**Chapter 107**

**The Conqueror’s Grave**

**16 February 1995, House of Lords, Westminster Palace, London**

There was something strange about being here, inside Westminster Palace.

It wasn’t about because her surroundings were beautiful. After the Scuola Regina and other magical locations, Alexandra wasn’t exactly in awe. True, there was a certain British elegance as she was escorted by a lot of guards under the flashes of cameras, but compared to the Venetian school, it would not receive an ‘Acceptable’.

No, it was just that no matter how fast she had expected the Statute to break, the Potter Heiress still felt a bit astonished how quickly everything had unravelled...and how soon her deeds had led her here, in the heart of the British legislative power.

It was really crowded everywhere, and her final destination...it was a good thing she wasn’t afraid to be in presence of a large public...because there had to be hundreds of men and women...at least.

While Alexandra had never entered Westminster Palace before today, the red colour of the seats and the gold of the decoration, the young witch felt confident to say this was the House of Lords in front of her...and the elected members of the House of Commons had in all likelihood rushed to be here.

It didn’t take good eyes to notice the shocked expressions. Many of these august and not-so-august politicians were still trying to deal with the fact their world’s foundations had been completely shattered. Some were looking calm, giving her inquisitive looks. Others were quite clearly angry.

But she had not the time to observe them one by one.

“Mister Prime Minister,” the Ravenclaw Champion gave a nod to the man. “It is quite an honour to be invited here.”

He looked like he had seen better days. His costume was impeccable, but his facial expression betrayed an extreme exhaustion, and if Alexandra could notice it, large glasses or not, then all the other spectators could too.

“And this House is honoured to welcome you here...Miss Alexandra Potter, is it?”

“Technically, it’s Lady Alexandra Potter,” not that it really mattered today, “but since your peerage had no idea of the Wizengamot’s existence, our equivalent to your House of Lords, I suppose we can skip the titles and go straight to the subjects. Ask your question, Mister Prime Minister. I don’t have much time, so let’s not waste it.”

There were a lot of whispers in every direction, naturally. At the moment, she didn’t really care.

“Very well,” the white-haired politician declared. “I suppose my first question concerns the implications of the...duel you fought on Westminster Bridge. Your...opponent made certain outrageous claims.”

“You want to know if his screams about being the rightful King of Britannia have some basis in reality, correct?” The Prime Minister nodded. “On this point, he didn’t completely lie. The victor of this duel would get the royal claim. Since I won after he cheated outrageously, I suppose I have it now...I will add it to my long list of useless titles.”

Whatever he had expected her to answer, this had not been it.

“Useless?” A member of the House of Lords asked as the Prime Minister was obviously flabbergasted.

“The Kingdom of Britannia, in every aspect which mattered, collapsed about one thousand and five hundred years ago. The dark castle that was conjured during the duel was one of the last remnants of that lost age. There are other relics and ruins, but in most cases, they aren’t linked to any royal title. So apart from a title...well, I’m afraid ‘useless’ is indeed the best description, yes.”

“You are here telling us this war criminal fought you and killed dozens just to claim a useless title? That’s just ridiculous!”

“I’m sure my enemy didn’t intend to stop there. He would likely have loved to brainwash all of you and forced you to kneel. Of course, sooner or later, Galahad may have realised that trying to enslave a sizeable percentage of England’s population would get him killed in short order. As I’m sure you have noticed, magic doesn’t make you invincible...big guns have still their use.”

“But you don’t.”

“I still have enough problems with my paperwork to be eager for titles which will bury me under piles of folders and various papers.”

There was familiar hooting, and Alexandra asked the Changelina for some shoulder protection...right on time. A couple of seconds later, Atalanta landed.

Well, since she wanted to be at the centre of the show...

“Atalanta here, on the other hand, is quite eager to be proclaimed as Queen,” the green-eyed girl said humorously. “If it involves petting, taking care of her superb white feathers, owl treats, and some other advantages, I suppose she is ready to assume her royal duties.”

Naturally, her avian companion’s ego knew no bounds after that...especially as Alexandra had kept a few treats on her.

“Err...yes.” It was clear she had destabilised the Prime Minister...though there were many in the assistance which were charmed by Atalanta’s plumage...that was quite something. “I think everyone who watched the duel had the pleasure to look at her.” Atalanta hooted proudly. “Is there a significance-“

“They are our proud messengers. You have your postal office, we have our mail owls.”

Atalanta hooted, clearly implying the former was doing far less of a good job than her.

“Anyway,” the Potter Heiress said while caressing the back of the snowy owl’s head, “the royal claim for a long-dead kingdom will play no part in the coming weeks.”

“Are we supposed to believe you?” A blonde-haired man in costume which seemed almost comical vituperated. “You somehow brought a Dreadnought in the Thames!”

The Prime Minister gave the man a glare, before turning towards her.

“As much as the interruption was rude...the question deserves to be asked. A Dreadnought is not a toy.”

“I didn’t intend to use it in front of Westminster Palace,” Alexandra admitted after a shrug, “it was a contingency I prepared in case things went to hell...and they did. I suppose I should present my apologies to this government, because I stole quite a few warships from Scapa Flow.”

“These warships were scuttled...Lady Potter.”

“I am powerful enough to levitate them out of the depths by myself.” The Exchequer certainly was aware of it now, and since it was a skill made possible by the fact she was a Hydra Animagus, it wasn’t like the Ministry or a lot of people could replicate it within hours. “And yes, before you ask the question, Mister Prime Minister, it was easier for me to restore scuttled ships than build new ones. I don’t think any magical government built a modern warship since the Statute of Secrecy was cast.”

“I suppose you refer to the...agreement that our two societies had to remain separate and unaware of each other?”

“That the non-magical society was unaware of the magical one, yes...the reverse is not true. I was raised in a non-magical home, and I am hardly the only witch or wizard who was.”

If the angry whispers were any indication, the politicians certainly didn’t like being informed of one-sided the Statute had been. And they still weren’t aware that Ra had destroyed millions of lives to separate the magical and the non-magical...

“In that case...” the Prime Minister cleared his throat. “Why now? There are many disasters that have erupted in the last twenty-four hours, beginning with Venice...your ‘Statute’ is clearly not working anymore...”

“Venice being frozen in time and the Statute being broken was the lesser evil,” Alexandra decided to stop dancing around the subject.

“The...lesser evil?” There were hundreds of murmurs supporting this astonished reaction.

“Yes.” And since the Archmage wasn’t here to defend himself, why not use the opportunity to do a lot of damage to his reputation. “Galahad, who I just fought on Westminster Bridge, was just the lackey of a far more dangerous wizard. Those that know of his existence call him Ra, the Archmage of Light. He was the one who created Excalibur...and the Grail. It was because the latter was about to blow up that another mage who swore to oppose him froze Venice in time for a few days.”

“Couldn’t it...be achieved in a far less...spectacular manner?”

“That depends,” Alexandra said darkly, “if you wanted most of Europe to be annihilated by the equivalent of a magical nuclear apocalypse.”

For the first time since she entered the House of Lords, Alexandra got a rather impressive silence.

It didn’t last, of course. The screams and shouts of accusation quickly followed.

“Fortunately, some magical parties are not interested in this senseless destruction, and stopped the Archmage before the disaster was total. They also have a plan to make sure the Grail is neutralised. And part of it demanded that I challenged Galahad and defeated him here.”

“This is...this is a heavy burden for one so young. You must be underage, surely?”

“I will celebrate my fifteenth birthday in July...assuming the world is still there by then.”

If everything that generated more imprecations and other loud reactions...something told Alexandra the non-magical politicians were NOT going to be happy when someone explained to them how bloody the European Magical Tournament had been.

The Prime Minister appeared to be speechless.

“By the way, if a certain Minister Cornelius Fudge comes here in a few minutes in a futile attempt to bluster and protest everything is under control...please give him the message that as soon as the Venetian crisis is over, I will ask for a vote of no-confidence. His incompetence is no longer amusing.”

Alexandra nodded and turned away, Atalanta leaving her shoulder to fly in circles above her head.

“Farewell, Mister Prime Minister, Lords of the realm. I hope we will see each other again, and in far more pleasant circumstances than today’s.”

**16 February 1995, Gringotts, London**

If from the outside everything looked fine, Gringotts had stopped being an ordinarily bank once Alexandra stepped inside.

That is, unless you considered showing two neat columns of pikes with goblin’s corpses impaled upon them was something a normal bank was doing every day.

The Basilisk Slayer didn’t.

Grimjaw was waiting for her near one of the ruined desks that had been used not long ago to examine precious gemstones brought by clients. Now it was soaked in crimson fluids, and the Ravenclaw Champion knew it wasn’t ketchup.

“I see I wasn’t the only one who had an eventful day.”

The old goblin grunted. He had two fresh wounds on his left arm. None of them were serious, but they were incredibly recent.

“You have a gift for understatement.”

“So I was told. How bad was it?”

The hall of Gringotts, seriously, looked it was going to need a complete renovation in the weeks to come. And no, she wasn’t speaking about the goblins’ corpses. The furniture had been hacked and fought over, several statues had been broken, and the floor looked like several Bombardment Charms had been used repeatedly until it cracked.

“It was bad.” Grimjaw conceded. “The traitors who invaded us were competent and determined...and they benefitted from many allies inside our very ranks.”

Then the old goblin bared his teeth.

“In the end, it was their professionalism which saved us. They went directly after your vault, in addition to several other...interesting targets. I have no doubt they intended to finish us once they had accomplished their primary mission. But since someone played with interesting forbidden Rune combinations, their whole attack plan fell into disarray, allowing us to mount a devastating counterattack. You wouldn’t know anything about it, Lady Potter?”

Alexandra smiled innocently.

“I want it to be known that these Rune defensive measures are perfectly safe as long as you use the protocols I sent you last month. It’s not my fault your invaders neglected to take them into account.”

“Hmm...we have established a mid-sized quarantine zone around your vault. The clean-up is going to be...extensive.”

Alexandra blinked before grinning ferociously.

“They tried to continue their raid once the first defences activated, didn’t they?”

She would almost have pitied the goblin thieves, if they weren’t murderous robbers and criminals.

“They sure by our fangs and gold did,” Grimjaw confirmed.

“How far did they manage to push?” the Champion of the Morrigan asked with real curiosity.

“Some of them fled once they saw a six-headed hydra construct of purple poison.”

Alexandra whistled in appreciation. Oh that one was particularly nasty. It was something she had thought of for the Second Task, an old Egyptian Runic Curse, unfortunately incomplete. The Basilisk Slayer had had to modify it with some Oghams, as some of the Hieroglyph evocations had been lost to time, but the result once tried out in the locks of Northern Scotland had been particularly impressive.

Unfortunately, it was so long to activate that there was no point using it during the Second Task. But it seemed that for defending her vault, it was a very good magical counterattack.

“Are they all dead now?”

“All those who went anywhere near your vault are. In many cases, the corpses are still there. We’re waiting for the poison to lose its potency. As I’m sure you realise, carving Runes is ground for fines. Several Senior Accountant-Managers have met in urgency and agreed your actions will have severe consequences: a stern warning to do it again...and a massive fine of one Knut.”

In other words, the goblins who had decided to use Grimjaw as their emissary were perfectly fine with what she had done.

“I will pay the fine,” and she took great care to not roll her eyes. “Now that you have described the situation, I feel like this entire raid was something Ra planned for, but Galahad took it and modified it without bothering to verify if the strategic situation had stayed the same.”

The now crippled Champion of Unity was arrogant and overconfident; stealing an existing plan based on excellent intelligence and some spies-betrayers ready to stab their fellow bankers in the back and unleashing it without warning was exactly the sort of things he would do.

Alexandra was suddenly very thankful the King of the Exchequer had immobilised Ra for the time being. For all her preparations, for all her superior tactics and ideas, Galahad’s chances to win the duel and accomplish other unpleasant deeds had been...above average.

If the Archmage of Light had come to London in person, it was almost certain Gringotts would have fallen to the Light-aligned goblins and the duel on Westminster Bridge would have had a different outcome. There would have been no One Ring to begin with, clearly...and honestly, Alexandra would not have dared duelling the Avatar again.

“The scenario you describe is certainly right.” Grimjaw’s face didn’t really change, but the darkness in his eyes could almost be considered a grimace. “There have been other attacks against different banking institutions. Not in Western Europe, but Central and Eastern Europe have been heavily targeted. Each time, goblins that were believed to be mere mercenaries or long dead have resurfaced. Each time, many gold promises were made.”

Alexandra hesitated...then decided by that point, there was no use withholding the information: Grimjaw and those who had fought against the goblin invaders were committed.

“I was told it is a habit of Ra to propose such terms. The Queen of the Exchequer pretended that at the end of the Kingdom of Keter, this was how the Archmage of Light convinced the goblin army to turn against the Dark.”

“I don’t have the archives to confirm that,” Grimjaw replied, well, it had been a long-shot...”However, we have the books to confirm something similar happened before the second Sack of Rome, when the western part of the empire began its long agony.”

Alexandra sighed. Ra was an awful being, but there was no denying that for all his power and fanaticism, he couldn’t have done half of what he did over the millennia without allies.

“There are going to be massive changes, assuming there is still a continent after this crisis is over.”

And no, the Potter Heiress wasn’t just speaking about the Statute of Secrecy.

“I know. There are...ongoing debates about the path Gringotts and the surviving race will have to choose. The storm is here, and hiding in the tunnels is not an option.”

“I suggest your choice is widely publicised, when it will be made. The Exchequer has not forgotten any of the goblin’s betrayals. The Summon I saw at Brise-Roc is quite busy near Venice right now, but I’m certain Knight Summoner is going to use it immediately after the time-freezing ceases.”

“Your suggestion is heard and will be discussed.”

Alexandra breathed out. That was all she could hope for, in the end. In the end, she was the Champion of Death, not Unity...though given how much Leo Black and his immediate predecessor had screwed up, one could only wonder how big the enslavement of a certain Power reached.

“I will return as soon as I can,” the black-haired Champion swore. “Now on an entirely different subject...I will pay plenty of Galleons for all critical information on Galahad, Leo Black, or whatever name he decides to call himself. Dumbledore should have transported him to Saint Mungo’s, but...”

Grimjaw grunted.

“The information will be collected, Lady Potter. His actions made him an enemy of this bank...for once, we will use our discretionary funds instead of yours. He fought like a coward. He will die like one.”

**16 February 1995, Saint Mungo’s Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries, London**

“He will live.”

There was no smile to accompany these three little words.

In fact, Albus Dumbledore couldn’t remember a Healer looking at him with such a sinister expression when the patient was still alive.

And it didn’t help that the former Chief Warlock knew Hippocrates Smethwyck when he studied at Hogwarts. Hippocrates had been a model student...and one of the most cheerful Hufflepuff Prefects Hogwarts had been graced of in a single decade.

This dark mood was the opposite of what people thought when saying ‘genuine Hufflepuff’.

That meant he wasn’t going to like the news at all.

“There is more to it than that.” The Headmaster said calmly.

“Yes.” Hippocrates’ lips twisted in something that was difficult to put a name upon. Nausea? Grimace? Despair? “He will live, but in my Healer’s opinion, I think it should have been more merciful to let him die.”

“That...but the Phoenix Tears-“

“The Phoenix Tears can only stop any venom from killing you. While the regenerative properties are impressive, they need to be applied as fast as possible, and the worse the venom or the poison is, the more urgently it needs to spread in someone’s blood. My patient...” the Healer shook his head, as if he couldn’t believe his own words. “I had heard rumours certain wizards could endure excruciating torments, but it’s the first time I had the opportunity to treat one. If Mister Leo Black was a typical wizard, he would have likely died before arriving at Saint Mungo’s. Phoenix Tears or not, he should have died no matter how fast my colleagues and I worked to stabilise him.”

Hippocrates sighed again.

“But now that we managed to purge most of the Hydra venom out of his body, I reiterate my judgement: it would have been kinder to kill him. We had to give him several draughts to keep him in a magical coma, otherwise the pain is so intolerable that-“

The Healer didn’t find the strength to finish his sentence.

“Hydra venom,” Albus muttered. He didn’t ask if the younger wizard was sure, Hippocrates was one of the best when it came to snake bites and other creature-induced injuries. So the infernal child was-

“Hydra venom bolstered by the properties of countless other poisons,” the Hufflepuff Healer closed his eyes for a couple of seconds before reopening them and giving Albus Dumbledore a look of exhaustion. “Hydras born in the Greek preserves are known to do that, but here, it was something else. And since the venom stayed active for too long, one arm and one leg are going to have to be amputated. My colleagues and I managed to save the rest of the body...but for those limbs, there’s nothing left to do.”

“But...” yes, bad news was...appropriate? The former Supreme Mugwump cleared his throat. “But since Fawkes recovered his hands-“

“No, Professor Dumbledore.” Hippocrates was apologetic...and exhausted. “It was too late too...if it had been a Diffindo, maybe we could have done something...but it was not. And for one hand, we couldn’t have done anything anway, as the arm was destroyed from the inside by the Hydra venom. As for the second hand...we tried first to save the life of our patient, not his hand.”

“I understand,” he could hardly fault them for that; it was absolutely the correct course of action. “But...the pain should have decreased by now. The venom is purged, and the magics that injured him weren’t unblockable curses.”

“No, you can thank the Ring he wore for that,” Hippocrates gave him an expression of disgust. “I don’t know where he found it, but what we have discovered is evident: it placed a curse upon his flesh and nerves. As the injuries piled up, a Curse wormed its way into his magical core. From now on, the pain he suffered, mental, physical, and magical...it will never cease tormenting him. It will be powered in cycles, so there will be moments where it will slightly decrease...but he is condemned to experience this pain until his last dying breath.”

Albus had seen many things, but here his jaw dropped in surprise.

This was...this was *horrible*.

A limb missing, this was bad, but several medical institutes had pioneered excellent prostheses. But with no hands...

Unless you were the kind of genius that came once in millennia, you needed your hands to channel and cast your magic correctly. Hand prostheses couldn’t serve as foci, or at least Albus had never heard they could serve this purpose. And pain was a complicating problem at the best of times, one which could cripple a child if it wasn’t handled well...Albus had seen it too many times to feel any illusion at this subject.

“I see,” the Headmaster of Hogwarts answered, feeling very, very old. “I...see. I will cover the expenses for the healing and the hospital room.”

“This is appreciated, Professor.” Hippocrates for once showed some signs of relief. “I think someone contacted House Black, but we have yet-“

Speak of the Dark Witch...

Bellatrix Lestrange was suddenly here.

Clad in black, as one could expect.

And her expression was one of triumph, not of sadness.

Albus wished he could draw his wand...but they were in Saint Mungo’s. Moreover, the lieutenant of Tom Riddle had not attacked anybody in the last months, according to the Order’s members...thus he could do nothing but ‘welcome’ her.

“Lady Lestrange.”

“Lady Black,” the powerful Dark Witch corrected with an arrogant sneer. “It appears we have to thank you for saving my dear cousin’s only son.”

“I did.” A short answer, and in a defiant tone.

“Well, I can tell you many Lords and Ladies of the Wizengamot are going to try to murder you politically for that.” Bellatrix said gleefully. “Intervening in the duel, especially when the terms were clear from the start...it might have been your last political mistake. Why, I wouldn’t be surprised if they rescinded your Order of Merlin 1st Class.”

The Headmaster of Hogwarts didn’t bother asking who had ‘suggested’ this political move to them.

“And what are you going to do to Heir Leo Black?”

The answer was short.

“Nothing.”

“Nothing?”

“Nothing,” Bellatrix Lestrange gave him one of her vicious smiles, “Leo Black is dead.”

“Actually,” Hippocrates Smethwyck cleared his throat, “we managed to save him-“

“Oh, I didn’t want to insult your superlative healing skills, Healer Smethwyck,” Bellatrix said in a more conciliatory tone, “I’m sure you did everything you could to keep him alive. What I wanted to say is that as the House of Black watched the duel, we heard several times, and so loudly that none of the uncountable spectators could miss it, something unthinkable. The duellist ferociously claimed *his name was Galahad, not Leo Black*.”

Dumbledore gaped. No, she wasn’t going to suggest what he thought-

“Obviously, the Regent of House Black, Lord Regulus, was already quite displeased with some of the recent ‘exploits’ of our former Lord. But these words were nothing short of outrageous and dishonourable.”

“He was-“

“His opponent didn’t hit him with a Confusion Hex or some mind-altering spell. And she suddenly didn’t proclaim herself to be a character straight out of the Arthurian legend,” the Dark Witch interrupted him as if he was an insignificant cockroach she could crush at her leisure. “He repeated it several times. The insult is clear.”

No, there had to be-

“If the son of Lord Sirius Black feels ashamed to belong to the Noble and Most Ancient House of Black, I can assure you, Professor Dumbledore, that the Noble and Most Ancient House of Black feels the same way where he is concerned. The matter will be brought before the Wizengamot. And on that day, this blood-traitor will disinherited and cast out; we have certainly no intention to give him another chance so he can try to dirty the Black name one more time.”

**16 February 1995, Avalon**

It was night when they returned to Avalon.

There was no one to welcome them, but the ancient road was lit by a particularly luminescent breed of fireflies...and there was a red moon shining over their heads. Even if none of them were Animagi with perfect night vision, it would take quite a deliberate effort to get lost.

“Silence is rather comfortable after everything what happened,” Alexandra commented as the fireflies’ illumination led them in the direction of the peaks of Avalon.

“The politicians were that unbearable?” Malatesti snickered.

The Basilisk Slayer glared at the Champion of War.

“I didn’t forget all of you found a lot of excuses to not escort me to speak with the aforementioned politicians.”

“I could have done it, Death,” the Dark Queen grinned, “I’m sure the outcome would have been perfect.”

Alexandra sighed.

“All of you except Lyudmila, obviously,” unfortunately, the other three Champions suddenly found the fauna and the flora very interesting...traitors.

This ensured that the rest of their progression was done in semi-silence, with only some short warnings when a dragon or another large animal decided to cross the ancient road before them.

That said, after a few minutes, the term ‘road’ was less and less justified. As they went high in the hills, the road became a hiking trail. Soon enough, it could be generously described as a goat’s path.

When it stopped, they were greeted by the sight of a tiny valley where some large stones had been carved with Runes before being raised as megaliths. This was not the only thing that had been done here. Alexandra could feel it on her skin. Powerful rituals had been cast there. Magic remembered; it was in the air, it was in the water...and it was in the stones.

As they advanced, the five Champions were able to look at more circles of stones, though these ones were small and could have almost passed as emplacements where to lit some bonfires.

Yet the pulsations of pure magic they expelled on a regular basis proved that they were far more than met the eye.

The Queen of the Exchequer was waiting for them near one of those circles.

“Congratulations are in order for Alexandra, I believe,” the legendary sorceress said.

“We spent over one hour recovering all the shards of Excalibur,” Romeo Malatesti complained, incapable of keeping his mouth shut as usual.

A stern and unyielding expression of Morgane reminded him who was in charge in a couple of heartbeats.

“Since you mentioned it...the shards, please,” the ancient female vampire ‘requested’, “the ritual must begin as soon as possible, less we want to wait for another night...”

Lucrezia levitated a large leather pouch, which had been copiously enchanted.

The Queen of the Exchequer uttered three words in a tongue that Alexandra had never heard before.

Immediately, a circle of seven stones began to burn in black flames.

Without any more ceremony, the content of the pouch was thrown into the pyre.

The former Champion of Death began to sing.

While the language was not among those she had ever learned, Alexandra was beginning to understand better the flow of magic. Morgane of Avalon was calling the Dark Powers for a purification spell, and then the ritual was supposed to use the symbolism of...an instrument?

There was something about metal and magic, about strength being used against itself...it didn’t help that the black flames stopped her from seeing what was truly happening, Hydra eyes or not.

“I heard you revealed a colossal surprise to poor Galahad, Alexandra,” Morgane spoke after a good minute as it was obvious the ritual was able to continue without her direct intervention.

Malatesti laughed uncontrollably.

The Champion of the Morrigan gave him a disabused expression before turning towards the Queen.

“He had one for me too. I felt that to get rid of it, it was better to use overwhelming firepower.” The Potter Heiress bit her lip before continuing. “I note that for some reason, no one in London or Avalon comments that I was able to kill my way through the last army remnants of Camlann, but teleport a Dreadnought in the Thames, and suddenly everyone screams in panic.”

The Queen of the Exchequer let her see an amused smile.

“I suppose it is a good point.” Hurrah! “But don’t expect several Knights and other members of our organisation to close our eyes on something so significant. We were surprised...and we are not so foolish as to miss this warship was not destined to destroy Camlann’s dungeon and ruin forever the plans of Galahad, no matter how perfectly it played its role.”

Alexandra didn’t wince, externally or internally. The moment she had planned to use the HMS Hydra, the Ravenclaw witch had known there couldn’t be any more surprise effect, be it against the Exchequer or anyone else.

“I suppose some of your agents already visited Scapa Flow.”

“They did.”

“Why did they?” Eleonora asked with curiosity. “Surely a Dreadnought is already a colossal effort to salvage, you didn’t...”

Alexandra tried the innocent expression. It didn’t work.

“How many?” The Champion of Innocence asked with an inquisitive tone which reminded her of Hermione.

Alexandra hesitated.

“In the last years,” Morgane intervened, “someone definitely stole most of the Dreadnoughts and scuttled ships of Scapa Flow. The real question is how many are operational right now.”

“Only the *HMS Hydra* is, for now,” the Champion of the Morrigan admitted, “it took a long time to train the crew and create a sustainable line of production for Runic shells.”

“You have strange hobbies,” Lyudmila remarked. “But I, for one, approve. I’ve always wanted to see if I could fight a Battleship by myself!”

Many witches may have face-palmed after these words, though no one would admit it afterwards...

Fortunately, the black flames dissipated a few seconds later, making sure all eyes returned to see what had been forged.

One thing was clear, the magical process had not used all the shards of Excalibur. Alexandra could see many of them darkened and twisted on the soot-covered stones.

In fact, it might not even have used the majority of the shards...but some had been entirely melted.

Seven, the Potter Heiress instinctively knew which number it was.

There was a river of silver metal pouring...and then bronze and other metals were added, along with several powders that reminded her of sand.

There were seven flow of boiling metal, and they all converged on a single stone.

Magic poured towards this critical point too.

There was a flash.

When it was possible to watch it again, an object of black metal had been summoned into existence.

“An astrolabe?” the Champion of Chaos wasn’t making a sarcastic retort, but she wasn’t far from it.

“Yes, an astrolabe,” Morgane Rys’Ygraine of Avalon said in a very serious voice. “This is the first part of the key which will allow you to reach the Conqueror’s Grave.”

“And the second?” Eleonora asked.

“You must return where the Hegemon Command was cast long ago.”

“That could be...anywhere,” Alexandra noted.

“Oh, no,” the Queen of the Exchequer bared her fangs. “You forget the colossal ego of the one who was certainly the most brilliant Apprentice of Ra. Add it the reality that the island which was hidden by the Hegemon Command wasn’t originally supposed to be his grave. It was supposed to be where the capital of an Empire would be built. Something so impressive deserved a particularly famous ritual ground. And his early conquests had given him one.”

This time it was not Lucrezia, Lyudmila, or Eleonora who spoke.

It was Romeo Malatesti.

“The Athenian Acropolis,” the Champion of Ares grimaced. “Of course Alexander couldn’t resist proclaiming himself the equal of the Gods...”

**17 February 1995, Athens, Greece**

Naturally, once the Portkey landed them in the heart of Greece, there was chaos waiting for them.

It shouldn’t have been the case.

It was easily two, maybe three hours past midnight.

Even with the Dark Sun’s fateful presence in the sky, the majority of the Athenians and the tourists visiting the city should be in their beds, not crowding the streets.

Alexandra had just to look at the Acropolis to know there was a problem. A very big problem.

“Lucrezia?”

“Yes, dear?”

“Could you please explain to all of us,” the Hydra Animagus hissed, “why there is a big cascade on the Acropolis’ slopes?”

Then the screams past the touristic gate – it should have been closed at this hour of the night, but it clearly wasn’t – did begin. Soon enough, there were hundreds of men and women running away in fear.

It was a good reaction, because wherever the water flowed between the impressive ruins, there were giant constructs of water materialising, and those were prompt to eliminate the people who didn’t flee fast enough.

“Would you believe me if I said this wasn’t the plan?”

“No.” The Champion of Death said sarcastically. “I may not be aware of certain rituals, but I saw a flying Megalith do the same in the now time-frozen city of Venice. And while I never visited Greece, I’m pretty sure the documentaries I watched on TV would have mentioned if there was a bloody cascade somewhere nearby. Plus those elementals of water...the Ottomans called them Marids, I think. It isn’t a coincidence they are here tonight.”

“Err...” well, for an instant, she had managed to silence a Succubus. “Okay. Do you know the founding myth of Athens?”

“That Poseidon and Athena were rivals and participated in a contest for who would become the Protector of the city?” Romeo Malatesti intervened.

“Yes.” The Champion of Lust nodded. “Let’s just say that while the truth was exaggerated, the myth is based on very real facts.”

“I doubt very much the Powers fought over this pile of rocks,” Lyudmila Romanov shook her head before casting a war-spell that dissipated countless Marids in an instant. “I mean, it is a glorious pile of rocks, yes. But Powers aren’t able to fight each other directly. That’s why they need us.”

“Indeed,” Lucrezia cleared her throat as they advanced. Immediately, the Marids tried to attack them with water jets...which were easily blocked. It also attracted a lot of attention as many heads turned in their direction...but with the Statute broken, that could be disregarded for the moment. “The contest was between a Champion of Athena and a Champion of Poseidon. The latter created a Summoning ritual which ensured there would be a permanent connection with the Water Plane. Athens would never run out of drinkable water.”

“Wait a minute...” Alexandra frowned while eliminating two Marids that had decided to take the shape of horned devils. “This was well after the destruction of the ‘Great Magical Kingdom’ and Ra enslaving all the Powers of the Light. There wasn’t any Power of Water around.”

“Poseidon was of the Dark,” the Succubus replied serenely as the five Champions engaged the water elementals. “But that didn’t stop our predecessors from trying to link some Planes to new deities, in order to prepare some serious attempts to cancel the mistakes of the past.”

“Yes, but it failed.” Eleonora pointed out. “The citizens of Athens chose Athena...the name of the city is a good indicator, I feel.”

“Yes,” the Succubus gritted her perfect white teeth, that was how annoyed she was. Needless to say the Marids who were on the receiving end were not enjoying the onslaught. “But just think about it, my dear Champion of Innocence: doesn’t something feel wrong about the contest?”

“Sure,” Alexandra shrugged. “If the Champion of Poseidon really delivered an unlimited source of drinkable water, which since I’m able to smell it, has numerous magical properties...he or she should have been the winner. Both in ancient and modern times, access to water is the difference between a thriving city and an abandoned town.”

“Exactly,” Lucrezia said with an evident dose of bad faith...and plenty of arrogance. “That should have won the contest without discussion.”

“But there was the olive tree...” Malatesti said mockingly.

Alexandra suddenly didn’t understand.

“What is the...I have seen many olive trees in my life. They are nothing special.”

“The trees aren’t special.” Lucrezia continued acidly, “except Ra arrived just as the contest was done, and used the one the Champion of Athena had grown on the Acropolis to stabilise the Summon ritual to the Plane of Water, before killing on the spot the Champion of Poseidon.”

Of course the Archmage did it. Why was everyone not surprised? Oh, right. Ra was a murderous bastard.

“Okay,” the green-eyed Champion of Hogwarts declared as the flow of Marids suddenly stopped and she found herself watching the newly-created river and the ruins that were part of the Athenian Antiquity settlement. “But that doesn’t explain why the Champion of Poseidon’s creation is back...especially after it was inactive for so long.”

“The connection to the Plane of Water had never been intended to be eternal.” The Champion of Lust explained. “It took centuries, but the flow of water constantly diminished, until it ended as the barbarians began their invasion of the Roman Empire. Athens survived for several centuries on the reputation of its philosophical schools and other centres of education, but without that water and other artefacts Ra had given them, Athens was defenceless and could be forgotten. Yet the fact is, Athens was tied to the Plane of Water for centuries, and magic remembers. Now that the Seals of Water have been activated, magical resonance reopened the bridge between Water and our world. This was a possibility our...patrons were aware of.”

Listening to this, it was easy to understand most of them hadn’t really understood what ‘magic will return to this world’. How could they? They were Champions yes, but they were all born in a world centuries after the Statute of Secrecy was enacted, millennia after Ra killed his sister and enslaved Fate.

The Exchequer’s plan had left nothing to chance. No matter how limited the victory, the Statute couldn’t be salvaged, and the Light would have to deal with countless problems, because the Seals had multiple applications beyond giving Osiris and his troops an advantage against the Archmage.

“And what is our strategy?” Eleonora seemed content to look at Lucrezia like one monitored a particularly disobedient child.

“Isn’t it evident? We fight our way to the top of the Acropolis, and we eliminate everything that stands in our way.”

**17 February 1995, the Acropolis, Greece**

Just watching the ‘gate’ of the Acropolis, Alexandra immediately thought, immediately created a feeling she was not feeling often: insignificance.

The columns were so huge, the marble blocks so titanic, that despite everything she had done, the Potter Heiress felt like a Hobbit contemplating some colossal fortress.

And this was only the shadow of the Acropolis.

Most of it was in ruins, courtesy of the ravages of time and human predation.

“How much magic did they use?” She asked after destroying a toad-like Marid with transfigured claws.

“Relatively little, all told,” Lucrezia Sforza told her.

Alexandra wasn’t the one who gave her a surprised look.

“The marble blocks are so heavy that even with Levitation Charms, bringing them here would be a chore. And that’s assuming the quarry was nearby.”

“It was not.” The Succubus had gone for a red colour when it came to her hair, and at the light of the torches Malatesti had conjured, this mane shone like crimson. “The blocks were transported first by ship to the port of Piraeus, before finishing the rest of the journey by more conventional means. The ancient Athenians got some support in the form of Arithmantic formulae from the local wizards, but apart from that, most of it was done by architecture genius.”

It was...difficult to believe.

Especially as when they passed the ‘forest of columns’ and properly arrived on the Acropolis itself, the Parthenon was waiting for them, on the other side of the river reborn.

It was...were there proper words to describe it, as water magic imbued everything and the ancient stones echoed the songs of ages long gone?

The temple seemed like it had always been here.

For all the crimes of Ra and the tormented history that had led to the foundation of Athens, the Parthenon seemed like a miracle shaped in stone.

“The first Parthenon was incomplete when the Persians looted and burned the Acropolis,” Lucrezia explained in guide mode, “but the Athenians had the greatest War-Mage of the time, Archon Strategos Pericles, Polemarch of the League of Delos. And as the Persians fled back to Asia, the Acropolis was rebuilt, greater and more magnificent than before.”

“How did they pay for it?” the Dark Queen asked, visibly interested by the subject. “The gate we just passed through must have cost a fortune alone.”

“Athens was the city where the League of Delos had its treasury and main banking institutions of the time. After Salamis, both wizards and non-wizards thought it was best to place all the gold and the rest of the precious resources here, for at least they were sure Athens would never negotiate with the Persians...unlike a certain city blessed by Ares I won’t name.”

Romeo Malatesti snorted.

“I will have you know, Lust, that we fought this war on the same side.”

“And thanks to your prideful King, the war was almost lost at the Thermopylae...one might think he had something to prove, after all his predecessors’ flirts with the Kings of Kings ruling from Persepolis.”

Eleonora giggled, and Alexandra imitated her. It was really too funny to see the two Champions of the Scuola Regina bicker about something that had taken place...two thousand and four hundred years ago? At least if the touristic boards of the Acropolis could be trusted...

The hilarity stopped as the Champion of the Morrigan realised their ‘guide’ wasn’t walking in the direction of the Parthenon.

“Err...the Parthenon is that way, Lust.”

“I’m aware, Death. But we must go to the holiest and most sacred place of the Acropolis. And while the Parthenon would be suitable for some lesser ritual, what is truly important tonight is the Erechtheion.”

“Right...” it was the ruins of a temple which looked in a far worse condition than the very badly damaged Parthenon.

But as they approached, the sensation of magic overwhelmed everything.

“It was there the two Champions had their contest, isn’t it?”

“It is.” The Succubus confirmed. “Now please remain calm, and don’t make a lot of noise. It could annoy it.”

Alexandra was just noting that the river avoided all damaged statues and ruins – excellent wards and enchantments, to still be reawakened after a couple of millennia – when they really entered the part of the Erechtheion that was still standing...and they stopped.

Before them was something that had begun as a scar into reality, but now looked like a miniature fountain...one frozen in mid-air, and with a ring of stone to mark the limits of where the Plane of Water had been opened here.

There was no olive tree there – maybe the Exchequer had decided to burn it for the insult it represented.

However, the ‘Source’ had not been left defenceless.

If anyone doubted it, the size of the fangs the ‘Guardian’ could boast would assuredly ‘reassure’ them.

Alexandra sighed. It wasn’t difficult recognising the species...

“Styx Viper,” the green-eyed Basilisk Slayer commented coldly, “can we stop at least pretending it was a coincidence that led us here?”

In a way, Alexandra could lower a nonexistent hat in salute. She had thought her contingencies were impressive, but she didn’t hold a candle compared to Osiris and his troops.

All the Seals that had been activated must have had dozens of possible sub-plans integrated in them.

As soon as the Styx Vipers had multiplied, one must had come here. Given the absence of corpses, either the snake monster had been kept hidden and in stasis, or it had well-fed upon the tourists while remaining under semi-invisibility spells and not-Notice Charms.

“It was not a coincidence.” The Succubus confessed.

“I’m so glad to hear it from you,” Alexandra said sarcastically. “Now that it is said, how do we proceed?”

There was no ritual circle, and the water magic reigned supreme so close to the ‘Source’. The Ravenclaw doubted even the most powerful water spell in existence would conjure more than a single spark before being drowned and extinguished.

“Isn’t it evident?” Lyudmila yawned, a gesture she had not need to do, all Champions present knew. “Tearing apart the veil that the Hegemon Command created requires a powerful ritual, one none of us have the power for.”

“But the astrolabe-“ Eleonora began before being interrupted.

“It’s just a focusing lens,” the Fenrir Animagus snorted. “You need the lighthouse. You need an ocean worth of power, and you need it in a controllable way. The Light is too weakened to serve. The Dark will be too destructive. But Water is perfect for that...after all, didn’t the Conqueror choose his grave to be an island? That allows someone to use a flaw in the Hegemon Command. The veil of secrecy can be revealed if the entire sea around it cooperates.”

“Yes,” Romeo Malatesti grunted, “but in case you forgot, we don’t have a Champion of Water...”

And then the Champion of Ares had the good grace to blush.

“Oh.”

“Yes, oh,” Lucrezia Sforza smiled sadly, before her Changelina returned the astrolabe in her hands.

The Styx Viper hissed. Alexandra hissed back. The giant black snake took the hint and slithered away.

“Wait a minute,” the Dark Queen for once looked...not worried, but definitely anxious. “You can’t be suggesting what I think you are.”

“And why not?” the Succubus raised an eyebrow.

“Because if you give yourself to the Power of Water here, you can’t know which Divine Aspect will be reawakened and what it will do to you!” The Champion of Loki said impatiently. “It will change you, and in a way that will likely equal the changes done to the Veela of Life!”

“Yes.”

Venus wasn’t per se a deity of water, Alexandra knew, but her Greek equivalent, Aphrodite, was born from the sea itself. And there was Poseidon, who was a lustful God, and whose contest with Athena had shaped the history of the Acropolis.

It wasn’t going to kill Lucrezia Sforza. But she sure by the One Ring wouldn’t be unchanged by it.

“This is just crazy,” that the Champion most of the Scuola Regina had believed insane was uttering these words didn’t lack irony, Alexandra was going to admit.

“We need balance,” the Succubus reminded them severely, in a voice that was completely at odds with her usual behaviour. “The Power of Fire is unleashed. Even if you could find your way to the Conqueror’s Grave by another improbable bath, Fire needs to be balanced with Water. Otherwise this world will *burn*.”

“And Venice will burn first.” Alexandra noted.

With the volcano that had just been created, it was guaranteed the imbalance would be...potentially catastrophic.

“Yes.”

The determined expression of the Succubus...it was not frightening, but you couldn’t ignore it.

The only alternative would be for another Champion to do it, like they had discussed it at Avalon...it felt an eternity ago.

Really, Alexandra knew she was the best alternative...and feeling Water in its full glory here...it wasn’t something she was ready to throw herself into.

“So be it,” the Potter Heiress spoke. “Unless someone else wants to volunteer?”

But none of the three other Champions did, and thus the matter was settled.

Lucrezia Sforza stepped forwards, and as she did, her clothes were removed by her Changelina, leaving her in a human appearance.

But not for long.

A second later, the Succubus revealed her true appearance.

And it was her true appearance, the Champion of Death knew it instinctively.

Her skin was midnight black, and seduction incarnate. Black wings, black tail, and black horns...only the hair and the eyes were crimson, a shade of red shining so brightly there had to be magic involved to achieve it.

“**Our paths must separate here. We will see each other again**.”

The torches had been extinguished by the Power of Water long ago, but none of them had had problem seeing and sensing what happened before.

Yet as Lucrezia Sforza began to sing, Alexandra suddenly felt as if her Hydra senses were dimming.

The night was listening.

The world was listening.

She had a vision of the Parthenon, except it was intact and gleaming. There was a crowd and a man with a stupendous voice was cheered by a crowd.

Olive trees were washed away, as water rose.

There were rivers flowing, flooding entire valleys.

Some flowed to a city that looked like Venice, while others she was sure she had never seen before.

The world convulsed and drowned.

There was only Water.

The song ended.

A pulse of Dark and Light burned.

Water withdrew.

It was like a gigantic wave was receding...Alexandra shook her head.

The Styx Viper hissed...but not angrily, and the snake slithered back to a position that indicated it would return to its guarding position the moment they would leave.

Lucrezia Sforza was nowhere to be seen.

But on the ancient stones, at the edge of the river, which looked like it had gotten a significant flow increase...

The astrolabe awaited.

Alexandra touched it, and immediately coordinates flashed into her mind. Images of an island she had never seen were conjured, despite having her Occlumency shields raised to prevent something like that.

“It worked.”

Romeo Malatesti’s relief was particularly loud...and sincere, though some might have been offended by his choice of words.

“Are you sure?” Eleonora wondered. “Lucrezia is-“

“One with the Plane of Water now?” The Champion of Ravenclaw didn’t know if the words were apt or not. And honestly, if something had turned badly...her knowledge of rituals was way too limited to correct it. “You heard her words. She was going to play her part...now it is time we play ours. Malatesti?”

“Let’s get out of the Erechtheion, and I will contact the Queen.” The Champion of Ares promised. “The Hegemon Command is broken...we should have no problems travelling to the Conqueror’s Grave now.”

**17 February 1995, a ship somewhere north of Crete, Mediterranean Sea**

Gregorios had always had an iron stomach, but after the cataclysm they had just endured, it was too much.

He vomited overboard, and didn’t feel any shame about it.

“You...you were right.” He told his second once his nausea began to disappear and the sky and the sea looked like they were in their proper place. “We were too close to the island. I should have heeded your warnings.”

And the *Cassandra*, his beloved ship, had almost been sunk due to his mistake.

“To be fair, Captain, I was more concerned about how any ritual could unleash violent winds and throw us against the Cretan coast...”

Gregorios swallowed heavily.

“Our losses?”

“Heavy,” recognised the other wizard with a wince.

Gregorios grimaced. Most of the sailors, unlike his men and he, were not wizards. In a plan like this, they could and would likely be sacrificed if the circumstances or his superior demanded it. But seeing them gone in what was the ocean combining a maelstrom, a sea tornado, and the Powers only knew what else...it hurt.

“Damn it...” the man who in the Exchequer had received the title of Pawn Sailor shook his head. “Use your finest Tracking Spells. We can’t do a lot given our orders, but let’s see if we can at least recover their bodies. Their families deserve that much.”

“Yes Captain,” his second said quietly, Gregorios feigning to ignore the sob which followed it. “At least we have accomplished our mission. The island was about ten nautical miles north-east of where our superiors thought it was...and thus we found it effortlessly.”

“Indeed.”

By all rights, there should have been nothing but the sea and the sky in the distance.

But there wasn’t.

The Dark Sun was once again making its presence known, and as a new day began, for the first time wizard eyes could admire an island which had been hidden for millennia.

It was a very mountainous island for sure. The peak was easily three hundred metres above sea level, and most of its contour was separated from the azure element by high cliffs.

Yet a white city with typical houses and structures from Ancient Greece could be seen.

They could be seen...and the same was true of a sort of shimmering orb letting a silver rain of magic fall upon the island.

“It seems our mission is ending here.”

“Captain?”

“Breaking the Hegemon Command seems to have activated another nasty creation of the megalomaniac. I think it’s the Artistic Punishment, or at least that’s the name our predecessors gave it once they studied its mysteries.”

“Is it an insurmountable obstacle?”

“It’s not.” Gregorios approved. “Still better warn the Queen that only the Champions can land upon this island without dying in a horrible fashion. Prepare the two-way Portkeys and several messages. The megalomaniac conqueror was paranoia incarnate when it came to erecting the defences of his last residence, and I want to avoid another disaster before it sinks the *Cassandra*.”

**17 February 1995, the Conqueror’s Grave Island, north of Crete, Mediterranean Sea**

“This island...I don’t like it at all.”

“Why by Nieflheim not?” Lyudmila snorted. “It is Alexander’s island...you should feel at home!”

Alexandra rolled her eyes.

“May I remind you that the man once accepted to be Ra’s Apprentice before deciding to change sides? My ancestor he may be, but I will never take it as a role model.”

“And the world is thankful for that,” Eleonora added a moment later. “Despite limited means, both magical and technological, Alexander conquered in mere years one of the greatest empires in history, and against the powerhouses of the time. If you decided to emulate him...well, I would be very afraid.”

“Duly noted,” the Champion of the Morrigan clicked her fingers, “and for the record, my current duties are enough.”

Confronting the Prime Minister and the House of Lords inside Westminster Palace had made her wonder if she really *wanted* to become Lady Protector of the British Isles. The titles and the privileges were cool. The theory was good. But when magic was revealed to the entire world and everything was a maelstrom of panic and anger, it suddenly turned out the benefits were outnumbered by the drawbacks.

“You certainly killed enough people on the bridge duelling the maniac.” The Champion of Innocence agreed. “But I doubt there will be much use of that talent here. I am not able to sense any life...this city is dead.”

“Oh, it’s dead.” Romeo Malatesti confirmed. “Alexander wanted his Egopolis that no one would come to loot like the thieves did for the Pharaohs of the Nile.”

Alexandra raised an eyebrow while chuckling.

“Egopolis?”

“It’s not even a joke. He called the city Alexandropolis.” The Champion of War complained. “By my Power, I know that I love snubbing the mediocre challengers and celebrating my victories, but the Conqueror’s arrogance...according to the old archives, the Conqueror decided over fifteen cities had to be called Alexandropolis, Alexandroupolis, or something similar before he died.”

“Fifteen?” Lyudmila made an appreciative expression. “Not bad.”

“And I am not counting Alexandria, Iskandria and other cities,” Romeo snorted. “The only thing positive I will say is that it is easy to defend.”

“Yes.”

The city of this island had been built on several levels, each with a large and tall white wall. The streets were tortuous, like those they had used to reach the entrance of the Acropolis at Athens.

It could have given her vibes of Minas Tirith...if they weren’t statues of Alexander *everywhere*.

“Are you really sure he intended to use that city as his capital?” Alexandra asked just to be sure.

Because there were really monuments dedicated to ‘Alexander’s glory’, ‘Alexander’s strength’, and so on no matter where she looked at...and they hadn’t even entered the city.

“Yes, he did.”

The Potter Heiress sighed.

“In that case, Egopolis may have been an incredibly accurate name for Mister Megalomaniac.”

What was the saying about never meeting your heroes?

Fortunately, hers were written in a fantasy book, and had little chance to materialise in the real world...

“Not that I want to press you or anything, but we don’t have an infinite amount of time.” The Dark Queen bared her fangs. “Shall we advance?”

“Yes...yes we shall.” Alexandra gave a disgusted look to a statue of bronze that was roughly six times her size, and which had probably cost more than the entire tuitions of the Scuola Regina for the year. “Let’s stay prudent. There are only four of us, and if the enchantment above our heads is there to prevent everyone but Champions of Magic to visit, there must be a reason.”

Honestly, she expected the statues to animate and attack before they reached the gate of the first wall.

But there was nothing. Nothing but silence and emptiness.

If there were traps and vicious enchantments waiting to be triggered...even her Hydra eyes could not perceive them.

It took them a couple of hours to climb up to the upper levels. Not just because they had to break through the gates – something a certain Fenrir Animagus did with relish – but also because they didn’t know any secrets of this island. The Conqueror’s Grave was a place where the Exchequer’s knowledge could be of no help.

They had to search the entire city for clues...alas, they didn’t find any.

Their only solution was to go up, and hope they hadn’t missed something.

And the more they did, the more Alexandra felt ill-at-ease.

“It reminds me of an abandoned city I visited in my dreams once.” The young witch confessed to Eleonora when they made a pause to drink and eat. “The collapsing city of Fate is exactly like that...okay Alexander’s is better maintained, but...those cities are truly dead.”

“I’ve seen it several times,” the Scuola Regina witch nodded, “I don’t think it’s exactly the same, but...they share enough common points...not a good sign.”

“Hey! I think I’ve seen something interesting.”

Romeo Malatesti pointed at a location two levels above...and sure enough it was at the very top of the city. It was still far away, but the enormous bronze-coloured gate was extremely eye-catching.

This time they didn’t bother searching the rest of the levels, and rushed to examine it.

It took them a few minutes and some more gates destroyed, but they reached it.

It was indeed a colossal bronze gate, one huge enough that a mid-sized Dragon or an adult Basilisk could have gone through the doors without difficulty.

“I don’t see any structure outside that could have been used...” Eleonora pointed out the obvious. “The architects of the tombs must have built the grave inside the mountain.”

And given the size of the island, they had a large amount of space at their disposal, provided they had magic to make the task less insurmountable.

“This must have been done before his death,” Romeo Malatesti explained. “No way could that sort of work have been made after it. The Generals were fighting each other for the throne, they wouldn’t have tolerated that all the resources would be diverted here...assuming they were keyed in the Hegemon Command, and in all likelihood, they weren’t.”

“Who cares?”

Lyudmila Romanov transformed into her Animagus form again, and this time the giant lupine monster was shrouded in Chaotic magic.

The impact when her attack struck the bronze gate was...err...really bloody terrifying if you hadn’t seen the Dark Queen fight before.

But when the dark clouds of Chaos power were sent away by the Mediterranean wind...the truth was obvious.

There wasn’t a single scratch on the bronze gate.

“This is a joke, right?”

Now they had a very big problem.

“War?”

“Yes, Death?”

“In order to not waste time, can you contact the Exchequer from here? Tell them we have found the Conqueror’s Grave...now we will be positively thankful for any help that explains us how to open it...please.”

**Author’s note**: There are some graves which are easy to locate and to open. Alexander’s grave...is not one of them.

The clock is ticking, and there are only four Champions left.

The adventures of Alexandra and the three other Champions will continue next month, I promise.

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