**Chapter 105**

**Secrets of Avalon**

**16 February 1995, Avalon**

Alexandra woke up to the loud sounds of sniffing.

The young witch opened her eyes...and had the sudden urge to giggle.

“Hello, small one...”

It was a rodent. It had clearly been the animal sniffing her, and it stared at her with an expression reminding her of the Weasley Twins.

Alexandra shook herself, before stretching and taking a more comfortable position on the moss.

And it was then she realised that while the animal was a rodent, it was the size of a very large dog.

“What sort of magical animal are you?”

Alexandra advanced a hand so she could pet the superb brown fur, but the animal took a step back and gave her a disapproving air.

“*I am a Chaos Beaver. And don’t touch my fur, intruder*!”

Alexandra blinked. First the dragons talked...and now the beavers were speaking too. This world was really filled with surprises.

“My boots! Give me back my boots, horrid rodent!” There was a large splash in the small river they had decided to sleep nearby last night, and Lyudmila Romanov was suddenly in the riverbed, fighting with another member of the ‘Chaos Beavers’.

Yes, this was definitely the kind of prank the Weasley Twins would have tried...if the target wasn’t a certain Champion of Chaos.

“Fair warning,” Alexandra warned the talking animal, “my companion can change into a giant wolf.”

“*We know*.” The beaver revealed the large incisors the species was famed for. “*Who do you think gave us the ability to speak your tongue*?”

“And you aren’t afraid?”

“*We are able to defend ourselves*,” something proven a second later as Lyudmila was surprised by two other beavers, which seem to use some sort of...tripping magic, allowing them to escape the Dark Queen. “*Now get out of my way. I am hungry, and you’re in the way of a delightful berry bush I saved for my morning snack*.”

Alexandra obeyed...and the Chaos Beaver charged the bush, and began to devour dozens of berries with a lack of manners that reminded her of Ron Weasley in the Great Hall.

“I will make myself a coat of these huge rodents!” Lyudmila grumbled as she came back, boots in hand, and completely wet from this little chaotic episode. “And I will remember this, **Loki**!”

“It’s a bit our fault, I freely admit,” Alexandra gave a nod in direction of the large pile of branches in the river that they had dismissed late night before going to sleep. “We decided to rest very close to their dam.”

“*Quite right*!” a certain beaver approved, stopping his bountiful berry meal, “*it is your fault*!”

“They are tricksters, nothing more.” The blonde witch scoffed. “And I’m of the mind to organise a little beaver throwing contest. They have just asked for a good lesson.”

“I would prefer if you did nothing of the sort, Champion.”

The two witches turned their head...and met the amused expression of the Queen of the Exchequer.

Morgane of Avalon was there, standing on a large rock behind them...and they hadn’t felt a single spark of magical power to warn them.

Alexandra sighed internally. At some point, it had been encouraging to see there was a lot for her to understand before she could be considered on the level as powerful Lady-level practitioners...but these days, it was really frightening.

“Why?” Lyudmila asked. “You’re organising riddle contests with them?”

“No. They’re essential to the regeneration of the rivers and the nature of Avalon, and we only have a single colony of them.” The vampiric witch revealed a mouth filled with fangs. “I’m afraid they are indispensable here.”

“*That’s right*!” The Chaos Beaver burped, perhaps due to the aforementioned feast of berries. “*We are indispensable! Now return to your lair with your horrible tail*!”

Lyudmila growled...but decided ultimately the punishment of the insolent rodent would wait for another day.

The legendary witch walked away, and the two Champions followed. They did it bare-footed; it seemed sacrilegious to walk with boots on the soft and magnificent moss.

There was no path; it was just the forest.

“Ask your questions, Alexandra.” Morgane said without turning her head, guiding them in this natural maze of trees and verdant plants.

The black-haired girl grimaced before deciding to go ahead.

“I’m sure you did watch me killing Emrys Myrddin. Given how much hatred there must have been between you two, why weren’t you here to slay him?”

“Two reasons,” the near-immortal witch answered with a voice calm and posed, “the first, I will admit, is petty. Long ago, when I was not that much older than you currently are, Myrddin began to justify his atrocious behaviour where I was concerned by pretending there was a Prophecy involved. I even remember him saying it out loud to Uther Pendragon.”

“A Prophecy?” Alexandra asked with scepticism.

“Yes, a Prophecy. One which would end with Myrddin dying by my hands.” Morgane made a sound of derision. “That was a lie, obviously. Prophecies are rarely that clear, and even if for some reason it wasn’t the case, where would Myrddin have heard it? He was no Oracle or Seer, and all those who lived would have preferred cutting their own throats rather than be in his presence. Moreover, you killed him last night...and Prophecies are always coming true. Thus Myrddin lied all the way. And I freely admit I took a lot of pleasure making sure his lies were revealed for what they were, no matter how long it took me to do so.”

“Err...I see.” Let it not be said that the Queen of the Exchequer was not vindictive. “And the second reason?”

“The second reason was that I needed to prepare for a specific ritual. The permanent death of a Light Phoenix is a very powerful symbol, and magic remembers.”

The explanation ended there, and Alexandra had a feeling she wouldn’t get more answers about this subject.

The Potter Heiress changed the topic.

“My fellow Champion had last night an interesting theory. She made a guess the explosion of the Grail, if no one stops it, is going to kill a good part of Europe.”

“This is not a theory. This is the truth.” Morgane replied with a tone that made clear she was deadly serious. “While Europe has erected many powerful wards over the last centuries, they are not sufficient to handle something like the Grail. Tens of millions will die, at the very least. Since the Light shockwave will also destroy harvests and many other things, it is entirely possible that given a year or two, the deaths will be over a billion.”

“Damn.” The Dark Queen commented. “And the alternatives weren’t worse?”

“Let me remind you, Champion of Loki,” the legendary witch did not display any anger or turn to face her, “that Ra was busy crafting a lethal plague while you battled him. This disease would not have been stopped by mere wards, and the core ingredient to fuel it was a Champion of Death’s blood. It would have taken a minor miracle for the ritual *not to kill over two billion humans*.”

The words rang like the truth...not that Alexandra wasn’t surprised. She had stared in Ra’s eyes, and heard his proclamations. The Champion of the Morrigan knew what the Avatar of the Light had promised. Ra wanted a world where the Light stood triumphant. Defeat was not acceptable for him; better for the world to burn than see it fall into darkness.

In that sense, Alexandra wondered if the flaw in the Grail’s enchantments had been indeed been a mistake. Why would Ra care if the artefact devastated Europe and a few other continental parts, as long as he was rid of his most dangerous enemies?

Still, the former Champion of the Morrigan had given her the truth. It was not her fault that the answer was utterly unpalatable.

Alexandra asked another question, one which had tormented her since Ra had humiliated her.

“What did the Archmage meant when I didn’t understand anything when it came to Fragarach...or Clarent?”

This time Morgane stopped walking and turned her to watch her with an expression of...pity?

“Magic is, in many ways, the blood of this planet. It is a potent source of energy...but it can be a cruel one. Clarent was forged anew to oppose Excalibur, but only in a single witch-knight’s hands.”

There was no doubt about who the Queen was speaking about...and it wasn’t Alexandra.

“Mordred,” the Champion of Hogwarts whispered.

“My daughter,” Morgane confirmed. “Magical foci, be they wand or swords, must be perfectly attuned to their wielders for the greatest magical effect to be gained. And Clarent, alas, was an imperfect weapon from the start.”

“How so?”

“Mordred was bonded to her dragon very young, but the Knights of the Round Table murdered her bonded before she was sixteen. As such, while Fragarach was forged anew into Clarent, we were forced to use a different dragon’s flames...and you can still call your sword Fragarach. The ritual was imperfect. There were other problems. My daughter was not much of a smith, and didn’t master more than meagre basics of Alchemy. I had to help her in a considerable manner...too much, in fact.”

“Yet...Clarent was able to hold its own against Excalibur at Camlann. Or was the legend untrue?”

“It was true. But we were hoping for far more than ‘holding our own’...the goal was to forge a weapon that would be the perfect counter to Excalibur. In that aspect, we failed. Clarent was considerably weakened, though the problems weren’t visible for the eye...and of course with my daughter dead, there was no one left to wield it afterwards.”

“That’s...” Alexandra wasn’t sure she could find the correct words.

“Let’s make no mistake: Excalibur or not Excalibur, it’s likely you would have broken Clarent in the next couple of years, Alexandra. You are getting far too powerful, and all foci not attuned to you, be they your sword or your wand, would have failed you at one time or another.”

“And how does one learn to do that?” The Potter Heiress asked suspiciously, fearing she already knew the answer.

The smile of the vampiric witch confirmed her suspicions.

“With practise, young Champion. With a lot of practise.”

Alexandra grimaced.

“I doubt that this ‘practise’ can be made in seven or thirteen days.”

“You are right,” Morgane bluntly told her, while resuming her walk, “in fact, we may even have less time than that. For the next battles, the Exchequer is willing to you the weapons you need.”

Well, that wasn’t ominous at all.

“And what price will I need to pay?”

The female Guardian of Avalon didn’t answer, instead increasing the pace of the walk, leading them deeper into the woods.

**16 February 1995, somewhere near London, England**

“It seems,” the Champion of Unity admitted, “the leader of the Order of Phoenix isn’t going to help us.”

“This is extremely inconvenient...Lord Galahad.”

“It is worse than that. We have to assume the Dark released sent its hunters the moment time froze for Venice.”

Most of the wizards and witches who had answered his summon were looking like they were deathly afraid and shaken to their very hearts. Several were even crying. The Champion turned his head away from those in disgust. Those cowards would never have won a significant victory for the Light, it had been logical to keep them away from the Fourth Task...

Unfortunately, it also meant they were the only ones left to obey his commands.

“The Light be Praised, there is a solution to destroy this odious time curse. This solution is Excalibur.”

“Lord Galahad...Excalibur is trapped with the Lord Archmage, at the heart of the ritual cast by the Dark Avatar. If we could reach it, we would have already freed the Archmage, Praise the Light!”

The Champion of Unity gritted his teeth.

“I know that. Trapped in a moment where time has ceased to exist, Excalibur can’t be wielded. But it can be summoned away. There is an artefact which was forged for this very specific purpose!”

Most of the Knights of the Army of Light – as unworthy as those cowards were of the name – didn’t understand. Only three out of forty did. And all looked furious.

“It is the will of the Archmage that this artefact to remain in the depths of the Rhine until this world is no more! The Ring has done enough damage in the few years it was wielded by the Champions of the Light!”

“The Archmage ordered to not use unless the situation was dire enough,” the Light Champion corrected angrily. “Are you going to tell me the current disaster is not dire enough?”

“Let’s say you are willing to use the Ring and that Excalibur indeed is freed from this prison of time...what then, Lord Galahad? Using the holy blade against Time itself will be slow, dangerous, and may not even be faster than the time it will take for Venice to be freed from the ritual!”

“I intend,” the Perfect Knight said coldly, “to kill the last true descendant of Mordred, wherever she hides. Between the power of Excalibur and my royal claim, I will make sure Britannia will be mine and will accept the Light for seven generations. With this, I will have the strength to free the Archmage by myself.”

The wizard who had last spoken, an old man who must have seen more than one hundred winters, looked at him with utter disgust.

“You are a lunatic.”

“The Statute is over! There is no more reason to hide who we are!”

“I was not referring to that!” The old wizard retorted. “You want to take the Curse and challenge someone who is certainly a candidate for the Ragnarok Prophecy! What happens if you lose?”

“I won’t lose. With Excalibur, I can’t lose!”

Another wizard shook his head and drew his wand.

“I won’t be part of this folly!”

“You will.” Galahad commanded. “Or I will make sure you will regret it for the rest of your miserable life!”

**16 February 1995, Avalon**

It was a massive stone which must have been used as a place where wizards and witches debated in ancient times.

It must have been moved by magic from a quarry to this place, for they were in the middle of the woods, and Alexandra wasn’t sure even the biggest truck in existence would be sufficient to transport that rock.

It was old rock, and it had been carved with thousands of Oghams.

It was broken in two parts, and given how the Hydra in her could still sense the sparks of Light that remained centuries after the fact, the Champion of Death knew that she had to ‘thank’ Excalibur for this old destruction.

There were seats of wood around the rock. Although ‘seats’ may be the wrong way to describe them. It was as if the gigantic old oak which had spread everywhere had shaped its monumental roots so that they became human-purposed objects.

The other Champions waited for them here.

Romeo Malatesti and Lucrezia Sforza had decided to wait for them upon these old wooden seats. Eleonora di Riva had not. And as Morgane Rys’Ygraine climbed some branches to dominate the assembly on a black throne of branches and bark, Alexandra decided to stay where she was, with the Champion of Innocence on her left...and the Champion of Chaos on her right.

“I heard Ra’s favourite executioner speaking last night about his oh so-righteous genocidal convictions.” The Champion of Morrigan began. “Since I doubt there was any truth said without accident, I want to hear your version of events. I want to know the full history of this war we are trapped into.”

“The full history?” For the first time, there was irony in the voice of the Queen. “I’m afraid we don’t have enough time to recount millennia of wars, battles, and hopes that were cruelly trampled under the methodical rule of Archmage Ra...but very well, I will give you the short version.”

The Oghams began to burn...and visions of landscapes which were nothing like the woods of Avalon appeared.

It was somewhat like Egypt, with pyramids and certain recognisable elements...except Alexandra was sure Egypt had never been so green and paradise-like. There were enormous rivers, many rivers bigger than the Nile, and jungles bigger than the British Isles.

“Millennia ago, humanity pushed aside the boundaries of what had been thought impossible,” the voice of the Queen was distant, “and no nation had done as much as Keter, the great kingdom of what would be known today as North Africa.”

For a moment, the Champions were given what would have been a view from high above...and the kingdom was indeed properly unbelievable. It went from the Straits of Gibraltar to Suez, and controlled everything from the Mediterranean to the Great Lakes of Central Africa.

“Other kingdoms had developed great works, but Keter was the one to invent many of the arcane devices that merged what the young of today would call magic and technology. The bold inventors wished to usher a new age of wonders, and though they were some setbacks, their successes were beyond count.”

Immense magical carpets were levitating above a large city-pyramid. Ten thousand lighthouses were built across seemingly-impenetrable jungles. Nature was reshaped to fit the ideals of beauty.

“All of those lands were governed by the Pharaoh of Keter, a great battle-wizard...maybe the greatest wizard to have ever lived. The future seemed bright, for most of the other kingdoms under his reign pledged themselves to obey his rule, and great magical roads were built, along with thousands of artefacts to make sure trade prospered.”

There were thousands more images, and the more she saw, the more Alexandra was impressed. In its time, Keter had to have been the superpower of its age, and unlike the nations of today, it was using magic to bolster its strength to unimaginable heights.

How the hell did a kingdom so prosperous disappear from history?

“And then war came.” The visions were replaced by...blur of images and scenes of destruction. “We don’t know exactly who the Enemy was. We just know...it wasn’t human. We know all the kingdoms united under Keter’s banners. And that a great spell, perhaps the most powerful of all times, was cast by millions of mages, to obliterate the Enemy. Thousands of dragons participated in its working too.”

The lands of Keter reappeared, but this time it was evident the Golden Age was gone. Many cities had fallen into disrepair. Yet for every building which collapsed, there were two or three which were raised to replace the crippled infrastructure.

“Keter began to recover,” Morgane told them as if echoing her thoughts, “it was wounded, but its injuries could be healed. The cities, the people, and the kingdom began to heal. But the Pharaoh was old now. Old, exhausted...and with no children left, for all his sons, much like himself, had fought the now-obliterated Enemy...but unlike him, they did not survive to see the victory.”

Alexandra grimaced. She had a feeling where it was leading...internal problems...the kind which destroyed kingdoms and countries.

“The Pharaoh did not wish to marry again, for all the women he had loved were irreplaceable in his heart. But he needed many children, for the Thirteen Powers had great need of magical practitioners; the Obliteration Ritual had killed many and the losses of the war had been grievous well before that. He took many concubines, and sired many children. And late on a day of autumn, a young concubine gave birth to twins. One was born mere minutes before sunset...the other mere minutes after the night began its reign.”

Ra and Osiris.

“They were not the only children, of course. All in all, the Pharaoh must have sired near sixty. As all traditions of Keter demanded, they were all spread across the Thirteen Temples once they reached twelve. The older of the twins was pledged to Innocence and the Light. The younger one was pledged to Chaos and the Dark. By all accounts...the two were totally unsuitable for their respective Temples.”

It might have been funny, Alexandra knew...if it hadn’t killed millions, and wasn’t about to kill anymore.

“For better or for worse, the mages of Keter weren’t stubborn fools. They knew it could happen, and the sons and daughters of the Pharaoh were allowed to change of Temples and dedicated to another Power they thought was more attuned to their magic. But it couldn’t happen before they were sixteen or seventeen, the time for their first magical maturity to be reached. The son who received the name of Ra did not wish to wait. And alas, he was one of the favourite sons of the Pharaoh.”

“Which Temple did he choose to abandon Innocence for?” Alexandra asked, dreading the answer.

“Life,” of course the bastard had chosen that. “Of course,” the legendary witch continued, “at the time, it was thought to be a curious but unimportant detail. Ra was one of many potential Heirs to the Throne. But as the years passed, his prestige and his influence seemed to rise to new heights...in spite of something plenty of Life devotees complaining about: while Ra’s powers were stronger than they ever had been, theirs were on the wane.”

The image focused on a very, very old wizard on a silvery throne...the Pharaoh, no doubt. And there was one very familiar figure on his right, whispering in his ear...

“Nothing seemed to be able to stop the rise of the golden son of the Pharaoh. For reasons that were never completely explained, the High Vizier and several high figures of the Court supported his deeds no matter how imaginary they might be. Voices of the Temple of Fire were silenced, several times by force. Resources which might have gone to the reconstruction of several Orders were now directed only to Life or Light, and in general the Priests of Innocence and Fire protested what was done in their name.”

There was a new memory, one where dozens of proud and dignified men and women met each other. They were all clearly brothers and sisters. They were all ill-at-ease. Until one of them rises. Alexandra recognised him immediately: it was a younger Osiris.

He spoke, and while several of his siblings urged him to change his course, the decision he had taken was approved.

“Osiris knew Ra mustn’t become the new Pharaoh. This is why he volunteered to sabotage the Trial of Shadow, all the while killing the High Vizier and blaming it on his twin. The hope was to destroy Ra’s chances to become Pharaoh: by law, the ruler of Keter had to master the thirteen different magics of the Powers; a failure in one was a failure for all.”

Well, it seemed Myrddin had said the truth in one case, though it might have been an accident.

“And it failed.” Lyudmila Romanov commented.

“It succeeded.” Morgane corrected. “The High Vizier was killed. Ra would be fundamentally unable to wield any magic from the Darkness from this day onwards. But all the children had underestimated how much the old Pharaoh was blind when it came to Ra. For all the lack of proof, the Pharaoh exiled Osiris, sentencing him to never walk the soil of Keter again. Osiris obeyed. Seven days later, the Pharaoh was dead...and Ra was crowned, despite it being against all traditions.”

There was a pause.

“In the next three years, most of the sons and daughters of Pharaoh disappeared, never to be seen again.”

That at least answered her question if Ra had always been a murderous bastard or not.

“It would have been bad enough, but there were alarming developments all across Keter.”

Mages reported their powers vanishing. Elder Dragons were found dead, their organs harvested in what was one of the greatest crimes anyone of Keter could do. Harvests began to fail.

“At last, the last Priests of Chaos, the wizards and witches Osiris had always tried to distance himself from, escaped and fled out of Keter to inform him of their suspicions. The journey was extremely perilous, and they were hunted for countless moons by Ra’s fanatical hunters. In the end, only one had the time to inform him of what his brother intended.”

And on that day, the War of the Light and the Dark had begun, and it would rage for millennia.

“Osiris returned to Keter. Thousands rallied to his banners. It helped that Ra, for all his coronation’s promises of restoring the pre-war glory of Keter, had in fact accelerated its decline, and his ban of five out of Thirteen Temples was turning entire cities against him. Dragons and many powerhouses pledged their allegiance to Osiris, who was now thought to be the last possible alternative to the throne of Pharaoh.”

Two armies faced each other on a battlefield. They looked extremely similar, which had to be excepted...and Gods, the air was filled with dragons and air-mounted warriors. That had to be-

There was a colossal explosion of Light, and in an instant, one-third of Osiris’ army had been pulverised.

“It was on that day,” Morgane said in an emotionless sentence, “that the world understood there wasn’t one Power of Light anymore; there were three. The battle was lost before it even began.”

What followed...was butchery. The men fighting for Ra were no doubt the predecessors of the Trinity, and in case one wondered, no, they were just as fanatical as their successors would end up to be. There had been a massive river near the battlefield.

It turned red with blood for hundreds of kilometres.

“Ra had used his ultimate authority of Pharaoh to change what shouldn’t have been changed. He was both the Enslaver and the High Priest of the Light. And everyone who survived the massacre understood in mere hours that if they did not do something incredibly untraditional very quickly, they were all going to be butchered one by one.”

Alexandra *really* didn’t like where it was going.

“Changing the nature of other Powers to the Dark was a terrible and desperate act,” the voice of the Queen was anything but triumphant, “but there wasn’t a choice: Fire, Metal, and Water...those elements Ra had the power by his authority of Pharaoh to *illuminate* them into the Light. He couldn’t do that to the Dark. While it had never been intended that way, the end result was that only the Dark was denied to him.”

Even Lyudmila seemed taken aback.

“You mean...they made Osiris the Avatar of Darkness despite the fact he was totally unsuitable for it? You’re not serious!”

“I am completely serious.” Morgane answered, making no apology. “Though make no mistake: Osiris had little talent for Chaotic magic. However, he remained an incredibly talented mage; one of the many prodigies the Pharaoh line was known to sire regularly. But yes, him being chosen was due to the fact he was the last Great Mage of the Dark. And as Ra couldn’t touch the Dark, he was the best choice to see a new tomorrow.”

The Queen of the Exchequer showed them again the battlefield...at first the Potter Heiress wondered why...but the reason became all too obvious. Minute after minute, what had been gold-and-green fields where fruits and vegetables were cultivated...it had become a desert.

“Magical oaths were made. Desperate Priests prostrated themselves before the Powers. When the next battle would be fought, there would be three Powers of the Light against three Powers of the Dark.”

The last words weren’t uttered by the vampiric witch, but by Romeo Malatesti.

“And the greatest magical kingdom to have ever existed *burned*.”

**16 February 1995, King’s Cross Station, London, England**

Neville felt empty.

In fact, it wasn’t just that he *felt* empty, he *was* empty.

There were many things he didn’t remember from the last days, but the Boy-Who-Lived could not forget the Light magic coursing in his veins, and the sheer sensation of pleasure which went with it.

All of that was gone.

The future Lord Longbottom had been promised power, and he had received it.

But when the power was no longer there...*everything* was missing.

He could still use his wand...with a lot of difficulty. It was like his magical focus was struggling to understand it was really Neville who was casting the spells. As a result, his wand was partially fighting him.

This was...not good, but not as bad as feeling like a stranger in his own body.

Neville looked as old as a seventh-year...a seventh-year who had most of his body covered in scars.

Merlin damn it, the Gryffindor Champion was looking in a mirror, and all he saw was a perfect stranger!

“I...” for a moment, he didn’t find the words. “I lost...everything.”

“No.” Professor Dumbledore countered his words immediately. “Believe me, you haven’t, Champion Longbottom.”

“Professor...I am no longer the Champion of Fate. Potter...the Champion of Death made sure of that.”

His memories were incomplete, but he remembered enormous snake fangs and black scales. He remembered drowning and enduring more pain than he ever thought possible.

And his Nemean Lion inner animal was cowering in fear in the depths of his soul, unwilling to influence him in any way.

Alexandra Potter had come incredibly close to kill him, and without the Grail, Neville would be dead.

“I was speaking of your title of Champion of House Gryffindor.”

Ah...right. Now that the Headmaster mentioned it...

“I don’t think I deserve to be the Gryffindor Champion.” The fourth-year boy - who did not look his age anymore – affirmed guiltily. “That was all Fate, not me.”

“I see...” Albus Dumbledore looked very old at that moment. “It is of little importance, I suppose. The chances of the Tournament continuing with the egregious breaches of the Statute of Secrecy...they are slim in the extreme. We will deal with it in due time. For now, I have to leave you. I must go the Ministry and explain to them the danger represented by the madman Possessing the body of Leo Black.”

“Err...Professor...with most of the Light artefacts and wizards trapped in the city of Venice, there aren’t a lot of things he can do. He drank from the Grail,” like me, Neville didn’t add, struggling not vomit at the revulsion he felt, “but that doesn’t make him an army by himself. You easily forced him to flee, and I’m pretty sure there are dozens of wizards that can duel him. I think he is going to hide somewhere in London. Why wouldn’t he?”

“From personal experience,” the Headmaster of Hogwarts was prompt to crush any sense of optimism he had, “I can tell you the young, brave, and foolish wizards tend to believe themselves immortal until it has been decisively proven to them this isn’t the case. You have received this lesson. The idiot who proclaimed himself ‘true King of Britannia’ didn’t. He is going to try something stupid. Let’s hope I can stop him before he does.”

Albus Dumbledore Apparated away after these words, leaving Neville alone to deal with the injuries of his soul.

**16 February 1995, Avalon**

Alexandra for a few seconds took the time to assimilate the words. Her next question, as a result, wasn’t about the war itself.

“I know Life was the Power of Fire long ago. Innocence was Light. Chaos was Darkness. Which were the other Planes of Power?”

“A good question, Alexandra,” Morgane approved from her wooden throne, and her eyes flashed in deathly green light, “there were five Elemental Powers for all natural things. Life, as you said, was the Power of Fire. Desire was the Power of Water. Wisdom was the Power of Wood. Air belonged to Confusion. And Metal was the realm of Death.”

Well...the Potter Heiress could honestly say she hadn’t expected that.

“The world and the Powers changed a lot, didn’t they?”

“More than you could possibly imagine.” The Queen of the Exchequer answered. “There were the three Ritual Powers after that. Unity was the Power of Glass. Judgement was the Power of Lightning. And War was the Power of Blood.”

The last one was anything but a surprise, needless to say.

“The last five Powers were called the Soul Powers. Innocence was the Light, and Chaos was the Darkness. Corruption, which was once called Transformation, was known as the Power of Dreams. Order was Truth. And Fate, greatest and most sacred of all Thirteen Powers, was Magic.”

The last sentence terrified her. The Champion of the Morrigan knew Fate being a Light Power was bad; she had no idea it had been *that* bad.

“I suppose Osiris persuaded War first into becoming a Dark Power.”

“You suppose correctly,” Malatesti smiled, though honestly, Alexandra didn’t see what was there to be prideful about. The moment Ra had turned Life into a Light Power, Keter’s doom was a serious possibility. “Desire was the other.”

At least Lucrezia Sforza didn’t smile at these words.

“Ra had Life, Wisdom and Innocence by then,” the Queen of the Exchequer continued her story, “and for a time he grew overconfident, destroying the temples and ruling as the Light Tyrant he always wanted to be. Three years day-for-day, Osiris taught him the folly of that. Not far from the place where the city of Cairo sits today, the rebuilt Dark Army ambushed the main Light host, and this time the result was a one-sided rout for the accursed Pharaoh and his forces.”

The magical visions...they showed carnage on a grand scale. The two armies had changed. The golden warriors were all on one side...and they were massacred by the thousands. The dragons were all, save rare exceptions, fighting on the side of Osiris. In the end, it ended with a mountain of corpses.

“It was a massive victory...but it was incomplete. Ra had managed to fight his way out of the trap. And while he was already fanatically to win at any costs, he was not stupid. He knew what had happened. In the days where he returned to his seat of power, he turned Order into a Power of Light.”

The scenes which followed made clear that the first two battles had been mere skirmishes. They were just child’s tantrums compared to the madness that was to come. The armies grew to monstrous sizes, and the fields grew barren and lifeless. Sorcery burned the sky, and honour died, for it the Power of Truth was no more, how would you trust your own allies?

And yet, for all the blow it had been...it had clearly failed to turn the tide of the conflict back into Ra’s favour.

“It took five years of war for Osiris to be able to convince Confusion and Air to side with the Darkness. Once it was done, the eastern provinces, the lands of what is today known as Egypt, were consolidated and heavily warded. Armies were rebuilt, and new allies were found. Of course, while the alliance did that, Ra enslaved Judgement.”

Alexandra had thought her lightning spells were devastating. She had been completely wrong. What Ra unleashed...it was making her First Task’s exploit a mockery of lightning. It was devastation incarnate. Entire cities were reduced into ashes. Pyramids disappeared into torrents of thunder. Hundreds of thousands of trees were roasted, along with the entire wildlife that lived with them.

The Dark answered, of course. Nightmares began to plague the Light commanders. Outside the Light-warded cities, men began to turn against each other, and often transform into abominations.

A Fifth Power had joined the Dark, and its name would eventually become Corruption.

The young Champion of Ravenclaw didn’t turn away when the next campaign was shown, but by the Morrigan, it was tempting. The heartlands of Keter, the verdant landscapes which had been a paradise like no other, were ruined beyond recognition. The fortresses were razed to their foundations. Magical animals were butchered by the thousands to serve as ritual-fodder.

And yet, as always, there was worse to come.

“Ra enslaved Unity into the Light.” It had been the Power of Glass, she knew that now. And it was...awful. Suddenly, there was an entire desert of glass where there had been cereal fields and a massive river. “And two entire armies were lost as they tried to stop him.”

The Basilisk Slayer knew what was going to follow. There was only one Power that could be claimed, after all.

“Death.”

“Death.” Morgane repeated grimly.

At least it was quick.

In mere minutes, millions died. The course of the war had entirely changed, this was evident. Before, Ra had been on the defensive, but he could make it a costly butchery, bleed the armies of the Dark until they were forced to pause and rebuild, giving him more time to rebuild his own forces.

There was nothing of the sort anymore. Six Light Powers against six Dark Powers...and the Dark was winning in a decisive manner.

Soon enough, Ra was besieged in his own capital...which had become everything wrong there was about the Light.

“Osiris realised too late he had been wrong. He and Ra were not the last children of Pharaoh alive. There was another.” Why did it feel like very nasty news? “She was the High Priestess of Fate, and Ra had kept her imprisoned since he was Pharaoh.”

A rather beautiful woman appeared...the familial resemblance to Ra and Osiris was obvious. But it was not just her pose and her smile that attracted her gaze. It was her eyes. There were green, these eyes.

They were the same green as Morgane’s and Alexandra’s.

“Not the eyes of Death, after all,” the Ravenclaw whispered, “the eyes of Fate.”

“We still don’t know how she managed it,” Morgane admitted. “We think she managed to cast some secret ritual of her Priesthood during the long years Ra’s torturers made her life a living hell. But we are all in her debt.”

“Why?” Eleonora asked, her voice trembling in fear.

“Because if she hadn’t cast enough of Fate’s Power into the Darkness to protect us, we would not be speaking on this island right now. The Dark would not be able to exist. Fate was the Power of Magic...the greatest Power, the one against which there is no counter.”

“How did you screw up so badly?” Lyudmila asked angrily. “A ritual like this must days to complete! The Dark Avatar should have felt it hundreds of kilometres away!”

“He did.” The Queen stated, and for a moment hatred flashed in her eyes. “Unfortunately, he did not anticipate all the armies of goblins betraying the Dark. They turned against the Darkness when Ra promised them a king’s ransom of gold, and putting them down was a bloodbath which cost the Dark several days.”

So that was why the Exchequer hated so much the goblins despite coexisting and allying with so many other magical species...

“This was not the last time goblins tried to betray us.” Morgane Rys’Ygraine declared coldly. “They’re trying a similar treachery as we speak. But this was the most costly. By the time these backstabbers had been forced to flee, Ra had reinforced his capital, and the advance was incredibly bloody...and far too slow.”

They all saw as Osiris fought his way through the streets. They watched as he climbed the steps of what had been the Pharaoh’s Palace-Pyramid...and they all knew what was going to happen. A sword of pure Light rose.

This time, Alexandra looked away.

“With this fratricide, Ra was granted control of Fate. And his first command was to decree the destruction of everything that was Dark in Keter.”

It was the end of the kingdom...no, the end of a world. In mere seconds, tens of millions died. Enclaves which had stood against the ravages of this cataclysmic war were annihilated without warning. Dragons fell from the skies, and became mass of bones before they touched ground.

In less than a minute, Africa had been turned into a graveyard. There were nothing but ruins and corpses, and the former and the latter were so numerous there wasn’t enough hours for someone to count them.

The Armies of the Dark had been annihilated...the tattered banners were standing above a spectacle of desolation.

And Ra? The Avatar of Light *smiled*.

The bastard had destroyed the world, and he was smiling.

A few seconds later, his smile turned to horror, as his brother stood at the base of the Palace-Pyramid.

Osiris was alive. The Avatar of the Dark had survived.

And the survivors of the Light began to die in colossal numbers.

They had been spared the onslaught by luck, but this time they couldn’t do anything to save their lives and Dark incantations turned their blood into poison.

Ra’s expression of panic was extremely pleasant to contemplate...but alas, it didn’t last.

And the Archmage of Light, visibly exhausted, uttered some kind of banishment spell.

It wasn’t the kind of Edict which had forced the Avatar of the Dark to go into exile the first time. But it threw him out of the capital of Keter.

The Light had won, but Osiris survived.

How long would it take until more Dark wizards and witches rallied to him? Alexandra didn’t know. But she was certain they had seen the birth of the Exchequer.

There was only one intriguing point that remained to be asked.

“Why ‘Archmage’? Why not ‘Pharaoh’?”

“Fratricide was an unforgivable sin among the kingdom of Keter. And while he was very careful in the first years, using his agents to do eliminate his brothers and sisters, the final sacrifice of the High Priestess of Fate, his sister, was done by his hand alone. At this moment, no matter the will of the Powers or the previous Pharaoh, Ra was denied the absolute power he craved.”

“You mean?” Lyudmila howled in laughter.

“Yes. Ra cannot rule. If he tries to place a crown upon his head, the kingdom he imposes his Light tyranny upon immediately rebels or disintegrates. The Prophecy of Ragnarok does not just predict the Light’s downfall. It is also the price the Archmage of Light will have to pay for his greatest crime until he breathes for the last time. Ra is the Archmage of Light because all the titles of kingship have been denied to him.”

**16 February 1995, not far from Duisburg, Germany**

The Champion of Unity had never liked the Rhine River. For him, it had always been a cold and ugly serpent of water, and to know a priceless artefact awaited in the riverbed had only soured further his feelings.

And then there were the Undines.

But among the Knights of the Army of the Light, they were better known as the Guardians of the Ring.

Galahad didn’t have time to even touch the water.

They manifested first.

They looked like young and beautiful women, but this was a lie, like the rest of the magic which had given them birth.

They looked like they were made of water. That at least was perfectly true. But then humans were also made of water, and they could die. The Guardians would end today if they tried to stand in his way.

“**You are not welcome here, Champion**.” The words were sung, not spoken. He hated this music. It was something born of melancholy and curses. It was the Song of the Undines, legacy of the Curse of the Niebelungen. “**Leave, and do not return**.”

“The Ring is needed! The Prophecies are ending! Fulfil your purpose! I am Galahad of the Round Table, and I command you to let the Ring serve the Light once more!”

“**You are not of the Round Table**.” The First Undine insulted him.

“**You are the remnants of Arthur’s soul, tainting a thousand innocents**.” The Second Undine added.

“**You are traitor to Innocence**.” The Third Undine concluded. “**Soon the blood of your crimes will be there on your hands for all to see**.”

“I command you!”

“**And we refuse to obey**,” the First Undine stuck her tongue out in childish provocation. “**The Ring was thrown into the Rhine for a reason, Champion of Shattered Glass. As long as it stays there, the Dark will not have its triumph. The Curse of the Niebelungen will be kept dormant. Ragnarok will be delayed for another day. Leave**.”

“I will call Excalibur and claim my Crown. It is not within your power to deny me!”

The Second Undine advanced by a few feet until it was only a long spear or so away from him.

“**You are right. It is not our power which will deny you. It is your own blindness**.”

“Nonsense.”

“**We see the Curse of the Grail running in your veins, Leo Black. Did you really think there would be no price to pay?”**

“I am not Leo Black anymore!”

“**He let you merge with his soul. You can’t deny his gift, Champion of Shattered Glass**.” The Second Undine bared her teeth. “**Much like you can’t deny all Crowns turn to ashes when the Curse is branded upon your very soul**.”

Galahad drew his sword.

“You know you can’t win against me. Why are you opposing me? I am going to forge a new Britannia! I can give you Dominion over hundreds of rivers for this service!”

Watery blades were conjured, and in mere heartbeats, the Undines’ appearance changed. They had been akin to the nymphs before; there were now azure Valkyries in liquid form.

“**No. You won’t**.”

The Guardians of the Rhine charged, and the Battle for the Ring began.

**16 February 1995, Avalon**

The fact the Avatar of Light – a wizard she had grown to hate a lot in the last days – was fundamentally unable to be a King because Magic itself wouldn’t tolerate it was extremely funny, in Alexandra’s opinion.

But it made a lot of sense. The Ravenclaw girl had often wondered why there wasn’t a nation ruled by the Army of Light somewhere in the world, one Ra was governing when he wasn’t busy hunting Dark Lords and Ladies.

Now the answer was revealed: he couldn’t. And with Myrddin out of the war since the era of Camlann, there was no one immortal to take the reins, meaning the Light wasn’t able to keep power after its endless succession of ‘victories’.

Alexandra admired what the last High Priestess of Fate did, really. Her brother had killed her, but she had ensured all his victories would be built on quicksand.

It was one thing to win; quite another to rebuild after the fighting was over. The Dark couldn’t win, but it could learn from its mistakes, and rule in the shadows where the Light wasn’t able to find them. The Light could and did win, but while it could learn from its mistakes for a few years, the end result was that it couldn’t change its global strategy, because magic itself remembered the fratricide of the Avatar.

“What of the Great Artefacts?” Alexandra asked at last. “I didn’t see any of them being used during this...during the First War. And since the Grail was imbued with the Seven Powers of the Light, I suppose it was created after that apocalypse.”

“The first of the Great Three artefacts was created centuries after the First War, yes,” the Queen of the Exchequer answered as the light of the Ogham dimmed, and the Dark Sun reappeared over their heads in the skies over Avalon. “We don’t know for sure which one it was. The Grail of Ages, the Ark of the Covenant, and the Spear of Calamity were created in close succession. And it would take decades before there was something which could be considered an open battle. What we know for sure is that those ones were the First Three.”

“We have become quite familiar with the Grail and its powers,” an artefact that by all rights, should never have existed. “The Ark of the Covenant was denied to him long ago, from what you hinted.”

“It was denied to Ra, yes.” Lucrezia intervened. “But it didn’t stop the Army of Light from creating inferior copies in the centuries after.”

“Copies for what?” Alexandra wondered out loud. “I very much doubt they did create permanent portals to the Plane of Light with every artefact. Otherwise all their Champions, including Fate, would have run out of Power long ago.”

“You’re right; the copies of the Ark weren’t connected to the Light itself. But they were ritually enchanted to contain other powerful Light artefacts. That way, as long as they were stored in one, no soul touched by the Dark could ever approach one, never mind touch them.” The Succubus inspected her nails. “Of course, they didn’t have the protections of the true Ark. The copies were all destroyed in due time, though alas it is always possible the Trinity managed to hide one.”

That was...annoying and problematic, all right.

“And the Spear? What is it purpose?”

“Annihilation of the souls,” the answer made her shiver. “It is a weapon which breaks the cycle of Life and Death.”

“Ra didn’t try to use it in the last battle.” No way Alexandra would have missed something like that.

“The Spear doesn’t exist anymore.”The vampiric witch informed her. “It was shattered on Mount Golgotha, two thousand years ago, when a Champion brainwashed from the cradle did an idiotic thing: he used the Spear against a fellow Champion of the Light...one of Innocence, in fact.”

“The stories I read don’t describe it like that,” Eleonora said, her face suddenly looking very angry...for quite understandable reasons.

Morgane of Avalon chuckled, though there was no cheerfulness behind it.

“The Archmage,” the irony was incredibly thick, “made it his lifetime mission to try to erase all traces of the ‘mistake’. Given the religious implications it had, he wasn’t exactly successful.”

“The artefact was completely destroyed, then?”

“Oh, no, Alexandra. Ra took the Light metal from the Spear, the pieces that could be saved, at least, and forged it into a Ring.”

“A Ring, really?” The Dark Queen scoffed. Alexandra wasn’t sharing her optimism. Please, please, let her intuition be wrong...

“A Ring that was forged once again to summon Excalibur when and where the wielder wanted.” The Queen of the Exchequer said coldly. “A Ring allowing its wielder to see the invisible and become it for brief moments. A Ring increasing the strength of the person donning it on one’s finger. A Ring that would allow a Light mage to dominate anyone to command anyone lacking the mental fortitude to resist.”

The silence in the forest was absolute.

“And a Ring that is so heavily cursed that it led every Champion of the Light who used it to a litany of tragedies. Sometimes, we didn’t even need to act anymore whenever the Ring was active; all we had to do was to wait, and let the Light tear itself apart. In the end, it was thrown into a river, and disappeared into legend.”

Alexandra closed her eyes for a second.

“Tolkien didn’t really invent the Ring, didn’t he?” The avid reader of the *Lord of the Rings* murmured.

She should have remembered vampires had excellent senses.

“Alexandra.” The Potter Heiress opened her eyes again. “While Tolkien was an extremely gifted writer, the legend of a Cursed Ring was inspired by the Legend of the Niebelungen. And unfortunately, the legend and the tragedy of the tales have a lot of truth behind them. The Champion of Loki can confirm I speak the truth.”

Lyudmila Romanov grimaced in discomfort...which was an odd thing to look at.

“They were Champions of the Light...but they didn’t deserve what fate awaited them in the end.”

The second part of the sentence, no matter how reluctantly given, was a clear sign things must have been extremely bad.

“But why does it matter?” The Dark Queen of Durmstrang continued. “The Ring was thrown away for a reason. The Light can’t use it without the tragedies returning again; the Dark can’t use it at all.”

“It can summon Excalibur at a moment the Light is in dire need of it.” The Queen bared her teeth.

“They don’t need Excalibur,” Lyudmila told them with a contempt that was truly sovereign. “They need someone with a brain to lead their armies. And certainly new armies too, given how many wizards and witches we personally slaughtered to reach the Plaza di San Marco. Oh, and Champions, can’t forget the Champions. Death here removed quite a few of them from their order of battle, and after Delacour’s defection, they don’t have that many left.”

Alexandra felt a strong urge to giggle. She managed to control herself and not to, but it was hard.

“Nobody can be that stupid,” the Champion of Loki spoke, “not even a Grail-drunk fool.”

There were three heartbeats...and then there was an enormous magical pulse. It was...it was a cacophony, assaulting the senses.

It was a song that whispered of destruction and massacres beyond count. It was the music of tragedy and unending disaster.

“One Ring to rule them all. One Ring to find them. One Ring to bring them all, and in the darkness bind them.”

Alexandra sighed. Expect when reading the *Lord of the Rings* aloud, these were not words she had expected to say aloud to describe a real situation.

“You were saying?” The Queen of the Exchequer asked sarcastically the Champion of Chaos.

“I stand corrected.” Lyudmila shook her head. “There is really someone *that* stupid...”

**16 February 1995, not far from Duisburg, Germany**

The last Undine fell to his Light incantation, and Galahad screamed in victory.

“I told you...” with an enormous effort, the Knight of the Army of Light *pulled*. Immediately, the great artefact answered from the depths of the river. “The Ring is *mine*!”

For several seconds, Light roared, and its brilliance seemed to be able to challenge the Dark Sun darkening the skies of its disgusting presence.

The Light’s power faded too soon...but it faded soon enough, and the Ring floated in front of him.

“**You...have doomed the Light**...”

“Oh, shut up,” the Undine was struggling to maintain its liquid body, despite the black wound marring its magical essence. “Hurry up and die. You cost me too much time as it is.”

“**This day won’t be forgotten...Leo Black, Galahad, Arthur...or whatever name you will steal for yourself**.”

“I told you to be quiet and die!”

“**You have stolen what was supposed to rest here for an eternity...as long as the Ring isn’t returned...you will endure our Curse**.”

The Undine lost shape and vanished.

Galahad raised a Light shield to protect himself, but no magical attack came.

“One more time, the great Guardians prove themselves to be a massive disappointment.”

Slowly, the Champion of Unity donned the Ring.

Immediately, the three wounds the Undines had managed to inflict him healed.

“Ha! You are as potent as ever, I see.”

A second later, his hands were suddenly painted red.

What by all the Light Powers was that?”

At first, he thought this had opened wounds on his hands...but no, there wasn’t a trace of injury! Galahad plunged his hands in the waters of the Rhine...but not only the blood returned immediately after he removed them, the waters of the Rhine were turning red everywhere could see.

“**Give back the Ring**!”

“No!”

“**THE RING**!”

“THE RING IS MINE!”

The Light Champion roared and ordered the greatest weapon to be ever forged to come to him.

It answered.

There was an astounding amount of Light.

And when it diminished, Excalibur was here, ready to be used in battle and defeat the Dark forever.

The spirits of the Rhine were at last silenced.

“You best prepare your grave, Champion of Death...for I am not going to let you escape this time! I have Excalibur, and this time, the Great Enemy won’t be there to save you!”

**16 February 1995, Avalon**

“You knew, and you didn’t stop him.”

Alexandra did her best to not sound too accusatory, as the Queen of the Exchequer descended from her throne of wood.

“Yes.”

“Wait a minute,” Romeo Malatesti protested, “what exactly did happen?”

“You didn’t feel it? Eleonora da Riva asked, visibly surprised. “Because I did.”

The song of the Ring was not as thunderous as it had been at first, but it was impossible to miss it.

“All Light Champions have no choice but hear the Ring,” Lucrezia Sforza commented idly. “But not all Dark Champions are able to say the same. In fact, only those who are possible candidates for the Ragnarok Prophecy can.”

“And how do you know that?” the Dark Queen growled.

For sole response, the eyes of the Succubus began to shine in green light. It wasn’t the chaotic darkness of Lucrezia, or the deathly flames Alexandra had when she watched herself in a mirror. It was more fluid, more desirable...yet it remained extremely dangerous.

The Champion of the Scuola didn’t say a single word, but Alexandra had no doubt this was the true colour of the Succubus’ eyes.

Suddenly, the efforts Ra and his sycophants had invested into killing her made all too much sense.

“Let’s say I accept that.” The Potter Heiress turned her eyes away from the Champion of Lust. “That doesn’t explain why you thought it good to have Excalibur back in the game.”

“Because it is the only chance we have to destroy it.”

The words uttered by the Queen of the Exchequer silenced on the spot whatever the Dark Queen had been able to say.

“As you discovered the hard way,” the half-sister of King Arthur touched the Ogham-covered stone, and the ancient power of Avalon answered her silent call, turning the Runes into blazing beacons of green light, “no coalition of Dark Champions will ever be able to hold its own against Ra when he wields Excalibur. He is simply too powerful. Only Osiris can, at best, obtain a stalemate.”

“That doesn’t mean we will fare better against a lesser foe,” Eleonora countered. “Excalibur was created to cut through everything, be it metal or magic.”

“Excalibur was created to make the impossible possible,” Morgane corrected neutrally. “Its chief purpose is to allow one of the Light-sworn mages to at last restore their rule over a stable kingdom, something they’ve been fundamentally unable to do for millennia. At Camlann, they came incredibly close to achieve it. But they failed, in the end.”

The hand of the vampiric witch left the stone.

“But while Ra forged this abomination and did his best to leave it with no weaknesses we could exploit, the supposed ‘Invincible Sword’ is not flawless. The Curse tainting Ra’s veins made sure of that. One Champion of Ragnarok must challenge a wielder of Excalibur in a duel of blades and magic, win, and this abomination will break, making the world a far better place.”

The Champion of Loki howled. It wasn’t a pleasant sound.

“You make it sound so simple. Did you forget to mention that during the Battle of Camlann, Excalibur was wielded by a bastard who couldn’t cast any spells, and he still nearly managed to kill a fully grown dragon and most of the Dark Lords you hired to protect your daughter?”

“Yes.” The Queen of the Exchequer nodded. “And that was a major mistake. It had to be a duel, not something that could allow the Light to shape the tale as a hero against a horde of monsters. The moment the duel was between Arthur and my daughter alone, the fight was a far more equal affair.”

“That still remains a very risky thing,” Alexandra noted. “I will grant you it’s not as insane as challenging Ra...again...but it is not Leo Black, the useless Gryffindor who has never touched a sword in his life. It is Galahad. I assume he is a competent swordsman.”

“That would give him far too much credit. He is a wizard who has always loved cheating in fencing duels and competitions.”

“That...that doesn’t really make it better. With the Ring and Excalibur, his magical powers will be bolstered to an impressive degree.”

“They will.”

Eleonora cleared her throat.

“What my dear Queen of the Night Court is trying to say is...why take such a risk now?” The Champion of Innocence crossed her arms. “I’m reasonably sure we can ambush this imbecile; individually each Champion here is far more powerful and clever than the damned Champion of Unity. We let the Curse of the Ring turn his existence into a living hell, and then one of the Champions slay it. Yes, it won’t break Excalibur, but I’m sure that with the Ring thrown into a new river and Excalibur slammed into a rock at the bottom of the ocean, Ra will need millennia to find to it again. So why?”

“We need access to the Ark of the Covenant. It is the only plan that will guarantee the destruction of the Grail won’t destroy the continent with it.”

“You can’t find the Ark otherwise?”

“The Tomb of Alexander is protected by the Hegemon Command. All the Fidelius-type Charms and other Hiding Rituals were invented based on it, yet they remain pale shadows of it. Before it was cast, Osiris knew exactly where the island was. After it, it was impossible to find it. But the keys forged to find our way to it have always been unsatisfying. We hoped it wouldn’t be necessary to solve this problem. As the events of Venice have proved, this isn’t going to work. We need the Ark of the Covenant to neutralise the Grail. And the ritual to bypass the Hegemon Command requires a shard of Excalibur given away freely, by the hand of the one which will destroy this ‘Light Sword’.”

In other words, the duel against the owner of Excalibur was only the first step...arguably possibly the most difficult step...optimistically.

“This isn’t the full truth,” the Dark Queen of Durmstrang remarked.

“Champion of Loki, I have yet to give you a single lie.”

Ouch. Lyudmila Romanov had been kind of asking for that one.

“I won’t do it.” Eleonora da Riva spoke first, shaking her head. “As much as I want pay back for all the insults Ra and his lackeys have done to Innocence, I can’t. I am terrible with a sword in hand. It’s not even a question of fighting Excalibur. I am pretty sure I will lose fast against any competent swordsman, magical or not.”

“And apparently, I am not exactly ‘Chosen of Ragnarok’ material,” Romeo Malatesti seemed genuinely unhappy. This was a Champion who would have genuinely volunteered, Alexandra knew. Of course, being a Champion of Ares and a bloodthirsty maniac would make such a fateful duel irresistible for him...

That left only three of them.

Irony of all ironies, they had been the current trio leading the rankings of the European Magical Tournament before it all went to hell.

Yet the Quest the Exchequer proposed was far more dangerous and desperate than any Tournament Task had been and would be.

“**Loki** just wants you to know he is willing to provide the loaded dices, if it comes to that.”

Alexandra groaned.

“Of course he will...”

**16 February 1995, Minister of Magic, London**

It was already one of the worst days in Rufus’ life, and they had a few more hours before noon.

It was like everyone had suddenly decided to break the Statute of Secrecy. The Dark Sun revealing itself was just the beginning. His Aurors had been forced to fight a lot of skirmishes before dawn, a few against vampires and skinchangers, but the majority had been against ordinary wizards and witches who were in full panic mode.

The DMLE wasn’t prepared to handle that. Its budget resources had already been considerably decreased year after year, as this moron of Fudge didn’t want anything to do with the maintenance of a proper force of Aurors and Hit-Wizards.

Though to be fair, even if the Minister and his cronies hadn’t done their best to defang the only forces capable of stopping this madness, it was likely it wouldn’t have been enough.

Everything was madness.

The number of magical incidents was in the thousands, and to repeat his previous words, it was just the beginning of the day.

Nor did it count the fact the Statute breaches were not the only problems he had to worry about.

There were riots in London and every major city.

“We have maniacs using their brooms in full view of everyone on the Isle of Man!”

Rufus cursed under his breath. And naturally, before he could answer, there was another problem coming.

“We have a few Hags trying to sell Potions in a Muggle market! What the hell are they thinking?”

“Director! We have to send Hit-Wizards on Edinburgh! There are-“

“No.” Rufus shook his head. “We can’t.”

“What?”

“We don’t have the Hit-Wizards to send.” Save his assistants and the DMLE personnel recording every breach of the Statute, the level was completely empty of the field wizards and witches he relied upon. “They are already all committed. The same is true about the Aurors.”

“But...but Director, we can’t let those breaches go unanswered!”

Rufus stared at the idiot Fudge had sent him.

“They won’t be unanswered.” The old veteran promised. “But I can’t conjure Aurors and Hit-Wizards from nowhere, and asking my subordinates to go after new problems when they have not solved the previous cases they were sent to deal with...it is many things, and disaster is the word coming first to my mind.”

“But-“

“There is a problem.”

Rufus passed a hand in his grey hair and repressed a sigh before staring at the new visitor in his office...and he shivered, for that wasn’t one of Fudge’s messengers or someone he knew well.

It was a masked and cloaked figure, one he couldn’t tell if it was a man or a woman in the first place.

It was an Unspeakable.

“What is the problem?” Rufus asked, fighting the dread forming in his stomach.

“The Thames is beginning to turn red.”

“Would it be too much to hope it’s a simple Colour-Changing Charm?”

The Unspeakable didn’t seem to find his attempt at humour funny.

“It is a Curse, and a powerful one. And there is worse.”

Naturally, Fudge’s subordinate scoffed.

“What can be worse than this massive Breach of the Statute of Secrecy?”

“The ravens are leaving the Tower of London.”

“Oh, this old legend-“

“This isn’t a legend,” the icy voice of the Unspeakable forced the idiot to shut up. “This is a Prophecy, and one I hoped would never come to pass in my lifetime. There is going to be a battle. The era of the Statute is over. You better prepare for the aftershocks, and for the love of Mother Magic...don’t try to intervene.”

The cloaked figure left his office, and Rufus scowled. Wasn’t there a limit to how many bad news could be given in a single day?

**16 February 1995, Avalon**

They left quickly the oak thrones behind after these last revelations.

The Queen of the Exchequer departed first, though not before warning them they had at beast day left in Avalon to make their choice. As if the cursed song of discord wasn’t in their ears to begin with.

No, that was unfair.

The Exchequer had not stopped the Champion of Unity, but they hadn’t tried to incite him to seek at costs a return of Excalibur. Ra had brainwashed countless people in the last centuries, and when you taught your subordinates to be fanatics, sadly there wasn’t a lot of doubt they were going to take the fanatical option every time there was a choice to make.

The Dark was just exploiting this monumental flaw to gain the victory it wanted.

None of it made the Quest in front of her a very attractive proposition.

They walked out of the forest, slowly at first, before accelerating their pace.

Their progression ended near the cliffs of Avalon.

The weather was rather refreshing, with powerful waves, a reasonable amount of wind...and of course, the Dark Sun, always the Dark Sun above their heads, and the discordant music of the Ring in the ears.

Alexandra watched the waves for several minutes. The temptation was strong to jump from the cliff and transform into a Hydra, and let her animal instincts take over. There was abundant fish here; she could smell it from where she was standing. It would be all so simple, to let the multi-headed inner animal take over and-

“It has to be you, Death.”

“Why, Chaos?” The Champion of House Ravenclaw replied. “I freely admit I have felt the desire to murder Leo Black so many times I have stopped counting them. He’s a Light bigot, and apparently the soul that possesses him is not much better in that regard. But Leo Black is dead.”

“He’s not.” Lucrezia Sforza disagreed. “There was some willingness in him to be Possessed. How much was done by trickery is unknown to me, but the act of Possession has to include some permission from the original owner of the body to let the other soul take over. Otherwise the body begins to fail in short order, and no one would have missed the smell of putrefaction at the beginning of the Fourth Task.”

Alexandra rolled her eyes.

“Sure. Let’s go with that. I will freely admit that I would love to murder Leo Black, Galahad, or whatever first name this stupid Gryffindor gives himself in the end.” She stared at the Succubus’ green eyes. “But I’m not really in the mood, after losing one arm and all my foci, to plunge back so fast into the fires of war.”

“I understand.” The Champion of the Scuola Regina nodded elegantly. “But I will remind you...and everyone else, for that matter...that this duel is only the beginning of the tasks which await us.”

“The beginning?” Romeo Malatesti grunted, evidently as surprised as she was.

“Life once again is part of the Power of Fire,” Lucrezia bared perfect white teeth, “since we aren’t the Army of Light, the promise sworn millennia ago must be fulfilled. It doesn’t matter that our King is trapped for several days in a time prison of his own making. A Power must be released from the embrace of the Dark...and evidently, it can’t be Chaos.”

Alexandra thought about it for several seconds before opening her mouth again.

“It isn’t a coincidence, isn’t it? There is a floating Megalith near Venice. The Third Seal that Chaos broke is a Seal of Ice. And now the moron went to seize the Ring from the depths of a river. The Exchequer has been preparing the return of the Power of Water.”

And the original Power of the Plane of Water had been Desire, Lust, or whatever name you wanted to give to the Champion of Passion...

“I would have thought,” Eleonora spoke for them all, “that you would have preferred to continue the current antagonism between Death and Life.”

“That can still be arranged,” the Succubus said, and the message was unsubtle.

Yeah, Lucrezia Sforza could challenge the wielder of Excalibur, and Alexandra had seen her wield a rapier: the Champion of Venus wasn’t the easy prey the Light Champion would expect her to be.

And if she won, if the plan of the Exchequer was successful, there would indeed be a new Champion of Water before the next seven days were over.

Theoretically, every Power technically could be chosen, but the Basilisk Slayer didn’t want to know what would happen if Chaos empowered Water instead of the Darkness. Nothing good, she was ready to bet.

War and Water? Oh dear, what a good idea...yes, she was joking. War and Fire at least would have made sense. But Fleur Delacour and a new volcano told her it was impossible.

No, if there was a choice to be made, it was between Desire and Death. And it was a life-changing choice.

Alexandra wasn’t naive enough to believe otherwise. It was a pity they had yet to see what would happen to Delacour, but they had all felt the power of Fire in the distance while the King made his entrance. It was not the kind of small ritual that involved stagnation of the body and the soul.

That left one other option. Lucrezia Sforza could become a new Avatar of Water if she wanted, but there was another Champion who could fight Excalibur.

“Chaos? You largely have the skill and the firepower to annihilate Galahad, body and soul.”

“I can.” The Russian blonde didn’t bother to lie on that, at least. “But I don’t want a crown.”

Romeo Malatesti began to laugh.

“The Tsar’s Heiress refusing a diadem, that would be the day-“ He went very quiet as Lyudmila glared at him.

Then Alexandra remembered how insistent certain parties had been that she read the customs of Magical Russia. Most of it had been really awful reading, especially the part where the ‘officially, there are no Muggle-born’. Yeah, there were families in Britain who still practised Blood-Adoption legally, but there were particular cases, and in general the wizard or the witch was adult. Whereas in Russia-

Oh, no.

“You think,” the Champion of Death said slowly, “that you have been Blood Adopted?”

“I am reasonably sure of it,” the Champion of Loki reluctantly admitted, “I searched for a long time, but assassins erased every trace there was supposed to be. Yet for some reason, I am the only witch in eighty or so years to not suffer from inbreeding-related diseases and other problems plaguing the House of Romanov. Curious, isn’t it?”

Suddenly, the choice of Loki to choose a Champion in the person of a pureblood witch from an Imperial House made so much sense.

“They erased it so thoroughly even Loki can’t tell for sure what happened. But they can’t change their own weaknesses. I am powerful; they are not. And while the Tsarina died the same year I was born, the dates have been altered, and I caught a few of the administrators who were involved in correcting everything for the history books.”

The next glare wasn’t destined at Malatesti; it was for the world as a whole.

“I swore I wouldn’t take a crown, and I won’t. If you want me to kill the imbecile as the Curse of the Ring forces him to crawl in a pool of black blood, fine. But I won’t challenge him, no matter how easy it would be to give him a humiliation before thousands of spectators.”

The words were made of steel. There was no hesitation. There was no weakness in the chaotic eyes.

Well, that was that.

The only alternative was Lucrezia, who, to her credit, would likely fight and win, at the price of letting her become a Champion of Water.

In theory, there was Malatesti too...but first, he wasn’t able to hear the Song of the Ring. Alexandra could have lived with that, but there was another mighty problem: she wasn’t sure the Champion of Ares could win such a duel. Romeo Malatesti was strong, and if it had been ‘only’ Leo Black out there, there was no doubt he would have killed his enemy, Excalibur or not Excalibur.

But if Galahad was approximately as skilled as a seventh-year elite student in magic, this might not be enough. And in terms of swordsmanship, the male Champion of the Scuola Regina wasn’t that good...

The Basilisk Slayer sighed.

“Lucrezia?”

“Yes, Alexandra.” At least the Succubus was in serious mode, not the lustful voice this time.

“If we proceed according to the plan of the Exchequer, I have a few conditions of my own.”

**16 February 1995, close to Westminster Bridge, London**

If he still had been the Champion of it, Neville would have thought it was a miracle from Fate.

As it was, it likely happened because the Light Champion was searching for him.

“Leo, if you can hear me, resist!”

The wizard laughed to his face.

“You really understand nothing, Longbottom. His soul and mine have merged; otherwise I would never have tried to Possess him in the first place. Those who do try to take over end up looking like corpses in short order.”

Like Quirrell...the words were not said, but Neville remembered first year.

The Boy-Who-Lived wanted to say it was stupid, but he was sure half of what he had done in the last days had been erased from his memories. The effect of drinking the Grail had turned him into someone he couldn’t recognise, and it was his own body and his own mind. Leo had not had a single chance to fight against the power of the Light.

“How must I call you, then?”

To his shock, as he stared at the hands of the wizard he had called his friend, Neville’s eyes widened in horror. The hands were red with blood, and already many drops of it were falling on the pavement.

“I am Galahad.”

There was something wrong with that statement...like Magic itself was displeased by it.

It wasn’t the same thing which happened right after. Muggles around them screamed, for the Dark Sun began to spread more darkness, and thunder of green lightning began to burn the skies.

It was terrifying...and in this weather which reeked of Dark Magic, thousands of black birds were flying.

There may be tens of thousands of them, and some of them were far too big to not be magical. It was a true aerial army, and more were arriving by the minute.

Neville was not well-versed in Celtic mythology, but it did not take much knowledge to know this was a forewarning of something incredibly bad. He summed it up in three words.

“Potter is coming.”

“Oh yes. I am going to challenge her. And I am going to kill her for good.”

For a second, Neville thought this had been a joke.

But the ugly expression, familiar union of arrogance and triumph, did not fade.

“Have you lost your mind?”

“Careful, ex-Champion...unlike you, I have not lost the Light’s blessings.”

“I apologise, *Champion*.” Neville snarled. “Unless you have forgotten, because I certainly did not, Potter is a Hydra Animagus.”

“And I have Excalibur!” Yes, yes he had. And the Sword of Light looked extremely redoubtable. “Potter stood no chance against it mere hours ago.”

“I believe...she stood no chance against the *Archmage*.”

The way Potter had killed Voldemort...it had been a painful reminder how easily the Ravenclaw witch had won the First Task. This was the Champion many had nicknamed the Empress of Lightning when they were in the corridors of the Scuola Regina.

“You were far more amusing when you were the Champion of Fate.” Galahad snorted. “This is your last chance, by the way. For all your weaknesses, I am merciful. I offer you a chance to claim back what you have lost. You can be the Champion of Fate reborn Neville. I will rule Britannia! You can be my right hand and we will build a kingdom where the Dark will be banished forever!”

For a moment, the sensation of *emptiness* was terrible.

For several heartbeats, Neville was tempted to say ‘yes’.

But when he stared at the sky, the memories of the terrible pain which had been his entire world were forcefully back, dominating his thoughts.

The dreadful Dark Sun was here, monstrously powerful, and the Light was unable to stop it. There were more and more ravens, crows and other black birds, and for all he wasn’t a Light Champion, Neville could feel a Dark Power was rising.

The Morrigan was watching, and this time, Ra was not here to save the day.

“No.” He coughed, before finding strength in his voice. “No. I won’t fight Potter again unless she comes for me first.”

Neville wanted to live. He was not fifteen! Yes, he was the Boy-Who-Lived, but there hadn’t been a contract in the papers of the European Magical Tournament which required him to sign a suicide pact!

“Your cowardice is duly noted.”

“You have not yet duelled Potter one-on-one. If you had, you wouldn’t speak of cowardice.”

Many Muggles were looking at them now. The small pool of blood created by Galahad’s bleeding hands had attracted attention, of course, but there were other reasons. The Champion of Unity was shining like a second sun, the Ring on his right hand and Excalibur burning in golden light.

It was insufficient to fight the baleful influence of Death, but it attracted a lot of attention.

Galahad scoffed and turned away.

“She was lucky so far. It ends now.”

“Two Basilisks,” Neville counted aloud, not caring everyone could him. “Many Knights of the Army of Light, a Leviathan, several Champions of the Tournament, a Dragon, Dementors, the Dark Queen, and even Ra himself.”

“Her sword and her wand have been broken. And it remains my Fate to win.”

Neville let the body of Leo Black walk away. He was sure this was the last time he would see him alive.

“If you see the Black Witch, tell her I am waiting for her on Westminster Bridge!”

**16 February 1995, Avalon**

The sword, at first glance, looked ready to break with the first serious blow it would encounter.

It was an impression more than first confirmed when Alexandra swung it, her target a large rock.

In less time than it took to say it, Alexandra had the remains of a sword in her hand, the blade as destroyed as Fragarach.

There was a flash of steel-like colour...and the blade, impossibly, was once back returned to its normal state.

“How?” Alexandra touched it to check, and sure enough, the sword was returned to the ‘fragile state’, but it was a true sword, not a ruined blade.

“An elaborate trick including an advanced Transfer Charm, some metal-to-metal Transfiguration, and a very difficult Enchantment,” the Queen of the Exchequer smiled at her astonished expression. “With the advent of the thirteenth century, the Army of Light began to deploy more and more Light-enchanted blades, and we needed to a counter. The Broken Blades were that answer. The inventor was killed on the personal order of Ra, but Knight General had already mastered the art before that.”

“That’s...incredible.” Sure, there was a slight delay necessary for the blade to rebuild itself, but one didn’t change of blade in the middle of the duel. One couldn’t find oneself defenceless when death came for you. “I don’t want to sound too petty, but why didn’t someone suggest I fought with one?”

“Do you think it would have changed anything when you had to duel Ra?”

Alexandra grimaced.

“No.”

“You have your answer, then.”

Yes, yes she did.

“Does this...this Broken Blade has a name?”

“No. You’re the first to wield it.”

Well, she would have to find a good one.

Obviously, the sword was extremely plain; no jewel, no silvery colours or sign this was an extraordinary blade...but it was a weapon of war...and it was hers.

“I give you the same warning I gave to Champions for decades: the Broken Blades have already been used against Excalibur, and though they work, the more a duel lasts, the more Excalibur is likely to eat through all enchantments and magic, and thus destroy the ability of the Broken Blade to rebuild itself.”

“I am going to adopt my duelling strategy in consequence.”

“Good. Now your wand.” Unlike the Broken Blade, which had been handed with a tired sheath that had seen better days, the little bow was richly decorated. A wand waited inside. The moment her fingers touched it, sparks of green lightning flashed, and Alexandra gasped as a feeling of *completion* echoed across her.

There was some sense of...lacking compared to her now-destroyed wand a second after, but overall, it was a very good wand. The Champion of the Morrigan cast a few dozen spells to be sure, and all answered her like her previous wooded companion had.

“It is an excellent wand,” Alexandra raised an eyebrow. “The core is Hydra heartstring, I suppose?”

“It is,” the legendary witch confirmed. “I would appreciate if you tried to keep it intact for as long as possible. We never have a lot of it in our reserves.”

“Ah, I had heard something about that...isn’t it that Hydras have to naturally die for the most useful parts to be harvested?”

“Completely correct. And since Hydras rarely die in accidents, one has to wait the end of their natural lives...and while the efforts to bolster their numbers have met some successes, there aren’t a thousand of them left, and these are all breeds, not just the Lernaean sub-species.”

“I will be careful,” Alexandra promised, examining the wand with attention. She was pretty sure she had never seen a wood like the one she was touching it right now; it was pale, unmistakably wood, but of a grey-white colour. “I suppose if I have to create a wand, my own blood and scales would form the core...the wood?”

“It was taken from a New Zealand Kauri Tree.” The Queen told her. And since she had never visited New Zealand, it did not mean anything to her. “Thirty centimetres. A very powerful combination, one our wand-makers had to stabilise with Thestral hair and an Alchemy Philtre combining several snakes’ blood, willingly given.”

Alexandra didn’t ask for the amount of research that had gone into inventing a weapon like that; she could guess it would make the effort of a certain British wand-maker look like an amateur.

The temptation was there to bask in the power of this wand. But Alexandra couldn’t. Far in the distance, the Song of the Ring was getting more and more powerful. The Light abomination was singing, calling most of the surviving Champions to the end of the world as they knew it.

“I suppose this would be ridiculous to speak of price right now.”

“Ridiculous indeed,” Morgane smiled. “What I do now, I do for my Apprentice.”

Alexandra watched the wand, flexed her magic with this superb focus for a seconds, before turning her eyes towards the Queen of the Exchequer.

“Why the urgency?” The Champion of Ravenclaw asked. “I mean, I am honoured and everything, but if we both survive the next days of pure chaos, we aren’t exactly going to die of old age...and I know for sure the Morrigan doesn’t intend for me to collect your soul anytime soon.”

The female Vampiri Romani looked at her with a serious expression.

“It is possible everything will proceed exactly as the original plan called for, but we have been disappointed for so long none of the upper ranks are particularly optimistic. As a consequence, it is entirely possible Osiris will have to neutralise Ra one way or another.”

It wasn’t difficult to read between the lines.

“In that case...you would have to take command.” The royal throne of the Exchequer would be empty for the first time in millennia.

“Yes. But it isn’t that simple. I am more powerful than any Knight, but I do not command the same respect as the King does. The only way for my authority to hold in the long-term would be if it is clear I am a Regent until Osiris returns...”

The last part of the sentence was left open-ended.

But it wasn’t that difficult to catch the meaning.

A Regent could be named when a King was in need to recover...or when the potential Heir to the Throne was too young to assume the duties and responsibilities which came with it.

“When?” Alexandra asked.

“The Summer Solstice.”

How...ironic.

“I will have my conditions.”

“Naturally,” Morgane smiled, “your mother’s Apprentice Contract established a record with two hundred and three pages...I have no doubt she will show it to you if you request it...and yours will certainly beat hers, at least where length is concerned.”

“Two hundred...this is a manuscript in its own right!”

“Oh, yes...young wizards and witches often forget it, but an Apprentice Contract is made in the first place to protect the Apprentice in every aspect. The conditions by which the Apprenticeship begin and end are written first, evidently, but everything that is and can be considered important will be mentioned. Magical foci’s replacements, to name just one example.”

Alexandra chuckled.

“What now?”

“Now it is time to find armour and protections appropriate for your station,” the Queen of the Exchequer’s tone was suggestive, but her expression made it clear this was non-negotiable. “I am not going to let my Apprentice fight a prestigious duel in tattered sportswear or what dreadful garment you would choose on your own.”

“You and Lady Stella Zabini have a lot of points in common.” The Hydra Animagus commented with a frown.

“A Carnival teaches a lot of interesting lessons,” the Queen of the Exchequer said philosophically, “and now the masks have fallen.”

**16 February 1995, Westminster Bridge, London**

Everything was formidable when you had enough hindsight.

Albus had enough of it now.

Enough to know that allowing Leo Black to return to Hogwarts last year had been a monumental mistake. Having him in the preliminaries had just been one more catastrophe added to a cauldron about to explode.

And to say that between the two troublemakers, the Headmaster had been the most worried about Ron Weasley.

It had been an error. The death of Sirius Black had sent his son on a dark path where the only choices were particularly painful...painful and paid in blood and destructive soul magics.

All of it could have been avoided, if the proper decisions were to be taken in time.

But they hadn’t been, and Albus supposed plenty of it could be blamed on him.

The last actions of the tragedy, however, weren’t his fault.

When he had duelled Gellert in the middle of Berlin, this had been because he hadn’t the choice: his former lover was refusing to come out of the magical redoubts he had erected in the middle of the old Prussian capital.

On the contrary, the soul in command of the aged body of Leo Black seemed to have chosen a site because it was guaranteed to attract the maximum of attention.

They were in the very heart of London, and between the Thames taking the colour of blood and the ravens circling in the skies, it would have attracted the gaze of thousands.

Now? There were easily tens of thousands potential spectators. Maybe hundreds of thousands. And that was for the direct spectators. Albus knew enough about Muggle devices after this year – the Succubus ruling the Scuola Regina was useful for that at least – to know the scenes were transmitted across England and maybe more.

This was the end of the Statute, and every foundation the ICW had built for the last centuries.

At least this was going to be spectacular.

Quite evidently, the Light Champion had recovered Excalibur and a Light Ring of prodigious power, no matter how heavily cursed.

In addition to that, several mages the Defeater of Grindelwald had never seen before were busy assembling some sort of lighthouse over the Thames, a miniature lighthouse which seemed to have the ability to repel the Dark Magic that was spreading everywhere.

“MORDRED! I KNOW YOU CAN HEAR ME! COME AND ANSWER MY CHALLENGE!”

Dumbledore felt it. It was as if an abyss had opened, and the Darkness *hissed* in anger.

He drew his wand.

Even if the Headmaster of Hogwarts had been warned in advance, he couldn’t have reacted in time.

Green lightning materialised and struck faster than should be possible.

It was powerful and irresistible.

It was like Death itself had willed it.

The ‘Light lighthouse’ and the half-dozen mages working to assemble it disappeared forever for an instant.

When his eyes could see it again, Albus saw only debris and corpses falling in the bloody waters of the Thames.

Shadows swirled, and suddenly, the Black Witch was here.

Unlike Leo Black, it was clear James Potter’s spawn had not aged or changed very much since the last time he had seen her at the Scuola Regina.

That was for the face only, of course.

For the first time, the Defeater of Grindelwald was seeing the Ravenclaw Champion clad in black armour, one where countless green Runes and green snake-shaped decorations had been carved as magical symbols and defensive protections.

On her back, was a scabbard and the sword seemed to shine in malice and darkness.

In her hand, there was a wand, which was still spitting the last sparkles of green lightning the Black Witch had just killed like they were insects.

“My name is Alexandra Potter, Champion of Shattered Glass.” There was no magic cast to increase the voice, yet Albus was sure the entire crowd was able to listen to her. The green eyes burned so brightly and so sinisterly that for a moment, it was easy to believe he was watching the Champion of Judgement, not Death. “Consider this challenge accepted.”

**Author’s note**: The end of the Statute will continue in the next update, which may or may not be titled *Once and Future King*.

The events within it will be naturally focused on a certain duel. While there are no armies on the battlefield, there are two claimants. It is time for the grudges of Camlann to be settled once for all.

The odds are not good once more, but this time Alexandra is not facing Ra...

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