

Shadow

English 313

Where The Light Lies

Sunlight drifted through the town. The mist fettered the rays of morning, the child of last night's storm still residing in Asla.

The people slowly crept out of their beds, donning the armor for the day. Workers for the mines dusted off the particles of metals and gems from their clothes, leaving a fine grain of treasure at home. The boots of the farmers were caked in the ongoing harvest. Venarian grain. Hardy food for the people of Asla, and alongside ore from the mines, would be the fuel for the war.

Marla woke from the sheets with a deep pin in her heart. The harvest was difficult, yes. Her father needed her in the fields that day in order to meet this week's quota. The storm had forced many of the farmers to miss out on valuable time.

“Marla!” Davro hollered. “I need you before the sun-swallows come. They love our grain a heck of a lot more than we do!”

She shuffled slowly out of her bed. It wasn't the harvest that weighed heavily on her. It was Jax.

The war had taken many of the young men of Asla away from their homes. The frontlines sat at the border between the country and its fierce neighbor, Krall. Whilst Asla was a peaceful country focused on development and progress, their neighbor was a consumptive culture that waged war across the realms to fuel the machine. Jax was one of the many young men of her

town that had signed up to fight. Jax...her best friend. Her...

Marla sighed.

No news from the frontlines had been heard in weeks. The storm had made it impossible for messages to be sent. Too much ‘interference’ with the light beams she recalled. Hopefully with the storm gone she could hear about Alsa’s progress and the health of the town’s own soldiers.

She stumbled to the washroom rubbing her eyes and prepared herself for the day. After a fresh wash and a new linen dress her spirit lightened and the pin lifted ever so slightly.

“Father! I’m ready. Let me quickly go gather the pickers from town. All the venarian grain will be gone before the sun-swallows can fly down from the Azoian mountains” Marla shouted across the house.

“I’ll even take Jack, we’ll be back in no time,” she giggled.

Davro rolled his eyes knowing what that horse was like. He set out into the fields preparing for the workers. His field would benefit the war efforts immensely once it was picked. The sooner that war ended, the sooner he could rest easy.

Marla set out in the cart with Jack towing it alongside Hera. Her blonde mane and milky skin matched Marla’s, whilst the spirited horse Jack was midnight black—a fierce one like none other. Jack reminded her of Jax ... it was his favorite horse after all. They had the same deep dark hair that matched the night sky.

The pin pressed, but Hera nuzzled her and the pin diminished in a flurry of adoration. Marla watched as the landscape flowed by. Vast fields of grains were laid out across the valley. Vineyards arrayed with ample plump grapes sat on short wooden posts. Orchards of varying fruit trees made a gentle forest at the foot of the mountains.

Enclosed by the Azoian mountains, her little town of Galan was a farming village that was deep into the lands of Asla. The capital, Alain, stood far closer to the border, which they shared with Krall. The many fields in this valley were put to use in this time of need. Already Marla could see other farmers making preparations to head into town and pick up today's workforce. She waved at the Joneses, a warm family of four, and old man Hilfie, who hollered "I reckon it'd be a FINE harvest today!" She laughed at the sound of his exuberance. Perhaps it will be...

Galan soon came into view, standing defiantly at the entrance of the valley.

The mist had begun to break away, making way for cheery townsfolk as the market opened up. Stands were settled in the townsquare, with rich fruit on display and luscious vegetables. A harvesters bay sat ready to accept more venarian grain for the war effort, with pickers lined up outside waiting for their farmers to pick them up. Marla swerved into the array of carts, allowing the pickers to load up their gear.

Harlan greeted her with a wide smile. "Hello Marla! The day is sunny after so long. A great harvest is to be had today!" he exclaimed. She nodded with a wide smile of her own. The jests from the pickers were the best in town, their humor well practiced with long days in the fields. Marla was soon laughing, a shrill note in the calamity of the town's rumpitious morning. She quickly tore herself away though—she wanted to check the war room.

It resided at the edge of town. A large tower crafted with the finest stones from the quarry, etched with sigils to protect from infiltration by any means. Atop it sat a giant pane crafted with a special glass, tempered by the mistresses of Asla. When powered by a crystal it could send crucial information to other towers and receive it as well.

A swift set of knocks in a peculiar order merited a quick opening. A familiar face

appeared from the war room. “Jared!” Marla cried out. She launched herself into the arms of a large burly man, with the same dark brown skin as Jax. An immense beard crowned Marla’s head until she finished squeezing him to death. He let out a booming laughter that shook the stone.

Jared headed the town’s war room as ranking officer in the region. Behind him his underlings eyed the commotion at the door oddly, not used to seeing Jared break away so easily.

A tense atmosphere rose back into play as Marla finished embracing Jared. Her eyes met his and they both knew why she was there. Jared as the father of Jax was worried too. The storm had separated the town from the rest of Asla for some time. No news had been heard from other outposts, and the enchanted glass atop the tower remained cold without the embrace of light.

“If the light is able to finally penetrate the veil and make it to our glass, we will know how the Battle of Latago went in a few moments, Marla. Sit tight, you arrived just in time...as per usual.” He patrolled to the top of the tower with Marla swiftly behind him. The air grew stiff. The soldiers' eyes returned to their gaze to the top of the tower. They would know...soon enough.

A light came from the entrance to the valley and flew into the glass with a hum. The tower vibrated and the sigils flashed. Energy brimmed with an intensity higher than caffeine.

The pin came and pressed.

Marla closed her eyes and clasped Jared’s hands.

The outcome of the Battle of Latago could decide the war.

Reigned over by Shadows

The songs of little shades echoed throughout the castle. Their black wings fluttered through the smoky air—evading the columns of war which rose from the great forges of Krall.

Kavlan perched himself atop the castle walls, eyeing the commotion below. Hundreds of feet beneath him, wooden carts brought in a wealth of iron, steel, gold, bronze and many other ores. Exhausted horses were beckoned forward by slaves, releasing nervous neighs in response to the immense heat waves rolling from the forges. Krall's forges were embedded with heavy enchantments that allowed it to hold vast quantities of lava. Transported from deep magma pools, the molten liquid was perfect for crafting the instruments of death.

Lined against the walls were arrays of freshly crafted weapons feeling the cool lick of the frigid air. Wicked double handed swords etched with Krallian sigils desired the satiation of Aslan blood. Spears lined with aerial enchantments on the shaft would command the wind to aid its plight. Monstrous axes and halberds twisted light at the edges, wrapped in illusions to disarm the wisdom of soldiers.

Kavlan swung his legs back along the walkway, eyeing the door many yards away. Beyond it lay the throne room where King Kraveus awaited his son. Today they were welcoming a procession from some of the many countries which Krall had conquered throughout the continent and across the seas. One of which was Destasia, where King Draelin was now arriving from alongside his daughter Daye, in hopes of solidifying an alliance with the conquerors.

Kavlan let out a deep sigh, accepting the negotiations of politics to come. His broad shoulders shifted uneasily in the Katian armor he wore, dark red and saturated in sorrow. He

wasn't born a warrior—but his father's kingdom had made him one.

“Kavlan - your father ‘requests’ your presence in the throne room at once,” rang out a messenger. The servant's tail whipped between his legs, exposing the nerves befitting the demands of a king.

Kavlan came off of the dark gray stone that made up the castle. He strolled to the door which the messenger opened, “Your Grace,” he whispered, “The king is impatient this day.” Kavlan knew why. This alliance could mean securing more technologies to fuel the war.

The long hallway stretched away from the outer tower, peering into the center of the castle. The walls were lined with portraits of old and scenes of decadence. Blood decorating battlefields and sinews strung upon the dinner table. In prominent paintings, typhoons along the shores of Letase were depicted—the air rife with dragons. Sky serpents of tooth and fire, they were one of the few species Krall had not conquered. Yet many more paintings followed, showing the accolades of many commanders as they laid waste to armies in the name of their king and country. Tragedies were found in ample numbers...the families of Krall tuned to the spirit of *war*.

At the end of the hallway was a small set of dark oak doors leading into one of the sanctuaries adjacent to the throne room. There Kavlan set aside his doubts and opened the next set of doors, adorn with gold and lavished with gems.

“KAVLAN, MY SON,” boomed King Kraveus. Banners seemed to ripple at the sound.

Soldiers stiffened at the sound of their king. Obviously the guards had been enjoying the silence until now.

Kavlan smiled and regarded his father, “Hello Father. We engage in destiny today.”

He stretched out his arms in curtsy. A custom of the kingdom and product of their

culture. It showed that they had no weapons and meant no harm, embedded into everyday life. Although this stopped no one from hiding weapons through other means.

Kavlan approached, striding forward as the only person in the kingdom who needn't bow before his father.

The king nodded and stretched out his right hand, beckoning the prince to his adjacent throne. Seating arrangements were sparse for the royalty. Fashioned from refined and hard metals, his father said "A king in court should never rest comfortably—lest it seize the tip of a dagger."

The grim thought settled into Kavlan's mind, as he eyeballed the large set of dark oak doors at the end of the throne room. He settled into his princely chair as his father motioned to the guards. Cold to the touch, it's only comfort was the power it wielded.

The doors swung open with the sound of gears working to move the ancient barricade.

A swift set of trumpets joined the red carpet, loosing a resounding note in the hall. The same messenger from before scurried before the opening.

"Behold, the **Royal Procession of the Conquered.**"

Faces painted with fake warmth surged through the doors. The procession about fifty large kept a steady pace, ensuring they could decompose their distaste in time before they reached the king. He never let them forget what they were. And what he had done.

After completing the walk over a hundred yards long, they knelt before King Kraveus.

The corpulent among them sucked in the air of the throne room—filled with the scent of a freshly washed floor, the evidence of previous visitors having been erased away.

In unison they spoke, "We are at your service, Your Majesty."

His smile broadened, exposing the whites of his teeth.

“Welcome my friends. Thank you for joining us this day to honor our bond and future together. Join me in the dining hall, we will feast gladly today!”

The party slowly proceeded towards the right as a mistress led them into an adjoining room. The great hall sat hundreds of people, with four tables a hundred feet long, two on each side of the rectangular room. At the end was a fifth table about fifty feet long, perpendicular to the rest, seating the head family and its closest allies.

Streaming in were the elite families of Krall, with servants and cooks in tow, arraying a wide variety of delicacies before them. Rich meats and freshly harvested fruits lined the tables. Seasoned halo fish lay in a pond of Tilian sauce, the favorite of many. Fountains of varying wines and vast tables of desserts sat at the perimeter, welcoming a long night of pleasure.

Kavlan eyed the procession as it made its way into the dining hall. A set of eyes found his gaze. The princess from Destasia, Daye.

Her hair was midnight black, saturated in the night. Her moonlight skin glowed and shining eyes peered into Kavlan.

She smiled first. Something sweet, something seductive. Her elegant red dress beckoned the eyes, and complimented the red drapes of the Krall families.

Kavlan smiled back in an amusing manner, knowing the game afoot. He set out for his position at the end of the dining hall, knowing that tonight would set him on a path he knew he couldn't turn back from.

“Father, let us conquer another day.”

Spirit of War
(Work in Progress)

The bleak landscape breathed with despair.

In and out, deeper and faster

Settling souls into the hereafter

Jax surveyed the battlefield with aching eyes.

Drawing on the great moons of their planet, Zashe, the foremost magician of Asla, had kept the field of Latago in permanent daylight. This was the reason why Krall had not conquered Asla, one of its bordering countries. Whilst it had laid waste to so many nations, the most powerful magic of Krall was intertwined with shadows. It was devastating in the dawn, growing in the eve, and drenched in power at night. As Aslans worshipped the goddess of light, Lae, their power juxtaposed Krall's and conquered it at its peak.

However, the light revealed the tragedies of war.

Bodies lay marooned across fields of twisting magic. Piles of Aslan bodies lay encircled by pools of darkness, formed by shadowdancers. These treacherous magicians performed dark rituals to the god of darkness, Kal, who gave them the power to weaponize their shadow.

However with each victim they made, a part of their shadow stayed behind...

The bodies of Krall soldiers were brimming with light. Almost beautiful in a way, they looked like fallen gods upon the black field. Eye sockets released a twin beam of photons, the magic still escaping from its target. The magic was harmless to a regular human, but intermixed

with the warrior sigils of Krall soldiers, it burnt their innards to a crisp.

Tormented cries strung together formed a chorus of agony. The field of Latago was made the final resting place of many in the armies of Krall and Asla. Yet the battle had gone on far too long and their magic was waning. Enchantments were weaker. Spell work was growing sloppy. Kills were no longer swift and decisive. They were slow and waning. War gazed on the tragedies.

Jax lifted himself using his spear. His dark armor matched the black dirt of Latago. His muscles screamed from the exhaustion of a constant battle on the front lines that had lasted nearly two fortnights. He had lost too many of his friends.

“Fuck, where is my caster? Where is Jerash?”

His squadron shifted uneasily. The five of them were moving swiftly through the no man's land to recover what magic they could. Yet with each enchantment they absorbed, they shut off a beacon of lights that the hunting parties of Krall could follow. An increasingly shorter distance was being made between them and the hounds. Only the jagged landscape with rising hills and deformed cavities were their form of evasion in the waning light.

Their battlemancer soon arrived with Jerash in tow. His purple robe was adorned with vials of magic belted at the waist. They hissed and brimmed, power waiting to erupt.

“We need to get the fuck out of here or they will have us for breakfast, or whatever time it even is. Z Ashe can't keep this light show up forever without these vials to fuel the spell. And if that spell ends, the Krall use the night sky to tear us to shreds.”

The party looked back at Jax with weary eyes, understanding that the fate of their camp rested on parties such as these. No one knew why the Krall were trying for this long. Their first and only campaign into Aslan lands ended when they had sustained daylight across the entire

border for a week. Now pushing a month, the moons had been sung still for too long—they wanted to be free. Perhaps the Krall knew, even light had its limits.

“We have enough for now,” Jerash announced, “Let’s head back before they teach us to dance.” The thought was a cruel joke among Aslan soldiers. When the shadowdancers poisoned a shadow, it contorted as the body it resembled followed in tow.

They turned east and headed to camp, quietly and softly, as the chorus accompanied them and arrows whistled through the sky.

Suddenly Jerash stopped, his face drawn with confusion. The party stopped inquisitively, unable to proceed without his enchantment guiding the safe path through the foul magic.

“Something is wrong. I can feel it ... slipping away.”

The realization dawned on Jax. It wasn’t supposed to happen, not yet.

“To the shitty bunker, NOW!” he ordered.

They ran swiftly for an old bunker still about a mile away from camp. Huddling in, they sealed the door and were met with torches still lit, keeping shadows at bay yet not the excrement.

“It’s happening, now.” A look of dread dressed Jerash’s face.

They saw it happen through the reinforced windows.

A small circle of black appeared in the bright sky above Latago. Then it expanded, relinquishing the light that had remained over the field for so long. Monstrous cries came from the west, as the shadowy creatures finally knew they could rise.

Zashe’s spell was over. The darkness had come.

A wind blew across the battlefield, sinking into the dead and the alive. The torches darkened, then fizzled out.

The energy that blew past them whispered, “Your goddess is dead. We killed her.”

Some music I listened to for this world

re:deep - Fragile (Ryan Davis Reconstruct)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iaQs9GoAmQ0>

Exploring landscapes

Lord of the Rings | The Shire - Music & Ambience:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=30b7_S0paCQ

How I picture Asla

Phoria - Emanate:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2my_DFCdpE

Be patient with the song to hear the light flowing through the stone.

Max Richter - Sleep Reconstructed (Path theme)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GvAkbHF_q80

Decisions. Fate. Consequence. Kavlán.

Best of Tycho

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PRqKCgT0sQA&t=0s>

General worldbuilding