A real-life Vellir...just one who hasn't a spark of talent.

Storm lets go of her hand and sits back, staring into the distance.

PAX (CONT'D)

Storm.

Storm ignores her.

PAX (CONT'D)

Storm!

She looks at Pax.

STORM

Did you have a choice?

Pax looks down, ashamed.

PAX

No more than you.

Storm reaches for her whiskey and downs it. She sets down the empty glass and tries not to choke. The waitress circles back to their table.

WAITRESS

Refill?

STORM

Yes. I believe I am going to get drunk.

The waitress smirks at her and leaves. Storm looks at Pax again.

STORM (CONT'D)

This stuff is terrible, you know.

Pax, sensing the tension easing, smiles. The waitress delivers the whiskey and leaves again.

Storm picks up the glass, holds it up to Pax.

STORM (CONT'D)  
Never lie to me again.

Pax picks up her own glass and holds it up.

PAX  
Deal.

They toss back the whiskey.

EXT. STREETS OF VINDHIR - DAY

Storm and Pax trudge sluggishly down the street, looking very hungover.

STORM  
Pax, I'm not --

She runs to an alley and vomits. Pax walks over and leans against the wall.

PAX  
Welcome to your first hangover.

STORM  
I'm never touching that stuff again.

PAX  
That's what they all say. Come on, we need to go.

They continue down the street toward a massive gate.

STORM  
Are we going back outside?

PAX  
No, this gate leads to the trade road. We're going deeper in.

STORM  
You mean there's more of this?

PAX  
Oh yes. If we go back to the surface, we have to go around the mountains. A week if we're lucky.  
(MORE)

PAX (CONT'D)

This is more direct. Three days if we take our time, but it's more dangerous. And even more so if the lights go out.

STORM

What's so dangerous?

PAX

Let me worry about that. You just worry about not bringing the mountains down on us.

They approach a huge gate. The GUARDS wave for them to halt.

GUARD

State your business.

PAX

Running another errand for Freya.

The guard point to Storm.

GUARD

What about her?

PAX

She's the errand.

GUARD

Right  
(to the other guards)  
Open up!

The massive gate grinds open.

INT. UNDERGROUND TRADE ROAD - DAY

Storm and Pax flinch as the gate clangs shut behind them.

PAX

The trade road is safe enough, but don't wander off.

STORM

Where would I wander off to?

PAX

Just stay close. I'm serious.

Pax reaches up and loosen the sword in the sheath across her back.



STORM  
Expecting trouble?

PAX  
I always expect it.

They proceed down the road for hours, further into the underground. They pass merchant trains and other travelers. Nobody pays them any mind.

STORM  
Can you tell me more about this place? Why build so much underground?

PAX  
Nobody really knows for sure. The underground has been around for centuries. Nobody knows who built it, or nobody remembers. It runs under the mountains and connects with the surface all over Oestra.

STORM  
Seems like something the Empire would want. How is this safer? Why don't they come down here and take it?

PAX  
They've tried and failed many times. The people won't allow it.

STORM  
How do those people back there put up any sort of fight? Even the scary ones you told me about?

PAX  
Oh, that's not the only city down here.

Storm stops.

STORM  
More cities?

PAX  
Yes, and bigger. We're headed to one of them now. Actually, two of them.

STORM  
What do you mean?

PAX

We'll stop in the twin cities of  
Kil Badhir and Thar Badhir. If you  
liked Vindhira, you'll love the twin  
cities.

Storm looks at her doubtfully.

STORM

Somehow I doubt it.

They continue on.

STORM (CONT'D)

Pax, I need to tell you something.

PAX

Ok, what?

STORM

You keep telling me not to bring  
the mountain down on our heads. I  
just thought I should tell you that  
I can see the Aether everywhere.  
I'm not even trying.

PAX

Wait. You mean you can only see it  
if you want to?

STORM

Yes. And...

PAX

What? Tell me.

STORM

I can see it around people too.

PAX

What does that mean?

STORM

I don't know. It's different  
though. Somehow I know it is.  
With the monsters, I sort of know  
what kind of essence they have.  
With you, it looks like it's barely  
there, but it is.

PAX

Well don't try practicing on me.

STORM  
I won't. I just wanted you to  
know.

PAX  
Thanks.

STORM  
There's something else.

PAX  
Ok. What?

STORM  
Where did you get that sword?

PAX  
Found it.

STORM  
Found it where?

Pax stops for a moment and gives Storm a cautious look.

PAX  
Same place I found you. I lost my  
other weapon on the way to  
Danavald. Sold it for food,  
actually. Lots of places I'm not  
welcome. When I got to Danavald  
and saw the soldiers still there, I  
almost turned back. Found it in a  
pile of wreckage so I grabbed it.  
You like it?

STORM  
It's not that.

PAX  
What then?

STORM  
Back at Freya's, when you killed  
the vorath, I could have sworn it  
reacted to what I was doing.

PAX  
How?

STORM  
It flickered. I thought I was  
seeing things, but I think it  
reacted to what I was doing.

Pax reaches up and takes out the sword.

PAX  
Can you do it again?

STORM  
I thought you said it was a bad  
idea to try down here.

PAX  
What about on me?

STORM  
No!

PAX  
Why not?

Storm looks down.

PAX (CONT'D)  
(more emphatically)  
Why not?

Storm looks up, her eyes holding tears.

STORM  
Because I think it might kill you.

PAX  
How do you know?

STORM  
I feel like it would be a  
violation. I don't how I know, but  
I do.

A long silence. Pax sheathes the blade.

PAX  
Ok. Maybe later then. Come on, we  
have a long way to go.

EXT. CITY OUTSKIRTS - NIGHT

The lights on the trade road fade to a dull orange. Evening in the underground. Storm and Pax descend through a massive fissure in the rock and look down into a gargantuan cavern housing the twin cities of Kil Badhir and Thar Badhir, separated by a roaring underground river.

STORM  
It's huge!

PAX  
 And this isn't even the biggest  
 one...two cities down here.

Storm just gapes in awe.

PAX (CONT'D)  
 Come on. I know a place where we  
 can rest and get some dinner.

INT. KIL BADHIR - PUB - NIGHT

The pub is dimly lit and quiet. Dangerous-looking men mill about with their drinks, and the conversation is hushed all around. Storm and Pax sit in a corner booth facing the door and nurse their drinks.

STORM  
 Why this place? I was imagining  
 something a little --

PAX  
 Less like a sewer?

Storm takes a drink, makes a face.

STORM  
 I suppose.

PAX  
 Listen. This may not be the best  
 place, but it's quiet and out of  
 the way. We have less of a chance  
 of being noticed in a place like  
 this.

STORM  
 You mean you have less of a chance  
 being noticed?

Pax stares daggers at her as she takes a drink.

PAX  
 Yeah.

A ROUGH MAN, 50s, in a dirty apron sets down a tray of food on the table. He stands, staring.

ROUGH MAN  
 Fifteen.

Pax looks up at him.

PAX

We'll settle up when we're done.

He places his hands on the table and leans in.

ROUGH MAN

You'll settle up now, missy.  
Fifteen.

A YOUNG MAN, 20s, walks up behind the Rough Man and holds out his hand, shaking it. It's money.

YOUNG MAN

Let me get this one, friend. She  
and I got way back!

Pax closes her eyes, not believing what she's seeing. The Rough Man takes the money and walks away. The Young Man remains standing, staring.

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)

Didn't think to see you here again.  
Ever.

Pax looks up and flashes a huge, fake smile.

PAX

Dolph, how've you been.

The Young Man, DOLPH, smiles right back.

DOLPH

Never better. In fact, after I  
recovered from the last time we...  
(glances at Storm)  
...ran into each other, I've  
actually been looking forward to  
seeing you again.

He pulls back a lock of long hair and reveals a missing ear, a twisted mass of scar tissue in its place.

STORM

Pax, what is he talking about?

DOLPH

I don't believe we've met.

STORM

Storm. You're Dolph. She's Pax.  
And I'm sure we're all happy to  
meet each other.

Dolph chuckles.

DOLPH

Spicy, this one. Maybe instead of taking what you owe me out of your hide, I'll just take it out of hers. Well...not just me.

Pax flings her glass into Dolph's face and leaps up, drawing her sword in a blur of motion.

DOLPH (CONT'D)

That was a mistake.

Behind him, Dolph's THREE THUGS get up from a nearby table and take out wicked-looking knives. They fan out, trying to corner Pax.

STORM

Now what?

PAX

We stay alive. Any chance at using your little trick this time?

Storm makes a choked sound of shock.

PAX (CONT'D)

Guess not.

Dolph has produced his own awful-looking knife and lunges. Pax cracks him in the face with the hilt of her sword. One thug tries to lunge past a reeling Dolph and Pax launches a vicious side kick into his throat. He falls down gurgling as she spins and kicks another thug, shattering his face. He falls down screaming. Dolph, now bleeding profusely from his broken nose, slashes at Pax. She parries with the sword, and another thug slashes at her, cutting her across the ribs. She hisses in pain and retreats a step

Storm stands from the table, looking angry. She walks up behind Pax, now facing three armed men.

PAX (CONT'D)

Stay back. If you see an opening, run for it.

Dolph starts to laugh.

DOLPH

Good one. Let her try. I'll be ripping screams out of her within the hour. Right after I finish gutting you!

He lunges again. Pax parries, but exposes her back to the third thug, who hits her across the back of the head with a short club. Pax reels and falls to her knees.

STORM

Pax!

Dolph finds his footing and grabs Pax's wrist. He twists savagely and the sword clatters to the floor. Pax looks stunned, but spits at Dolph.

DOLPH

Little bitch. Always think you're so much better than everyone. I've been looking forward to this. I'm going to bathe in your blood.

He raises his knife.

STORM

No! Stop!

Without thinking, Storm flings out her hands. A thin mist coalesces out of Dolph, streaming toward her hands. Only she can see it, but the other thugs know something isn't right. Dolph feels something too.

DOLPH

What are you doing?!

The mist swirls violently toward Storm, spinning up and down her arms.

STORM

I said leave her alone!

The knife descends. Storm screams and throws her hands forward. A blast of inky blackness surges out and takes Dolph in the chest, knocking him violently backward. When he skids to a stop, he is dead, looking dried up and emaciated.

The three thugs, now all on their feet, look at Storm in horror. They throw down their knives and run.

Pax rises unsteadily to her feet, retrieves her sword, and grabs Storm by the arm.

PAX

We're leaving. Now.

She turns and stumbles. Storm reaches out to steady her, and her hands come back slick with blood.



STORM  
You're hurt.

PAX  
No time. We have to go. Now!

They run out the door. A CURIOUS MAN stares after them.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

Storm puts another clean bandage on Pax's ribs. Pax winces, holding another bandage to the back of her head.

PAX  
You did it.

Storm doesn't look up from her task.

STORM  
Did what?

Pax reaches down to lift up Storm's face.

PAX  
You know exactly what.

STORM  
I killed him.

PAX  
Yes you did. And if you hadn't,  
I'd be dead and Dolph and his boys  
would be taking turns with you.

She starts to get up.

STORM  
You can't. Not yet anyway..

Pax sinks back down to the ground.

PAX  
Fine, but we have to get going  
soon. And we have to get off the  
trade road. Dolph's boys will have  
spread the word, and we'll have all  
sorts of unsavory types looking for  
us.

Storm sits back, holding herself.

PAX (CONT'D)

Now look. It'll take them awhile to get their bearings without Dolph. You bought us a little extra time, so I suggest we use it and get gone.

STORM

But what about you?

PAX

I'll be fine. I've had worse, now stop playing nursemaid and help me up.

Storm struggles to help Pax to her feet.

STORM

Good?

PAX

Good enough. Let's go. We have to be out of here before daybreak.

Storm starts toward the edge of town. Pax grabs her.

PAX (CONT'D)

Not that way.

STORM

But the gate is that way.

PAX

The trade road is that way. Remember the part about bad people looking for us?

STORM

Fine. Lead on.

They head off into the crowded back alleys of the city and disappear into the press of people.

INT. FREYA'S PLACE - NIGHT

Freya sits back in her chair, smoking her hookah. The back room is empty and she stares as if in thought.

The door opens, and a MESSENGER enters. The door closes and he stands there, waiting for permission.

FREYA

Come. You have news?

The messenger approaches her and whispers in her ear.  
 Freya's smile is pure evil.

FREYA (CONT'D)

She has successfully used her  
 power, has she? Knew she could.  
 Contact your man in Skalaholt. I  
 believe I'll require an Imperial  
 audience to discuss this new  
 development.

The messenger turns to go.

FREYA (CONT'D)

Wait. Send word to your contacts.  
 Do not lose track of her.

The messenger inclines his head and departs. Freya leans  
 back and takes another long pull of her hookah, looking very  
 satisfied.

EXT. TUNNELS - DAY

The upward slope is severe. Pax climbs hand over hand as  
 Storm struggles along below her. Faint light above them,  
 more natural-looking than the lights of the underground.

PAX

I see light! Real light!

She grabs for another hand hold and slips, sending a rock  
 down toward Storm.

PAX (CONT'D)

Look out!

Storm looks up as the rock plummets toward her...and misses!  
 She looks up.

PAX (CONT'D)

Sorry!

EXT. TUNNEL MOUTH - DAY

Storm and Pax emerge from the mouth of the tunnel. It lacks  
 a gate or any other markings. Storm looks confused.

STORM

I thought all the ways had gates  
 and guards.

PAX

Well, not this one. This is an old black market route. I'm actually surprised we didn't run into anyone else I know.

STORM

Been through here before?

PAX

Maybe, maybe not. What's it to you?

STORM

I just want to understand you.

PAX

What's there to understand? I run errands for Freya and bring her things of value. She pays me and doesn't ask questions. Mutual benefit.

STORM

Clearly. Are you starting to see me as a person now or a still just thing of value?

PAX

Ouch.

STORM

The more I think of it the angrier I get. You came to my home - which was destroyed - to pick through the rubble for things that belong to my people. And that witch Freya is the one who sent you.

(angrier)

Then she offers to help me find my people? What? Out of the goodness of her grandmotherly heart? I might be naïve and clueless about the world, but even I can see through that.

(angrier)

Saving me wasn't an act of kindness, it was greed. She's after something. Tell me I'm wrong, or do you not get paid if you say anything.

Pax looks like she's been slapped. She fumbles over to a small boulder and sits down, hanging her head.

PAX  
(whispering)  
You're right.

Storm walks right up to her, ready for a fight.

STORM  
What did you say?

Pax looks up at Storm. Her eyes are filled with tears.

PAX  
I said you're right. I had no  
right to loot your home. I had no  
right to drag you into the  
underground. And I had no right to  
let Freya get her hooks in you.

She stands up and wipes her face.

STORM  
No. No you didn't. But I still  
need help. I still need to find my  
people. You have to help me.

PAX  
Yes. Yes I do. I'll help you find  
them. And I'm never going back to  
Freya again.

STORM  
But what about those Enforcers?

She sets off down the rocky defile, not looking back.

PAX  
That's my problem.

INT. IMPERIAL PALACE - STEYR'S CHAMBER - NIGHT

Steyr sits in his study, nursing a glass of dark red wine. His legs are up on the massive desk, head thrown back and savoring the taste.

A faint click, and a hidden panel slides open. Dante Kane emerges from a secret passage. Steyr eyes him thoughtfully.

STEYR  
Making good use of the secret ways,  
I see. I hope you're not thinking  
of anything...untoward toward your  
emperor.

Dante's face remains impassive. He steps in front of the desk and comes to attention.

DANTE

I have used the secret ways for years when I thought it best to reach the emperor in discretion. I see no reason to abandon that method.

STEYR

Quite so. Just ensure that your reasons for doing so remain...how should I say...free from stray thoughts.

Dante's face twitches faintly in annoyance, but Steyr doesn't notice.

STEYR (CONT'D)

I've received a message from one of our more unsavory sources in the underground.

Steyr reaches for the wine decanter.

STEYR (CONT'D)

Wine?

DANTE

No, thank you. What message?

Steyr makes a "your loss" face and pours himself another glass.

STEYR

It seems that your troops missed a spot in Danavald.

DANTE

What do you mean?

STEYR

A girl. Vellir girl, to be specific. She turned up in the underground and has the most amazing ability, though no idea how to use it at present. What concerns me more is the carelessness of your men in letting such a valuable...asset escape.

DANTE

I will see to their punishment  
myself, excellency.

Steyr waves a hand.

STEYR

No need. I had the whole squad  
executed an hour ago.

Dante jumps to his feet, incensed.

DANTE

You what?! Those are my men! I am  
their commander. By what right --

Steyr now leaps to his feet.

STEYR

The right that I am their emperor!  
Their lives are mine to spend, just  
as their failures are yours to  
atone for. Now tell me, general,  
just exactly what you would have me  
do with the commander of such a  
gaggle of incompetents!

Dante's hand has crept within a finger's width of his sword.  
Steyr looks at his hand and smiles.

STEYR (CONT'D)

Is it your wish to strike me down?  
Go on, I'm unarmed, but know that  
if you raise a hand against me, you  
won't even make it to the door  
before you are struck down in turn.

The gems on Steyr's armor wink to life, bathing him in a warm  
glow. Dante drops his hand and stares.

STEYR (CONT'D)

You like them? I had them made for  
just such an...outburst. Auracite  
whose Aether can be commanded by  
one not of Vellir blood. A grand  
achievement, if I do say so myself.

DANTE

But I thought nothing of value was  
brought back from Danavald.

STEYR

I commissioned a special platoon to  
search for the material.

(MORE)

STEYR (CONT'D)

Some of your finest. Their efforts bore fruit. Of course, I had to have them executed as well once their work was complete.

Dante tightens his hands into fists, but remains motionless.

STEYR (CONT'D)

How else do you propose I rule? I can't have an entire race of people able to oppose me. I can't have the whole of the Imperial force knowing these secrets. That knowledge rests with me...and a special cadre of researchers whom I trust implicitly.

Steyr sits back down and takes a sip of his wine.

STEYR (CONT'D)

Your sense of honor is commendable, but I have another task for you. One that you will rather not enjoy given your...forgiveable outburst. Proceed at once to Gunnarsholt. I'm told a certain lost Vellir girl will be making her way there. She's traveling with a scavenger; another oversight of your men from Danavald.

DANTE

And what am I to do with them?

STEYR

Bring the Vellir girl to me.

DANTE

And the other.

STEYR

My source in the underground has a particular interest in getting her back, but wasn't especially particular on whether it's dead or alive. I'll leave it to you.

Another sip of wine.

STEYR (CONT'D)

Now go, unless you have more misgivings you'd like to share with me.



Dante drops to one knee and bows his head.

DANTE  
No, excellency. It will be done.

Dante rises, turns on a heel, and departs by the main door. Steyr just stares after him over yet another sip of wine.

EXT. GUNNARSHOLT MAIN STREET - DAY

Nestled in a valley at the foot of the mountains, Gunnarsholt is a town in name only. From above, it looks like half a dozen nomad camps set up shop next to each other. A grand river snakes around the town, and then away to the horizon.

Descending from the foothills into the town, Storm and Pax look dirty and road-weary.

STORM  
How are we supposed to find anyone here?

PAX  
For now, we're not. I need a bath. Incidentally...  
(sniffing Storm)  
...so do you.

Storm just stares at her. Pax counts off on her fingers.

PAX (CONT'D)  
Bath. Food. Look around. Deal?

STORM  
Deal.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE ROOM - DAY

Pax sinks into the steaming water with a sigh of contentment. On the other side of the privacy screen, Storm sits looking out the second story window at the mountains beyond.

STORM  
Never in my life did I think the world was so big.

PAX  
Are you starting to remember more?

Storm sits with eyes closed as the memories fly by.

BEGIN FLASHBACK SEQUENCE

- The shining spire of Danavald over a courtyard full of Danavellir drilling in the use of Aether.
- Holding her mother's hand walking down beautiful streets and passing smiling people.
- The main gate of the city. Her mother pointing, her words muffled, but clearly a warning.
- Her mother's smiling face as she reads a bedtime story.
- Airships hanging in the sky. People running in terror. Then explosions and blackness.

END FLASHBACK SEQUENCE

STORM

Just pieces, but it's coming back.  
I can see my mother. I see the  
city as it once was. Then the  
airships, then nothing.

PAX

Not much, but it's better than what  
you had, right?

STORM

Yes. But I don't know what's  
worse: not knowing at all, or  
knowing I should know much more.

On the other side of the screen, Pax stares silently into the distance, listening.

STORM (CONT'D)

Pax?

It doesn't register. Storm gets up and peeks around the privacy screen.

STORM (CONT'D)

Hey. You ok?

Pax gives her a bitter smile.

STORM (CONT'D)

What?

PAX

I was just thinking about what you  
said. Whether it's better to not  
know anything or know enough to  
realize you've lost so much.

STORM

If I didn't know better, I'd say  
you weren't talking about me.

Pax just stares wistfully into the distance.

STORM (CONT'D)

Tell me.

Pax takes a shuddering breath.

PAX

Not much to tell, I'm afraid. I  
ran away from home when I was  
twelve. Dad was an abusive drunk.  
Mom was too weak to do anything, so  
she blamed me.

INT. PAX'S HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

A darkened kitchen. YOUNG PAX, 12, huddles in the corner as  
her FATHER raves at her MOTHER.

PAX (V.O.)

My father would spend money on  
drink and women. My mother knew  
better than to say anything, but  
she did anyway. The end result was  
always the same.

Pax's father pushes her mother into the wall. A picture  
falls and shatters on the floor next to her. Her father  
looms over her, screaming and striking her.

PAX (V.O.)

I lost count of how many times I  
had to relive this scene. But one  
night was different.

Pax's mother reaches over and picks up a shard of glass.  
Stabs her father in the leg. He recoils, holding the wound.  
Her mother rises slowly to her feet, holding the bloody glass  
in a bloody hand.

PAX (V.O.)

I suppose it was only a matter of  
time. I was so scared.

Pax's father stands straight, his face a mask of rage. He  
advances on her mother, slapping the bloody glass out of her  
hand.

PAX (V.O.)  
All I could do was watch. I was  
paralyzed.

Pax's father strikes her mother. She falls, throwing her hands up to defend herself. The fists fall again and again. Then she lay still, eyes open, blood streaming from her nose and mouth. She is dead. Pax gets up and runs from the room. Her father turns and walks after her, hands bloody.

INT. PAX'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Pax runs into her bedroom and pushes the door shut.

PAX (V.O.)  
Everything slowed way down. I  
don't know why I thought there was  
anywhere to go.

Pax's father pushes against the door. It doesn't budge. A kick, and it flies open. His eyes are glazed over, drunk and in a blind rage. He advances on Pax, who backs slowly away.

PAX (V.O.)  
But there was something he didn't  
know.

STORM (V.O.)  
What?

PAX (V.O.)  
I was done being scared.

Pax's hand raises, pointing a weapon at her father.

PAX (V.O.)  
Done being helpless.

Her father rushes forward to overwhelm her.

PAX (V.O.)  
Done being a victim like my mother.

The weapon flashes, the muzzle smoking. Her father stops and stares at her. Then looks down at the smoking hole in his chest. The weapon flashes again and again. More holes. Pax's father falls to his knees, then onto his face. Dead.

PAX (V.O.)  
It happened so fast, but as I think  
back, I think I had more control  
over that moment than any other I  
can remember.

Pax stands over the body of her father. The weapon flashes twice more. She walks out.

INT. PAX'S HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Pax reaches down and closes her mother's eyes. She stands, hefting a bag over her shoulder, and walks out.

PAX (V.O.)  
Then I left and never looked back.

EXT. DARK ALLEY - NIGHT

Pax rummages through garbage cans, pulling out scraps of food to eat. She is dirty, but has a look of determination. A GANG OF MEN notice her and begin to close in.

PAX (V.O.)  
I was never afraid of anyone ever again. I had no home and no money, but I had my dignity. I was free.

Pax stands, chewing her garbage food, and stares at the gang defiantly. She draws back her jacket and shows the weapon. They back off.

PAX (V.O.)  
I did what I had to do to survive, and then I made a friend.

The gang leaves the alley, and an OLDER MAN comes up to her, hands raised. He beckons her to follow, and she does.

INT. THE ANGEL'S FEATHER - NIGHT

Pax and the older man enter the casino and head to the back room. She meets Freya for the first time, taken in by the grandmotherly smile.

PAX (V.O.)  
And that's how I came to know Freya and the only free life I ever knew. Couldn't have known then, but I was trading one form of slavery for another. The kind that made you feel free, but you knew that you weren't.

END FLASHBACK

Pax looks up at Storm.

PAX

And now I find myself back at the start, only I'm the friend and you're the lost one.

She smiles.

PAX (CONT'D)

And you still stink. Your turn.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE ROOM - DAY

Storm sinks into the tub. On the other side of the privacy screen, Pax is now fully dressed. She straps on her sword.

PAX

I'm going to go check the place out. Are you ok by yourself for a little bit?

Storm's eyes are closed, but she responds.

STORM

I'm great.

Pax smiles.

PAX

Alright. I'll be back in half an hour. I just need to take a look around and see if there are any leads on your people. Might be safer than dragging you around with me. People tend to ask a lot of questions and I'd rather not attract any attention just yet.

STORM

Alright.

Pax turns to leave.

STORM (CONT'D)

Pax.

PAX

Yeah?

STORM

Thank you. For everything.

Pax smiles, turns, and leaves.

EXT. GUNNARSHOLT - MARKET - DAY

Pax walks around the market, eyes taking in the commotion. She lingers to catch pieces of conversations, drawing "mind your own business" looks from a few hard-looking folks.

Across the marketplace, a lone man watches her with interest. He is REN, 30s, native-American features. He sits at a small table idly eating. Sees Pax slinking around and follows her with his eyes, taking note of the peculiar sword she wears.

Pax continues to wander, idly poking her head into shops and stands. She takes a step backward and bumps into someone.

PAX  
Hey! Watch where--

Ren, standing well over six feet tall, stares down at her. He has a long, hide-covered item strapped to his back.

PAX (CONT'D)  
(looking up)  
--you're going. I know you,  
friend?

She tries to move around him. He catches her arm and leads her away.

PAX (CONT'D)  
Hey! What's your problem.

REN  
Come with me.

PAX  
Like hell I will!

Ren spins her around to face him.

REN  
You don't belong here. What are  
you after?

PAX  
And why should that concern you?  
I'm minding my own business, which  
is none of yours.

REN  
I asked you a question.

He squeezes her arm.

PAX  
You're hurting me. Do I need to  
scream?

REN  
Not much good it would do you, but  
be my guest.

Pax tries to shake herself loose.

PAX  
Fine. You win. Mind letting me  
go?

Ren lets go slowly.

REN  
Don't run. I just want to talk.

PAX  
Fine, but I'm thirsty. You're  
buying.

She heads toward a tavern at a slow walk. Turns around.

PAX (CONT'D)  
Coming?

Ren huffs in exasperation, then follows her in.

INT. GUNNARSHOLT - TAVERN - DAY

Ren and Pax sit at a wooden table, two mugs in front of them. Pax takes a long pull, the liquid running out the corners of her mouth.

PAX  
Ok. It's your dime. Now who the  
hell are you and why are you  
bothering me?

REN  
Ren Faren. I am one with this  
land, and I wander. When something  
doesn't belong to this land, I  
notice.  
(a beat)  
I noticed you.

PAX  
What did you notice?



REN

You have a wrongness about you.  
Violence and pain. Who are you?

Pax looks nervous. She takes another long, messy pull of her drink.

PAX

(angry)  
Why the hell should I tell you  
anything? You don't know a damn  
thing!

REN

Don't I? Why are you so angry?

Another drink. The mug is empty. Pax holds it up and gets the attention of the BARMAN, who nods.

PAX

Why are you so nosy?

REN

I told you. I am one with the  
land, and when the land rejects  
something...  
(leans closer)  
...I notice.

The new drink arrives. Pax reaches for it. Ren catches her hand.

REN (CONT'D)

That will not help.

PAX

You clearly underestimate the power  
of a strong drink.

Ren does not let go. Pax holds his stare. He gently lets go of her arm and she proceeds to gulp more of her drink.

REN

I'm waiting.

Pax slams the mug down.

PAX

Fine!

Some of the tavern patrons turn to look.

PAX (CONT'D)

I'm helping someone find her people. We came here because we were told it's the best place to look for refugees or other lost souls.

REN

True, it is. But--

PAX

But what?

REN

I have seen a great many. Fleeing to the north. I believe them to be Vellir, but that can't be.

PAX

Why not?

REN

The Vellir are a powerful people. I wonder, if it's true, why they would be fleeing, and what from.

Pax sits bolt upright.

PAX

Yes!

More stares from the crowd

REN

Keep your voice down.

PAX

(quietly)

The girl I'm with is Vellir. Her home was destroyed by the Empire and I'm helping her find her people. Her memory is spotty, and--

Pax clamps her mouth shut, having said too much. Ren smiles and finishes her sentence.

REN

She has strange abilities?  
Something like that?

PAX

How in the hell...?

REN

I told you. I am one with the land. The Aether is known to me, as are those who are one with it.

PAX

Do you know where those Vellir were going?

REN

I know of only one place they would go. Reykjavald.

Pax jumps to her feet.

REN (CONT'D)

Where are you going?

PAX

I need to go tell her!

REN

You need to be calm. If Vellir are fleeing, it must be from something terrible. They are very powerful.

PAX

Then I need to hurry.

Ren rises slowly.

PAX (CONT'D)

What's this?

REN

I will help you help your friend. If your goal is to unite her with her people, you will need help.

Ren adjusts the long, covered item strapped to his back.

PAX

What's that, anyway?

REN

Something for later.

Pax shrugs, then rushes for the door. Ren follows slowly behind her, shaking his head.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE ROOM - DAY

The door bursts open and Pax flies into the room, beaming from ear to ear.

PAX

Storm! I've got great news!

She stops in her tracks. The room is trashed, the floor soaked. There is no sign of Storm. Pax rushes about the room, frantic.

PAX (CONT'D)

Storm?! Storm!

Behind her, a figure melts out of the shadows. An ASSASSIN, dressed head to toe in black, curved knife in hand, creeps toward her.

BANG!

Pax whirls around, sees the assassin hit the floor, a smoking hole in his back.

Ren walks through the door carrying a smoking rifle. The package from his back.

REN

Assassin. Left behind to wait for you to show your foolishness.

Pax sits heavily in a chair, staring blankly.

Ren kneels down and pulls up the back of the assassin's hood. A deep black tattoo of a rising sun shows on his neck.

REN (CONT'D)

Oh no.

PAX

Oh no what?

Ren points to the tattoo. Pax's face pales.

REN

It seems you have attracted the worst sort of attention.

A scream from outside rips the silence. Pax and Ren rush to the window.

EXT. GUNNARSHOLT - STREETS - DAY

Storm struggles and screams as she is manhandled down the street. She sees Pax's face in the window of the boarding house.

STORM

Pax! Help me!

Her captors shove the hood back down over her face and haul her to the edge of town, where a hulking transport craft is waiting, engines humming.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - DAY

Pax and Ren burst out the front door, weapons out. They run toward the sound of Storm's screams, which are fading into the distance.

They only get a few steps before the sound of the transport's engines roaring to life rip the air apart, sending dirt and debris flying.

Ren raises his rifle, peering through the scope.

REN

Empire.

PAX

No!

Pax falls to her knees screaming as the transport sails away to the east.

INT. CELL - NIGHT

Storm awakens in darkness. Dim light from the moon peeks through the lone window and reveals her cell.

Keys clink, and the door opens. A GUARD, dressed in ornate armor enters.

GUARD

On your feet.

STORM

Where are you taking me?

GUARD

To see the emperor, of course. Now let's go.

She gets up slowly and follows the guard. Another GUARD in similar armor falls in behind them.

INT. IMPERIAL THRONE ROOM - NIGHT

Steyr sits on his throne with a predatory grin. The far door to the chamber opens, admitting the guards and Storm. He leans forward, anxious.

STEYR  
 (to the guards)  
 You may go.  
 (to Storm)  
 Come closer, my dear.

Storm takes a wary step forward and stops.

STEYR (CONT'D)  
 I said closer.

The HONOR GUARDS positioned around the chamber make a move forward, gleaming in even more ornate armor and raising gleaming rifles. Steyr raises a hand to stop them.

STEYR (CONT'D)  
 Unless you would prefer to be  
 dragged before me?

Storm walks toward him. The guards retreat to their stations.

STEYR (CONT'D)  
 Better.

EXT. IMPERIAL PALACE - FOUNDATION - NIGHT

Pax and Ren fetch up against the lower foundation of the imperial palace. They look dirty and exhausted.

PAX  
 Well this is a fine mess. I don't  
 know what's worse, trying to break  
 into this place - where we'll face  
 certain death - or how you smell  
 after three days on the road.

Ren gives her a sour glance and says nothing.

PAX (CONT'D)  
 Well, this was your idea, so let's  
 hear the plan.

REN  
We need to find away in.

Pax throws her hands up and starts dancing around.

PAX  
Gods above! Simply brilliant!  
Imagine my luck at falling in with  
a military genius!

REN  
You are mocking me.

PAX  
(sarcastic)  
Of course I'm not, you big lug! We  
sneak into Kvia, into Skalaholt  
itself - which were a pleasant  
three days, I might add - and all  
we have to do is...  
(finger quotes)  
...find a way in?

REN  
You are mocking me.

Pax lowers her voice to mimic him.

PAX  
Yes, I am mocking you.

Ren begins making his way along the foundation.

PAX (CONT'D)  
Where are you going?

REN  
Finding a way in.

PAX  
Great! Perfect! Let me know when  
you--

REN  
Found it.

PAX  
--find it.

Pax catches up to Ren, who is straining against a huge metal grate. A trickle of water drips from the bottom. A drainage tunnel.

REN  
Will this do?

PAX  
I guess we'll see.

INT. IMPERIAL THRONE ROOM - NIGHT

Steyr paces around a stock-still Storm, who follows him furtively with her eyes.

STEYR  
Amazing! A real Vellir, in the flesh. Tell me about where you grew up. Danavald, is it? Or should I say "was?"

Storm's eyes flash, but she remains silent.

STEYR (CONT'D)  
Touch a nerve? Well aside from the unpleasantness of razing your city to the ground, I think there is a great deal I'm going to learn from you.

He pauses in front of her and grabs her chin.

STEYR (CONT'D)  
A great deal, indeed. I just wanted to get a good look at you. And to see if you would try and strike me down with your power. I hear it's been just a bit beyond your reach of late.

Steyr resumes his pacing around her.

STEYR (CONT'D)  
I offered to have your people help with my research. A deal they unfortunately refused. But imagine my surprise when you turned up, alive and well! I think we are going to have a lot of fun together, don't you?

Storm meets his eyes now, starting murder.

STORM  
You are a monster! I will never help you do anything. And I--



STEYR

What? You're going to burn me to ashes? Something like that? My dear, if you could have, you would have. No. Instead, I think my researchers are going to bind you, prod you, and pick at you to learn every little bit they can. And I hear some of their methods can be a touch unpleasant. No, my dear. I think after a short while, you'll be begging to help me.

Storm lunges for him, but is grabbed from behind by Dante Kane, who has walked up silently behind her.

STEYR (CONT'D)

(to Dante)

Take her back to her cell. We begin in the morning.

(to Storm)

Sleep well, my dear.

Dante leads her by the arm back to the throne room door. Steyr laughs to himself as they depart.

INT. IMPERIAL PALACE - DUNGEON LEVEL - NIGHT

Pax and Ren quietly replace the panel in the wall. They both sink back, out of breath.

PAX

Thanks for that.

REN

What?

PAX

Making yourself smell even worse.

The dim light of the corridor reveals a wall of cell doors made of gleaming metal. Elaborate locks adorn the doors, looking technologically advanced.

REN

You check along the right wall.  
I'll check the left.

They spread out and begin looking into cells. No luck. Then they hear the sound of crying. They rush forward.

Through the small cell window, Storm is crying into her hands.

PAX  
 (whispering)  
 Storm!

No movement. The sobs are getting louder. Pax raises her voice slightly.

PAX (CONT'D)  
 Storm.

She lifts her head, recognition flooding back. Pax can see her getting ready to shout.

PAX (CONT'D)  
 (quietly)  
 Hey...keep it down!

Storm is on her feet, smiling. Here it comes.

PAX (CONT'D)  
 Oh no.

STORM  
 Pax!

PAX  
 And there it is.

Pax turns to Ren.

PAX (CONT'D)  
 (cheery)  
 Look! She's excited. And now  
 we're bound to have company.

Ren pushes past Pax and scouts down the hallways. Pax remains and takes a look at the lock.

STORM  
 Who was that?

PAX  
 Someone I met while you were  
 getting kidnapped. He's a friend.

Pax starts feeling around the door with her hands.

PAX (CONT'D)  
 (to herself)  
 Where's the keyhole? Since when  
 did they start making doors without  
 keyholes.

Storm's smiling face appears in the window. Pax looks up at the beaming smile and rolls her eyes.

PAX (CONT'D)

Since we have about thirty seconds before the guards come to check why you were yelling, I don't suppose you could tell me how they open the door?

STORM

Sure. They use that fancy armor of theirs. Wave their hand and the door opens.

Pax just looks at Storm's smiling face.

PAX

Oh. Well then it's good we've got about a dozen of them on the way.

Pax looks down the hall to Ren.

PAX (CONT'D)

Anything?

STORM

(chiding)

They're not going to send a dozen.

Ren peeks around the corner and holds up one finger.

STORM (CONT'D)

How many?

PAX

A dozen.

Storm's face goes pale and she backs away from the window.

INT. IMPERIAL PALACE - DUNGEON HALL - CONTINUOUS

Ren creeps down the hallway, keeping to the shadows. He hears the scratch of a radio, and muffled voices. A LONE GUARD comes around the corner, sees Ren, and freezes.

Ren springs into action. The guard tries to turn and run, but Ren catches him around the neck. They struggle for a moment and Ren smashes his head against the wall. The guard struggles once more, and once more his head goes against the wall. He folds, and Ren eases him to the ground. Ren waits, listens, then grabs the guard and hauls him away.

INT. IMPERIAL PALACE - DUNGEON LEVEL - CONTINUOUS

Pax is still fiddling with the door when Ren comes around the corner, carrying an armored guard.

Storm presses her face to the cell window.

STORM

I thought you said a dozen.

Pax flashes her a wicked smile.

Ren drops the guard at the foot of the door.

REN

He was communicating with others.  
We don't have long before he's  
missed.

Pax looks to Storm.

PAX

Now what?

STORM

I'm not sure. I saw him wave his  
hand at the door and it opened.

Pax reaches down and picks up the unconscious guard's hand.  
She waves it in front of the door. Nothing happens.

STORM (CONT'D)

Try the other one.

Pax complies. Still nothing.

Ren looks at the guard's armor thoughtfully.

REN

Perhaps it's not the hands.

Pax ignores him and tries the other hand again. Nothing.

PAX

Are you sure he...  
(gesturing)  
...waved his hand?

STORM

I thought so. My view is a bit  
limited.

REN

We don't have time for this.

Ren reaches down and stands the guard up.

REN (CONT'D)  
If he was standing--

The door beeps softly. A click, and it opens outward an inch. He smiles.

PAX  
Oh don't look so smug.

Storm pushes the door open and throws herself into Pax's arms.

PAX (CONT'D)  
Ok, ok. We've got you. Now let's get the hell out of here.

STORM  
How?

PAX  
Same way we got in.

The guard's armor crackles to life. They hear a faint voice in the helmet like a radio transmission.

REN  
Time's up. We move. Start getting that panel open. I'll keep watch.

Pax drags storm back down the hallway toward the spot where they entered. She feels around the wall.

PAX  
Where was it?

Far in the distance, they hear the clank of many armored guards. Faint voices yelling back and forth.

REN  
(pointing)  
Top corners. Pull down and away.

A shining blast of energy explodes against the wall just above Ren's head.

PAX  
Ren!

Ren shoulders his massive rifle and unleashes a volley down the unseen hallway.

REN

Now!

Storm just stares, rage building in her eyes. She sees another blast of energy zip by Ren and explode into sparks on the wall behind him. Pax yanks furiously on the panel. Storm begins to walk slowly toward Ren.

PAX

What the hell are you doing?!

She pulls harder, the panel opens barely a crack.

Down the hall, Ren fires over and over, trading fire with unseen guards down the far hall. He glances up at Storm's approach.

REN

Go! I'll hold them off! There's nothing--

A blast clips Ren's shoulder. He falls over gasping, the wound smoking. His rifle clatters to the floor.

Unafraid, Storm walks around the corner, her eyes smoldering.

INT. IMPERIAL PALACE - DUNGEON HALL - CONTINUOUS

The GUARDS let up their fire. They see the invader fall over wounded. Coming out of their defensive stance, they begin to advance.

The GUARD CAPTAIN suddenly signals a halt.

Storm walks around the corner, stepping over Ren.

GUARD CAPTAIN

Hold fire. Take her alive. The emperor needs her.

Storm advances.

GUARD CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

Stop! Face away and drop to your knees.

Storm advances further.

GUARD CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

I said stop!

The other guards raise their weapons.

GUARD  
Captain?

GUARD CAPTAIN  
Hold your fire!

Storm stops within a few steps of them.

GUARD CAPTAIN (CONT'D)  
I said face away and drop to your  
knees.

Storm raises her hands, drawing Aether from the Auracite in  
the weapons themselves.

GUARD CAPTAIN (CONT'D)  
What are you doing?

In Storm's eyes, the mist swirls and churns. She takes a  
step forward.

Behind her, Pax emerges at the end of the hall.

PAX  
Storm!!

Behind the guards, Steyr and Dante Kane emerge around a  
corner.

Storm sees them as she unleashes a blast of blinding energy  
at the guards. The Aether hits and explodes furiously,  
throwing guards in all directions.

At the end of the hall, Dante starts to step in front of  
Steyr to protect him.

STEYR  
Do not let her escape!

Storm steps forward again, collecting more Aether from the  
fallen guards' weapons. She sets her eyes on Steyr.

Steyr steps forward, unafraid, the stones on his armor  
winking to life.

Storm extends her hand toward Steyr. The Aether builds and  
writhes around her. She unleashes it. It streaks down the  
hall toward Steyr and Dante. It breaks like a wave mere  
inches before reaching them. Steyr flashes an evil grin.  
Dante is dumbfounded.

Pax runs up behind Storm and grabs her arm.

PAX  
We need to go! Now!

Storm glances up at Pax's sword. The sword glows faintly. Before Pax can stop her, Storm reaches up and grabs the sword, drawing it forth and twisting back toward Steyr and Dante. The sword flares to life in her hand.

PAX (CONT'D)  
What?!

Dante regains his feet as more guards pour into the hallway behind him. He draws his own weapon.

DANTE  
Take her alive!

Advancing with the sword, Storm can feel the pulse of Aether all around her.

Dante advances, weapon at the ready, the guards close behind.

Storm takes another step. The sword begins to glow brightly.

Dante and the guards surge forward, trying to overwhelm her.

STORM  
No!

She swings the sword. Dante's sword rises to parry. They meet, and the world explodes in blinding light. Dante and the guards are thrown violently backward, landing in a heap at Steyr's feet. Dante's sword is shattered. Steyr just stares.

Storm turns and sprints back down the hall and disappears around the corner.

INT. IMPERIAL PALACE - DUNGEON LEVEL - CONTINUOUS

Pax is helping Ren back into the hidden tunnel. Storm comes sprinting down the hall, sword in hand.

PAX  
Come on!

Storm tosses the sword to Pax, who sheathes it in one fluid motion, then dives into the tunnel. Pax follows, pulling the panel closed behind her.



INT. IMPERIAL PALACE - DUNGEON HALL - NIGHT

Dante stirs, regaining consciousness. He looks at the shattered sword in his hand. Standing, he sees the hallway stacked with fallen guards.

He turns, and Steyr is still standing there, a look of hatred on his face.

STEYR

Find her.

INT. RAMSHACKLE HOUSE - NIGHT

FINNEAS, 30s, sits at his table reading by the faint glow of a small lamp.

He turns a page, chuckling, when he hears the sound of commotion outside. Then a loud thump against the door. He extinguishes the lamp and moves to the door.

A beat. Nothing.

PAX

(whispering)

Finneas! Open up!

Finneas recoils, he doesn't believe what he's hearing.

FINNEAS

Who's there?

PAX

It Pax, Finneas. Now open up!

Finneas hesitates, then opens the door.

Pax and Storm nearly fall into the doorway, holding a wounded Ren between them.

FINNEAS

Pax! What the hell is this?!

They clear the doorway and Finneas takes a quick look outside, then shuts the door. He turns on the faint lamp again as his three unexpected guests sit in a heap, panting.

PAX

Long story. Short version is...

(pointing to Storm)

...she got kidnapped, we broke in,  
we got her, we're here. Satisfied?

FINNEAS  
Not in the least. Broke in where?

PAX  
Imperial palace.

Finneas sits down hard, dumbfounded.

FINNEAS  
You what?!

PAX  
I said it was a long story. We  
need to hide until tomorrow night,  
then we're gone. I'm calling in a  
favor, Finneas. Can I count on  
you?

Finneas stares away in thought.

FINNEAS  
Of course. I owe you.

Storm gets Ren leaned up against a wall, then joins them.

PAX  
Finneas, this is Storm. Storm,  
Finneas.

STORM  
Nice to meet you.

FINNEAS  
Charmed, I'm sure.

He turns to Pax.

FINNEAS (CONT'D)  
This makes us even. Freya called  
that marker satisfied years ago,  
but I suppose I still owe you.

Storm looks uneasily at Pax.

STORM  
How does he know Freya?

PAX  
Did a job together. Didn't work  
out too well for Finneas.

STORM  
What do you mean?

PAX

That's another long story.

Finneas gets up and brings back some food and water.

FINNEAS

You must be hungry. You can tell me your story while you eat, and I'll take a look at your friend.

INT. RAMSHACKLE HOUSE - LATER

Finneas helps Ren drink some water. There is a fresh bandage on his shoulder, and he looks better.

PAX

So that's pretty much it. We need to get her away from Skalaholt as soon as possible.

FINNEAS

But how do you expect to find...what was the name?

REN

Reykjavald.

FINNEAS

That's just a myth.

REN

It's no myth. I have seen it. Far to the north.

STORM

Wait, you're saying that you know where my people are?

REN

I don't know about your people, but I know of another great Vellir city far to the north. That's the only place they would go.

Storm looks dumbstruck. She looks at Pax.

STORM

Did you know?

PAX

Not until right before you were taken.

(MORE)

PAX (CONT'D)

We were on our way to tell you when we found the room tossed and you gone.

Pax gives her a hard stare.

PAX (CONT'D)

What I really want to know is what you did with my sword. What was that?

STORM

I just reacted. Somehow I knew what to do. I don't know why.

REN

I do.

They all turn to stare at Ren.

REN (CONT'D)

The Vellir made all sorts of things to connect them with the Aether, including weapons. That sword is called an Aurablade. In your hands, it's just a sword. But in the hands of a Vellir, it is a mighty weapon indeed.

Storm sits down heavily.

STORM

He's right, I think. I felt it. It was amazing. After I blasted those guards, it was like the sword called to me. I think...it was helping me defend myself.

FINNEAS

What do you mean you blasted guards?! Gods above, Pax! What have you gotten me into?

Pax walked to Finneas and puts a hand on his shoulder.

PAX

Like I said, it's a long story. If you can hide us here until tomorrow night, we'll be gone. Can I count on you?

FINNEAS

Yes, of course. I don't have much,  
but I'll bring you some blankets.  
You can sleep in here.

PAX

Thank you, Finneas. We're square.

Finneas leaves the room and comes back a moment later with a stack of blankets.

FINNEAS

Sleep well.  
(to Storm)  
I hope you find what you're looking  
for.

He retreats to his room and the door shuts.

PAX

Let's get some sleep.

They all settle in. Pax extinguishes the lamp.

INT. RAMSHACKLE HOUSE - DAY

Storm opens her eyes. The morning sun shines through cracks in the closed shutters. Finneas sits at the table, looking intently at her.

STORM

Good morning.

Finneas doesn't say anything. He looks torn.

STORM (CONT'D)

Is everything alright?

Finneas takes a ragged breath and meets her eyes.

FINNEAS

I'm so sorry.

The door bursts in. Storm whirls around. FIVE FIGURES in all black stream through the door. They grab Storm, who screams.

Pax and Ren are jolted awake. Pax reaches for her sword, and Ren for his rifle.

DANTE (O.S.)

Stop!

Dante Kane saunters through the door, surveying the scene. His men hold wicked-looking blades to Ren's and Pax's throats.

Storm glares at him and begins to raise her hands. Thump! Finneas hits her from behind and she falls to the floor, unconscious.

Dante walks in and tosses a clinking bag to Finneas. Pax looks on in horror as she sees the Ebony Sun tattooed on the inside of Finneas's wrist.

DANTE (CONT'D)

The Empire thanks you for your service.

Finneas looks at Pax and shrugs.

FINNEAS

Some debts follow you.

Pax stares at him in hatred. Finneas just stares at her.

DANTE

Take the girl.

The LEAD ASSASSIN presses his sword up under Pax's chin.

LEAD ASSASSIN

What about them?

DANTE

Doesn't your employer have a bounty out on her?

LEAD ASSASSIN

She does.

DANTE

She comes with us...for now.

LEAD ASSASSIN

We had a deal. We take her to Freya for the bounty.

The assassin makes the slightest move toward Dante. Dante raises his weapon so fast that the assassin jumps.

DANTE

That decision lies with the Emperor.

LEAD ASSASSIN

But what about our deal?

DANTE

The deal has changed. If I were you, I would hope it does not change any further.

The assassin backs down. He points to Ren with his sword.

LEAD ASSASSIN

What about him.

DANTE

He will be executed as an outlaw for the killing of Imperial soldiers.

The assassins carry Storm out, followed by Dante.

PAX

No!

LEAD ASSASSIN

Oh yes. They got what they wanted, and so did we. By the way, Freya is looking forward to seeing you again. Some debts follow you.

INT. IMPERIAL PALACE - STORM'S CELL - NIGHT

Storm stirs awake, feeling the back of her head. Her hand comes away bloody. She pushes unsteadily to her feet and looks around. Her shoulders slump as she realizes where she is.

A face blocks the light coming through the window in the cell door. It's Dante Kane.

DANTE

I want you to know I take no pleasure in this.

STORM

Why should I care how you feel?

Dante hesitates a moment.

DANTE

I suppose you shouldn't. I...just wanted you to know.

He leaves. Storm stares after him, confused. A thought strikes her. She rushes to the window.

STORM

Wait!

INT. IMPERIAL PALACE - DUNGEON LEVEL - CONTINUOUS

Dante hears Storm call for him and stops, half-turning his head back.

INT. IMPERIAL PALACE - STORM'S CELL - CONTINUOUS

Storm sees Dante stop and turn his head.

STORM

Why are you doing this? What did I ever do to you or your Empire?

INT. IMPERIAL PALACE - DUNGEON LEVEL - CONTINUOUS

DANTE

You were born Vellir. That makes you a threat.

INT. IMPERIAL PALACE - STORM'S CELL - CONTINUOUS

STORM

To who? I don't even grasp a fraction of what all this means.

INT. IMPERIAL PALACE - DUNGEON LEVEL - CONTINUOUS

Dante turns and walk back toward Storm's cell.

DANTE

You must realize by now what is happening. The Empire conquers. It will suffer no competition.  
(quietly)  
Not from anyone.

INT. IMPERIAL PALACE - STORM'S CELL - CONTINUOUS

Storm sees how his expression changes.

STORM

How is it that you entered his service? You don't strike me as a heartless murderer.



Dante springs forward so fast that she flinches back a step. His face once again fills the window.

DANTE

How dare you name me murderer.  
What I have done, continue to do,  
goes against every tenet of honor I  
possess.

STORM

Then why?

DANTE

We are all prisoners after a  
fashion. You just happen to be the  
one on that side of the door.

Dante turns to leave.

STORM

When did it happen?

DANTE

When did what happen?

STORM

When did he murder your people.

Dante freezes in his tracks. He turns his head slowly.

DANTE

(solemnly)

The same day he found out that a  
young girl escaped his genocide and  
fled to safety.

The realization hits her like a ton of bricks.

STORM

You're from Odeilla?

DANTE

I was. A long time ago, my father  
would travel there to trade. My  
mother was an artisan. He used to  
love her work, and she was obsessed  
with his mysterious homeland. He  
would travel to her to see her  
latest work, and would share  
stories of his home. She was so  
inspired that she made it her  
life's work to mimic the beauty in  
those stories.

(MORE)

DANTE (CONT'D)

In time, they had a child, and he left his home to be with her and her new son. The child grew up happy, possessed of curious gifts, but was warned never to reveal them. In time, a man came, having heard of the boy with the special gifts. He was taken from his home; taken to Kvia where he would rise to become a fearsome general. But no matter his rank, or his power, the shackles remained. Unseen, they remained.

Storm just stares at him in disbelief.

STORM

That mean--

DANTE

I am Vellir. Half, if you want to be particular. We share more in common than you believe, girl.

STORM

Then why don't you help me?

DANTE

I have seen the depth of Steyr's cruelty, and believe me when I say that the only reason you are not lying on a table being studied right now is because he believes that you may become useful to him...as I have been useful.

Storm sits back down, overwhelmed.

STORM

Then why have you told me all this, only to feed me to him body and soul?

DANTE

Perhaps I wanted absolution. To know that one of my people saw that what I did, I did with revulsion and horror. That I obeyed as a trained dog obeys. And that it damns me. I don't ask forgiveness. I only want you to understand.

Storms remains silent, staring. Hearing nothing, Dante walks away. Storm can hear the sound of his footsteps recede into the distance.

INT. IMPERIAL PALACE - LABORATORY - DAY

Dante leads Storm into a bright laboratory. Shining metal tables and consoles full of blinking lights and display screens fill the room from wall to wall.

A padded chair sits in the middle of the room, flanked by more screens, dials, and lights. A halo of dull metal crowns the chair, streaming wires to an array of devices nearby.

DANTE

Sit.

Storm remains still.

Dante gestures, and a pair of guards muscle her into the seat, clamping down restraints on her wrists and ankles.

A RESEARCHER, male, 60s, wearing a white lab coat attaches leads to her arms and chest, then lowers the wired halo around her forehead. He looks to Dante.

RESEARCHER

We are ready.

DANTE

Begin.

INT. IMPERIAL PALACE - LABORATORY - LATER

Guards drag a limp and unconscious Storm from the room. Dante and the Researcher remain.

DANTE

Well?

RESEARCHER

Her innate abilities are astounding. The amount of Aether we detected flowing into her from our Auracite control group is consistent with a Vellir three times her age.

DANTE

So what now?

RESEARCHER

We move on to controlled release.

DANTE

Speak plainly.

RESEARCHER

We force Aether into her at a constantly increasing rate to observe the limits of her strength.

DANTE

For what purpose?

RESEARCHER

To see how much she can take before it kills her. The emperor has a keen interest in knowing the point at which a Vellir stops being able to use Aether against him, and when it can be turned into a weapon.

DANTE

But he already wiped out the Danavellir. What possible purpose could this serve?

RESEARCHER

There are those who fled.  
And...the other city.

Dante gets right up in his face.

DANTE

What other city?

INT. IMPERIAL PALACE - PAX AND REN'S CELL - NIGHT

Pax paces furiously around the cell, fuming. Ren sits in a corner, shackled to the wall.

REN

Would you stop pacing?

Pax stops short and levels a hard stare at him.

PAX

I've known Finneas since we were kids! That turncoat bastard!

REN

Instead of screaming into the wind,  
you might find a way to at least  
free me. Maybe we can still get  
ourselves out of this.

Outside, their GUARD comes to the window.

GUARD

Shut up, both of you!

PAX

Why don't you come in here and say  
that, tin man.

GUARD

I don't have to.

The guard leans to the side, pressing something.

The air in the room explodes with electricity. Pax and Ren  
writhe on the ground, screaming. After a long moment, it  
stops. They lay there, panting.

GUARD (CONT'D)

(smugly)

Got anything else to say?

Pax and Ren groan in pain.

GUARD (CONT'D)

Didn't think so.

They hear his footsteps resuming the patrol in the hall. Pax  
rolls over to face Ren.

PAX

Let's never do that again.

REN

You were the one who goaded him.

Pax rolls to a sitting position.

PAX

Alright, smart guy. What's your  
plan?

REN

I don't know that we have many  
options.

INT. IMPERIAL PALACE - STORM'S CELL - NIGHT

Storm sits huddled in a corner, holding herself. Tears stream down her face, looking hopeless.

She hears footsteps approaching, then a shadow falls across the cell door's window. It's Dante Kane.

The door beeps softly, then clicks open. Dante pauses.

STORM

What are you doing?

DANTE

One last good thing.

He walks away. Storm scrambles to her feet and peeks through the open door. Two guards lay in the passageway. She sneaks out.

INT. IMPERIAL THRONE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Dante pushes open the door, weapon drawn. Steyr sits on the throne, looking amused.

STEYR

What is the meaning of this?

DANTE

I thought you should know. I freed her. I hope she is now freeing her friends and escaping. I am here to see that she succeeds.

Dante drops into a fighting stance.

STEYR

My, my. The dog remembers he has teeth.

He rises, the stones in his armor winking to life.

STEYR (CONT'D)

Tell me, general. What was the tipping point? Was it when I burned home to the ground? When I burned yours to the ground?

Dante advances slowly, the Imperial Guards moving to flank him, rifles abandoned and blades drawn. They attack, Dante matching their movements with blinding speed. Through the fighting, Steyr continues.

STEYR (CONT'D)

What do you hope to accomplish by this futile act? She has nowhere to go. Her people are gone. She is alone.

DANTE

No! She is not alone!

STEYR

My dear general. In a moment, when you lay dead, she will be.

DANTE

There are others.

STEYR

Oh yes, I know. And if I could find this fabled lost city of the Vellir, which I will in time, I will bring it to its knees in kind.

The fighting is intense. Dante whirls and spins, downing one guard, then two. He takes wounds, but barely notices them.

STEYR (CONT'D)

This miserable respite you've bought them with your life is meaningless. Give in. Your resistance will mean nothing in the end.

Dante impales the last guard and turns to face Steyr, bloodied and panting.

DANTE

I have one last good thing to do.

He lunges.

STEYR

Yes. You can die.

The stones on Steyr's armor blaze to life, sending a brilliant flash of energy at Dante. He cannot evade it, and it consumes him. He tries to fight through it, blade forward, but it overcomes him and he falls to the floor, a smoking ruin. Steyr approaches and looks down, unimpressed.

STEYR (CONT'D)

What a waste.

INT. IMPERIAL PALACE - PAX AND REN'S CELL - NIGHT

Ren sits against the wall with Pax working away at the shackles with a short metal pin.

PAX  
Almost...got it!

The shackles fall away to the floor, making a terrible racket.

They both freeze as they hear hurried footsteps come down the hall.

REN  
When the door opens, I will rush the guard. You slip by and run. I will keep him occupied.

PAX  
That's suicide. I'll get the second guard when he comes. Then the rest will kill us, but we'll be free.

REN  
I like my plan better.

The door beeps...

PAX  
One...  
...And clicks...

REN  
Two...  
...And opens.

PAX  
Three!

Ren jumps to his feet and rushes to the door. He yanks it open with a roar, and Storm screams.

STORM  
What are you doing?!

PAX  
Us?! What are you doing?!



STORM

Dante Kane freed me. He is going to deal with the emperor so we have time to escape.

PAX

Good enough for me. Let's go!

Ren stops, looking down at Storm.

REN

And what will he buy with his life? Only our escape?

PAX

You were expecting more? A parade, perhaps?

Ren ignores her and takes Storm by the shoulders.

REN

What he did was noble, but it is only temporary. The emperor will not stop. Innocent people will keep dying, and if he ever finds the rest of your people, the slaughter will be absolute.

Storm looks to Pax.

STORM

What is he talking about? What others? Does he know where my people fled to?

REN

To Reykjavald, the lost city of the Vellir far to the north. That is the only place they could hope to be safe. I believe that your people are there.

PAX

Storm, we need to go. If anyone can get us there, it's Ren.

Storm looks at Ren, understanding.

PAX (CONT'D)

Storm! We have to go! Now!

Pax begins to run down the passageway. Storm stands with Ren, looking at him.

STORM

No.

Pax screeches to a stop.

PAX

No?! This is our only chance!  
Come on!

Storm lowers her eyes, deciding.

STORM

Alright. Let's go.

She gives Ren an apologetic look and runs after Pax. Ren passes them and takes the lead.

INT. IMPERIAL PALACE - DUNGEON LEVEL - CONTINUOUS

Pax runs to the end of the passage and grabs the panel.

PAX

Didn't we just do this?

REN

I'd advise you to hurry.

Storm catches up, bringing up the rear.

Pax gets the panel off and jumps in. Ren waits for Storm, but she gestures at him wildly.

STORM

Don't wait, I'm coming!

Ren jumps into the hole. Storm reaches the wall, looks into the darkness representing her freedom, and stops. A beat, then she grabs the panel and slams it in place. She takes a deep breath, then runs back the way she came.

INT. IMPERIAL THRONE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Steyr walks around the smoking remains of Dante Kane. He grunts in dismissal and walks back toward the throne. Behind him, the massive doors slam open.

Steyr does not turn.

STEYR

Have you found them?

Storm stands just inside the door, full of rage. She sees Dante laying dead on the ground, surrounded by dead Imperial guards. Looking around, she sees their strange rifles propped up in the alcoves where they had stood.

She takes a step and begins to gather the Aether from them.

Steyr makes an annoyed face, having expected an answer, then turns. He smirks. The girl has come to him.

STEYR (CONT'D)

I should thank you for saving me  
the trouble of tracking you down.

The stones on Steyr's armor wink to life.

STEYR (CONT'D)

Come now, dear. Haven't we tried  
this before?

Storm draws more Aether into herself, squirming in pain.

STORM

I've come to end this.

STEYR

And end it you shall, though not in  
the way you think.

Storm flings her hands forward. A blazing bolt of pure energy rushes forth...and dissipates harmlessly inches from Steyr.

Steyr stands smiling.

STEYR (CONT'D)

Care to try again?

INT. SECRET TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Pax glances back at Ren as they make their way out of the Imperial palace.

PAX

(annoyed)

Has she fallen behind again?

Ren glances back.

REN

Oh no.

PAX

What do you mean "oh no?"

Ren smiles thinly and turns back to Pax.

PAX (CONT'D)

Oh damn it all to hell!

INT. IMPERIAL THRONE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Storm reaches out again, drawing even more Aether than before. She blasts again. Nothing.

Steyr begins to laugh.

Storm screams at him.

STEYR

The irony of this is that I'm not going to kill you. I will tame you, throw you to my researchers, and still get everything I want out of you. I won't give you the satisfaction of dying and robbing me of my prize.

STORM

How could you?! Those were people!! Those were my people!!

Steyr keeps advancing, unmoved.

STEYR

Don't be childish. I'm not some common tavern thug. I mean to rule. And I will not suffer competition.

Storm is struck with a thought.

STORM

(to herself)  
Tavern thug?

INT. KIL BADHIR - PUB - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

She stands over the emaciated body of the pub thug she killed.

END FLASHBACK

INT. IMPERIAL THRONE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Storm begins to draw Aether again, but this time she focuses on Steyr. The stones on his armor begin to dim.

STEYR  
What are you doing?

She draws more, and the stones on Steyr's armor flicker as he struggles to control them.

STEYR (CONT'D)  
(panicked)  
What are you doing?!

Storm steps forward and throws out her hands.

STORM  
Ending you.

She unleashes a blast of inky blackness. The stones on Steyr's armor flash in response, but it's not enough. The bolt takes Steyr in the chest and throws him backward. He hits the floor and skids to a halt, unmoving.

Storm takes a ragged breath. She turns, making for the doors. The scrape of metal on stone makes her turn around.

Steyr is rising to his feet. Storm faces him again, looking determined.

STEYR  
Bitch! You think it's going to be that easy?

The stones on Steyr's armor blaze to life.

STEYR (CONT'D)  
I'm done toying with you! You will submit! Or you will die!

Storm begins to gather Steyr's Aether again. He notices the stones in his armor resisting, and screams. They blaze brighter.

STEYR (CONT'D)  
Now taste real power!

A blast of energy rushes from his armor toward Storm. She throws her hands up and unleashes the inky blackness again. They meet in a shower of lightning and sparks.

STEYR (CONT'D)  
You cannot win!

Storm screams as she draws more to power her energy. Her bolt of energy doesn't move.

Behind her, Pax and Ren run into the throne room and see the sight.

PAX

Storm!!

The sword on her back reacts, winking to life with a dull glow.

REN

Pax, your sword. What's happening.

Pax looks up at her sword. Realization hits. She draws it in one fluid motion as she screams.

PAX

Storm! Catch!

She flings the sword toward Storm. Storm turns, catches it one-handed, and the sword blazes to life. She screams in triumph as she pours every ounce of her power into the sword. It blazes a blinding white.

Steyr looks panicked as he tries to channel more energy at Storm. She advances, and she draws his energy into the blade.

Only mere steps separate them. Storm draws every ounce of power into the blade, whirls it, and with a yell, bounds forward and buries it to the hilt in Steyr's chest.

Storm releases the sword as Steyr's stone go dark. He stumbles, choking and coughing blood. The room goes quiet.

STEYR

How?

Storm just stares at him as he stumbles backward. Behind him, the lights of Skalaholt twinkle through the massive observation window.

Storm walks slowly up to him.

STEYR (CONT'D)

I cannot fall. I am the emperor.

STORM

You can. And you will.

Storm's hand flashes forward and grabs the hilt of the sword. With a yell, she rips the sword from Steyr's chest and kicks him backward. He crashes through the observation window and plunges down into the darkness. We see him fall silently into nothingness.

Storm staggers backward and drops the sword. Then she falls to the ground. We see her vision fading as Pax and Ren rush up to aid her.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE ROOM - DAY

Sun leaks through the shutters. Birds chirp outside over the rumble of voices.

Storm opens her eyes and stretches.

PAX

About time you woke up.

Storm looks up. Pax is sitting next to her bed, smiling.

STORM

Where am I?

PAX

Gunnarsholt. Ironic that we're in the same room you were kidnapped from.

Storm takes a beat to process this.

STORM

Gunnarsholt? How long have I been asleep?

Pax gets serious.

PAX

Four days. We didn't think you were going to make it.

STORM

Where is Ren?

PAX

Oh, he's out getting supplies. You have a long journey ahead of you.

STORM

Journey? Where am I going?

Pax scoots right up next to her.

PAX

He's taking you to Reykjavald.  
You're going home.

Storm's eyes fill with tears. Pax strokes her hair as she sobs. After a moment, it subsides.

STORM

Wait. You said "you're going home." What about you? Aren't you coming?

Pax stands and begins to pace.

PAX

I have to go square my account with Freya.

Her eyes grow hard.

STORM

I see. I suppose it's useless to ask you to come?

PAX

This time, yes. If I don't take care of this, I'll be looking over my shoulder for the rest of my life.

STORM

Will you be alright?

PAX

I have friends. I'll be fine.

The door opens and Ren walks in. He smiles at Storm.

REN

Welcome back.

STORM

Thanks. For everything. Both of you.

REN

Do you think you can travel? We can leave whenever you're ready.

Storm's smile lights up the room.



EXT. GUNNARSHOLT - MARKET - DAY

Storm and Ren stand together waving at Pax as she trots away from them. She stops, raises a hand in salute, and disappears into the crowd.

REN  
I don't like her.

Storm looks at him incredulously. After a beat, he smiles.

REN (CONT'D)  
Well, maybe a little.

Storm smiles.

STORM  
Come on. Let's go.

They head the opposite way, disappearing into the crowd themselves.

EXT. GATES OF REYKJAVALD - DAY

Storm and Ren stand before the beautiful, massive gate to an enormous city. Brilliant walls stretch to the left and right as far as the eye can see. Giant buildings of gleaming metal rise to the sky, a spire of scintillating stone rising highest of all.

The gate opens and a BEAUTIFUL WOMAN, 40s, dressed in a flowing white robe walks to meet them. She stops a few paces short. Storm walks to meet her.

The Beautiful Woman smiles knowingly and raises her hand. A blue glow forms around it.

As if by instinct, Storm raises her hand in turn, looks at it, and a similar blue glow springs into being.

The Beautiful Woman closes the distant and touches their hands together. A brilliant blue glow envelopes them both.

Within the blue glow, the Beautiful Woman smiles down on Storm.

BEAUTIFUL WOMAN.  
Welcome home.

FADE OUT.

THE END