

The End of An Age (Part I)

There had been no qualms in the land for quite sometime. The tribe of Tempskron had been in a time of peace since they first formed. War was only a word spoken by warriors and told in stories of the past. The best warrior from each of the four classes was chosen to lead and teach any new recruit. It was custom that the ladies could only become archers but the men had three choices, fighter, mechanic or a pike man. Neither of the three was more dominant because the tribe was rich and varied. They would tell anyone that they were blessed in the eyes of the gods and are rewarded for their thanks and dedication.

The four teachers of the warriors had been chosen together eight years earlier. Such an occurrence had never taken place till then, normally one or two would retire and be replaced but that time all four had chosen to step down. No one had ever thought it to be a bad omen or sign most thought nothing of it or thought it to be a blessing. The four were young when they became the leaders of the warriors, but they took the position with pride and respect. Over the next seven years they would prove that you don't have to be older to lead effectively.

As was custom after five years of being in the leader position they had to choose a substitute in case of death or accident to replace them if needed. The choice came quick and easy for all four, they simply choose their best students. The tribe had wanted to expand but never had until now for reasons of the wilderness and population. One week ago a team of builders was sent out to find the place a scout had found a few weeks earlier far into the continent. He returned tired and weary but successful, he spoke of a long hard journey through dry lands that would lead to an oasis, a natural formation where water flowed. He said that would be the best place since not only had there not been any other water found anywhere till then but the surrounding mountains could be used to their advantage.

For a greater chance of success the tribe of Tempskron send a few of their warriors along to help build and protect. Only a week had passed but many wondered if the spot was reached but on that day a scout returned with good news, the group had done so well that a few of them left a camp about half way to the site and made a small resting point for anyone making the journey in the future. The tribe asked him to stay to tell them stories of the land but he had to return to the others so that he could bring back good news once again.

Another week passed and on that day many waited eagerly for the scout to return but he did not. Some were worried thinking the group had fallen under attack but not many believed that because nothing in the wilderness was so dangerous. It took another three days before the scout returned with mixed news. The good news was that they had found the area with no problem or loss of life. They had already begun building a fountain around the water to ensure its stability. The other news was not only bad but would bring about the worst events since Tempskron had first been formed.

The scout was late because he was sent deeper in the desert passed where they were building to see if anyone or anything else could be found. In his search he found an old abandoned castle at least that's what he had thought at first find. The castle looked more like ruins, it was crumbling and had no life about it, but once inside there were lit torches lining the wall leading deeper.

The scout found people in the castle; they were gathered around a large pit that didn't look as if it had been built when the castle had. The stone around it was cracked but it was even and smoothed as if something had carved it carefully or burst from within with such power that it didn't disturb the stone around. The scout didn't want to stay long but while he was there he heard chanting and talk of resurrection. The name of the thing they were hoping to resurrect burned in his mind. Igolanos. He had heard that name only in stories of the Gods. Igolanos was a demon God, he had started a war of which very little is known because of the death and destruction caused. His name is uttered as a curse. When someone commits a deed of pure evil they are said to be possessed by Igolanos.

No one knew if it was even possible to resurrect a God, some even thought the scout had been possessed himself and was spouting nonsense to scare them. It was decided that same day that something had to be done whether this be true or not they could pose a threat to the newly forming town. The best would be sent and nothing less to be sure that the threat would be dealt with swiftly and without worry or stress. The leaders were sent, Min the archer, Gled the fighter, Zard the mechanic and Cid the pike man. They equipped themselves with the best armor and weapons available. They began on their quest the first light of day, the entire town greeted and waved them off with praise as they left the square and headed out. As was set in the past but was never enacted before the substitutes took their place as the temporary leaders the warriors.

The scout was given relief and another was sent in his place since he had traveled the distance many times now. Even though he knew the way better he was relieved when he drew a map of the way and gave it to the new scout. The tribe questioned the scout all day into the night about the land beyond the walls, the land that not many had seen. The picture he painted was one of a dry and dead land, void of green grass and trees or any wildlife. Many wondered if the war of the past had burned the continent over and only their land had been saved.

The substitutes took their position as seriously as if they had been appointed head of the warriors themselves. They were Rain the archer, Kovan the fighter, Vage the mechanic and Cane the pike man. Training continued as usual with the substitutes proving to be just as good as the ones they replaced. Most expected the warriors to return quickly with word of victory but the scout had said that it was a good two-day travel.

When the fifth day passed many wondered what had happened. There were rumors that the resurrection was complete and doom would follow but too many had belief in the warriors to let that shake them. A full seven days after they had left, a lone man stumbled into town nearly dead. He collapsed as people ran to his side with water and questioned him. He took a long drink before clearing his throat and coughing violently. He said that the warriors told him to stay at the site of the new town and they would go on ahead. When a day passed he became worried but when the second began to turn into dark he left in search of answers.

He was afraid to go alone so he took with him the few warriors who were guarding town. Upon finding the ruins he saw that no battle had taken place, there was no blood or any signs. As they went deeper into the ruins as the first scout had he wondered if they had gotten lost. He said they were drawn inward only by the torches, they never dared go down a hall that was unlit. The first sign of the first party was found at a staircase leading down past large double doors.

Standing at the first landing a dozen steps down was Gled and Zard. They seemed to be fine, no apparent wounds or damage but they just started up at them. The scout new something was wrong so he began to step back letting the warriors passed. No one spoke to invoke any sort of attack but when they reached the same landing both of him or her struck. Gled split one man in two; Zard crushed another's head with his mace knocking him to the ground. The scout didn't wait to see what would happen even though they were outnumbered two to one. He ran and never stopped, passed the town, through the dry lands till his feet walked on stone where he collapsed and told his story.

Everyone was outraged, they spat on the scout calling him a liar and said he was possessed by a demon. It was hard for anyone to believe that their finest could turn against them. The scout was taken away for healing and the rest of the town gathered in the square. Everyone was yelling at once about this or that, getting revenge, investigating and the like. It was finally decided that the only thing to do at this time would be to send someone to see what has happened but not just anyone. The substitutes would be sent, they would have to quickly assign substitutes for them before they could leave.

They were all given the best equipment and armor the same as the other were given before that had left. The four stood before the town, they promised that they would avenge them. If they are possessed they will be killed to end their suffering and they would not fail. The four left unaided as no scout had the courage to volunteer they had only a map to follow. The first day they made good time reaching the small camp that marked halfway. They rested before setting out for their last waypoint. The land was dry and the air hot; the heavy thick armor didn't help either. They reached the town in the last afternoon on the second day. Stones lined paths to areas where houses would be built and walls would be erected. They stopped to drink from the fountain and be sure of the route to the ruins.

The four had been prepared for fighting since the first few days of their training but for nothing like this. There is a difference in fighting someone whom you hate or who is standing on the other side of your beliefs. In war it is you or them the choice is simple. Here though they had no idea of what to expect from their attackers, even if they were who they used to be. The battle ahead was something they were prepared for physically but not at all mentally.

As the ruined castle came into view as the sun began to set, the castle seemed to glow as night came. None of them had spoken for quiet sometime now, they all had thought if they expressed concern it would be a sign of weakness or the inability to carryout what they might have to do. They slowed to a stop when Kovan raised a hand then he turned to Rain.

"Could you use your scout hawk to help us see if an ambush awaits us?"

Rain nodded and called her hawk, all of them had skills that were specific to their class and had to learn while they trained. It was a rule that they all learn every skill even if just the basics, then would choose a few to train more heavily. The hawk flew in from behind and circled high over them, the purpose was simply to scout and to help the archer with her aiming.

"He doesn't see anything, he would have signaled me if he had."

Rain looked up as the hawk made one last circle then headed back to where it would await her call again. Cane knelt in the sand and started to draw a square.

"Alright we are here but we don't know how many ways we can enter the castle."

He touched each of the four sides and drew a line outward.

"Yes that's true but even if there is, I suggest we don't split up so soon." Vage spoke as he surveyed the area around him looking for a possible vantage point.

"That's a good point, lets just head on and see what we find." Kovan began to lead as Cane stood and the rest followed. No one was the true leader of the three but Kovan was the biggest and strongest, although neither Cane nor Vage would admit it. As they approached the ruins they could see an obvious entrance that maybe once had large wooden doors or perhaps a drawbridge. Kovan made no signal to stop but the others were all on alert as they headed for the way in to the castle.

Rain had a strange feeling of being watched as she always did when she was uneasy but this was different, this time her and lives of her friends were at risk.

"Wait..." Before she could get any other words from her mouth a lone arrow splashed into the sand before Kovan just a mere inch from his right foot. Simultaneous everyone looked up to where the arrow must have originated. High above them was an archer; she was standing on a ledge that maybe once held a statue.

"That's Min!" Rain yelled out when she recognized the archer who trained her. Rain knew the danger immediately, they others had no way to reach her only she did.

"Go, get in the castle she cant get you from there I'll keep her busy." As Rain spoke Min was reading another arrow.

Kovan turned and looked at Rain and saw the concern on her face.

"Move!" Kovan yelled as he dashed toward the castle Cane and Vage in close pursuit. Min's target changed as the pike man moved from her site. Rain quickly began looking for cover; she noticed a large stone buried in ground a few feet behind her; it looked like it had fallen from the castle. She rolled first knowing Min had her targeted then she crouched and jumped behind the stone. The arrow meant for her flesh clashed with the stone.

Inside the others continued down the hall, Kovan leading Cane behind and Vage taking up the rear worrying about Rain. As they passed the first intersection hall Kovan noticed as the scout had said that no torches were lit. Cane walked up beside him and looked down but couldn't see anything either. Before Vage could reach them they started moving again. As Vage passed the hall the torches burst with flame, he stopped. At the end of the hall as his head turned he could see the outline of a man. Cane stopped when he no longer heard footsteps following him.

"Hey Vage what's wrong?" As Cane spoke Kovan stopped and turned.

"You better go on ahead and stop that ceremony, I'll handle this." Vage was sure he knew who it was.

"I don't think we should split up anymore then we have." Kovan spoke with objection but when Cane turned to face him, he could read his expression.

They both gave Vage one last glance then turned and began moving down the hall at a little faster pace.

"Why are you doing this? What happened?" Rain called out hoping Min could hear her.

"Why? What? You ask a lot of questions for someone who knows so much." Min pulled another arrow and waited.

"Know so much? I don't not why you're trying to hurt me." Rain pushed her back against the cold stone.

"I'm not trying to hurt you Rain. I'm trying to kill you!"

Vage took a step forward into the hall when the man beyond the lit of the torches spoke.

"I'm surprised you came alone. I thought you'd have requested the entire tribe would follow you." The man laughed out loud.

"You always thought I was good and honest. What happened here Zard?" Vage took a fighting stance before Zard stepped into the light.

"What happened? Do I look different? Maybe I fight different, would you like to see?" As the last words fell from Zard's mouth he pulled a mace from his back and began to charge Vage. Vage responded by charging faster toward him.

"Something is very wrong. I think I know who they were." Cane walked side by side with Kovan deeper into the castle.

"So do I, there is no mistaking it. I don't know..." Kovan stopped as they reached a doorway leading to a room with light.

A laugh was all that revealed itself within the room, but Kovan knew.

"I want you to go on ahead, I have an idea of what you'll find but you have to go now."

Cane understood, he had an idea of who was in the room and he knew what was up ahead. He nodded as he ran from Kovan's side.

"Laughing? You're not laughing at me are you? If you are you'd better be prepared to feel my wrath." Kovan stepped into the room.

The clash of shields echoed down the hall, the two mechs eyed each other. Before their maces could be used in very close combat Vage backed off and jumped back.

"You were always one to quit early, your not going to be any fun are you?"

Vage's brow dipped and his jaw clenched, he would hold his tongue now for he needed to think of a strategy.

Cane's running came to a halt when he reached the end of the hall and had two large double doors and a pike man facing him.

"I see the others did their parts well." Cid smirked.

Cane clenched his scythe.

"You won't get past me or this door do you understand?" Cid raised his head but never let his eyes leave Cane's.

Outside Rain was trying to think of a way to get a shot at Min. If she just tried to run out she wouldn't have enough time to aim but if she can get Min to shoot first she would. Rain gripped the arrow and slowly moved to the edge of the stone. Min was patient she waited with the tip of her arrow lining up her shot near the stone. Rain burst forth from behind the stone quickly making turns and ducks hoping to avoid the arrow. Min followed Rain and waited for the right moment then she loosed the arrow.

Kovan moved into the room where he saw Gled leaning up against the wall with an arrogant look on his face.

"I expected you to come, I just didn't know if the others would." Gled looked all about the room and even at Kovan's hands, feet, chest and weapon but never his face.

"You can't even look me in the eyes can you coward." Kovan took a step forward.

"I don't look my victims in the face, it's sad really." Gled laughed hard but was interrupted by Kovan launching at him.

Kovan jumped and came down axe first into Gled, the response was a raised axe that met with equal force to Kovans.

"I'm not like the others, I know your evil you bastard, I will kill you for what you did I don't care who you were." Kovan's grip became tighter to the point the tips of his fingers started to become pale.

"So you think your better then I? Well perhaps in honor but not in battle, I'll teach you your final lesson, the lesson of defeat."

Rain had jumped back just in time as the arrow sped to her. She didn't even check to make sure she wasn't hit she took aim and released. Min was fast also though, she moved right after she saw that the arrow would miss and was already stepped back when Rain's flew by.

Vage threw his arms up and a bluish glow surrounded him then dissipated. Zard did the same then soon after he raised his shield and with a flash it was extended and covered by a yellow force. Vage didn't copy and this threw off Zard, giving Vage a second to attack. With his mace drawing back Vage stepped forward bringing his arm forward with force.

Cid jumped and came clashing down on Cane as his scythe blocked the attack in time. Countering, Cane fell back and kicked up at Cid, but he was already aware and blocked with his knee. Both pike men fell to the ground either's weapon dangerously close to piercing them.

Kovan gave one last push before he backed off and regained his stature.

"You have the power, just not the brains and that's how I will beat you."

Zard took the attack from Vage in his side knocking him toward the wall. Before Vage could make a second attack Zard came back from the wall with his mace high above him tearing downward. A quick jerk of the arm let Vage's shield block the attack before it could do any harm but Zard was ready. He tried to kick at Vage's legs hoping to knock him off his feet but the diverted attention allowed Vage to push up with his shield. Zard's mace was pushed up leading to unbalance, he nearly left himself open for an attack if not for his mace blocking his chest. Vage wasn't sure what he needed to do to defeat Zard but he had to keep on edge, so far they were dead even.

"You got a lucky hit on me but don't think I'll let that happen again, boy!" Zard spoke with anger trying to put fear into Vage but it fell short, it only fueled him. Vage rushed Zard shield first crashing into him, he knew that would leave his back open but he'd take the risk. Zard took the hit badly, he moved backward losing his balance but tried desperately to beat Vage's back with his mace. Vage stopped and gave one more shove into his shield to push Zard off his feet before bringing his mace strongly above him.

"I wish it didn't have to end this way but there is no other way." Vage put as much force into his attack as he could without allowing Zard anytime to recover. The mace descended quickly toward Zard with Vage's force and anger behind it.

Gled threw Kovan back with a quick movement; he landed on his back looking up at Gled axe ready for the next strike. Gled was fast with his axe; he tore through the silence targeting Kovan but he had rolled to the side avoided the axe. The attack was powerful and planted itself into the stone a good inch. Gled turned to Kovan who was getting up.

"You think I'll let you just cut my head off?" He smiled.

Gled took his axe in both hands again and brought it back around to swing. For Gled things moved a little slower, he tensed his upper body and heaved his axe from the stone as Kovan's powerful attack reached him. Kovan's force met with Gled's raised axe but it stood little chance, Gled was sent backward nearly head over heels. The armor clashed with the stone and the sound filled the room as Gled slid to a stop near the wall. Kovan didn't want to wait for his strength to build up again he moved in for the kill.

Rain had taken refuge behind the stone again when she noticed something red quickly move above her.

"Rage arrow!" Jumping to her left she narrowly avoided the exploding arrow that rained down a dozen smaller ones. If she had jumped to her right she would have been left in the open, that's just what Min wanted. Rain quickly made up a plan; she'd need the help of her best friend, her falcon. She summoned him while thinking of how to utilize him effectively. As her friend appeared she formed the tactics in her mind.

"You may have hit me twice with that attack but I can still move so you failed." Now all she could do was hope she'd take the bait. Nothing happened, did she know or was she trying something else? Either way she had to move she didn't want to be an easy target. Diving sideways from the stone she fired a quick arrow at Min, he falcon followed as always to the target. Rain landed in the sand but found it harder to get up then she had thought, that one second could kill her.

The arrow missed Min by a foot, she didn't even try to avoid it she was too busy aiming up her shot but she failed to notice Rain's surprise. The arrow had been off but the falcon was smarter, it folded in its wings and turned hard for the target. Min's arm that was holding the arrow was struck just as she was about to loose. The arrow hit the sand next to Rain as she was getting to one knee. Min dropped her bow and reached over to cover the wound on her right arm, Rain loosed her arrow.

Cid waited for Cane to make the first move, but so was he. The two pike men started at each other. As fast as he could Cid threw up his scythe and a wind burst from around him. Cane had to squint to avoid dust and possibly death by closing his eyes.

"I see my little trick didn't work. I guess then I'll have to use what I wanted to in the beginning."

Cane knew what Cid was taking about there was only one attack that he held with pride. Cane knew if he didn't try something he would dead in about ten seconds. Cid twisted his upper body back with his scythe nearly coming around his again. Cane prepared himself. Cid yelled as he spun scythe out, Cane jumped his scythe in both hands swinging forward.

The arrow pierced Min through her arm that gripped her wound, it passed straight through into her and out her back, she fell. Rain watched as Min's body fell from the top of the ruined castle to the sandy death below. Min landed with a thud, but Rain was sure she was dead or would be she quickly ran into the castle to join her friends.

Kovan raised his axe till it was over his head, the bottom of the handle near his forehead.

"You will die for your betrayal!" Kovan screamed at Gled saliva flying from his mouth, Gled's eyes were wide. Kovan brought his axe down faster and harder then ever before. Gled died on impact, the axe had landed in his chest between the shoulder and his head, nearly severing his left arm.

Vage's mace poured down onto Zard's face, the metal crushed his bone.

Vage knew that one attack was enough; he had never struck anything with such hatred before. Removing his mace he turned not giving Zard another look, he moved down the hall and as he did he saw Rain running by.

Cane had barely missed Cid's attack but the same could not be said for him. Cane's scythe had taken Cid's head clear off, his body twisted from the attack still but was harmless now. Cane landed behind the beheaded pike man and stood while he fell for the last time.

The battle was over but what they had been sent to do was not. Kovan met with Rain outside the room where he had killed Gled, Vage came up behind her and they all walked to Cane.

"I think behind this door is what we came looking for." Cane began pushing the two large doors open as he spoke. As the door creaked open air came through but that was not all. Screams, and sounds of battle were heard from within. Kovan and Vage quickly stepped up and helped push the doors fully open. They all moved down to the first landing where they could see out into a large room with a hole in the middle. There were bodies everywhere, some whole, others just pieces. Monsters walked about killing anything that stood, some looked as if they were from stories told to scare children others you would never imagine.

The four stood staring at the beginning of a battle that had no end in site. The cult resurrected someone or something but it had done them in with no thanks. This would mark the darkest day in the history of Tempskron. The lands of Priston would never be same again.