

## BLOOD MAGIC:

False dichotomy

A pilot written by  
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"Any sufficiently advanced [or significantly different] technology is indistinguishable from magic." - Arthur C. Clark

**EXT. FORESTED AREA ON SIDE OF MOUNTAIN - AFTER NOON**

The area is slightly wooded, a large expanse of farmland spreads out below the cliffs. The area is punctuated by out of place ruins from a time long before.

A man taller than average, 20s, taut and sinewy, clearly been through a lot and recently, slowly and carefully explores the scant ruins, he is already a bit fatigued and injured. He is dressed in leathers and furs, on his right wrist is a bracelet/bangle, this is his TALISMEN.

He searches carefully, finding old items from the the long past, including devices that appear to be ancient electronics. Occasionally he finds gems in lock boxes and puts the best of what he finds in his bag.

He is attacked by beasts a combination of feline and ursine about the size of a tall man. Starting a fighting retreat he flicks his hand and fire leaps toward the nearest animal.

He swipes with a short katana like sword as he rolls to avoid an attack.

As the fatigue builds, his flame based attacks are diminished and his bladework more labored and imprecise.

A flying craft the size of an Apache helicopter, but not staying aloft with blades, approaches from the west and loiters. The Adventurer notices and yells.

ADVENTURER

You know, you can help any time!

There is no response from the craft. Finally he manages to fell the last beast, the craft departs.

ADVENTURER

Uhg I hate this, Why did I insist on having ambition?

He sits down, pulls out an almost empty bottle of what appears to be strawberry-chocolate milk, chugs the last of it then inspects his wounds. He glosses over the mere scratches, but when he comes across a real wound, he closes his eyes, concentrates and places a glowing hand over it. The wound closes, but only to the level of minor irritation.

Finished healing he digs around in his bag and pulls out some colorful gems. He counts them and sighs

## ADVENTURER

Well, at least I can afford a decent meal, and a bed.

He looks out over the farmland, then holds up his hand and his Talisman starts to glow and a Volumetric display, (Hologram) VMD hovers over his hand showing a detail of the area and displaying a distance to the community 'GOLDEN PASTURES' at 5 kilometers

## ADVENTURER

(sigh) Hopefully I don't get jumped again.

**EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF GOLDEN PASTURES - EVENING**

The adventurer follows a simple trail along the base of the mountains near the farmland, there are rows of vegetables and grains.

He approaches an energy barrier glistening like the surface of a soap bubble. He looks at it a moment, then holds up his talisman, when there is no reaction, he steps through the barrier.

He approaches a giant fissure in the shere mountain cliffs, where he passes a small building with some cattle grazing. The adventurer smiles slightly with satisfaction upon seeing the cattle. He continues along into the community propper.

## NEWSPASITION (V.O.)

It's a beautiful evening, The Matriarchy has ensured the temperature is perfect and the humidity is just right. Tonight we begin the third night of our three-week long Festival of Last Frost, welcoming the coming of spring. Like all our festival seasons, a party celebrated throughout the nation. We take this opportunity to thank the benevolent Matriarchy and their benevolent escilons that keep our little patch of utopia humming. Tonight, even Lady Evelyn Sinclair has deigned to grace us with her presence. If not for her grace we might actually have to work for a living, what a sad day that would be.

At the top of the cliffs are a pair of gigantic futuristic towers of ceramic and metal. There are tall futuristic towers all around the fissure, and a decently sized cyber-crystal punk outpost.

### **EXT. GOLDEN PASTURES - CONTINUOUS**

The town itself is clearly ancient, but advanced buildings of crystal, ceramic, metal and advanced composites with glowing lines of mostly aquamarine all around, surrounded by a hodgepodge of less advanced, clearly repurposed buildings of mostly wood and mud brick with power conduits connecting these patchworks to the older buildings. The aesthetic is crystal-eco. The buildings are all open air.

There are a few floating VMD signs on the buildings themselves talking about restaurants and shops. Some even thanking and praising Lady Sinclair, and the rest of the Matriarchy.

The majority of residents are less than thirty, they all wear loose 'homespun' yet surprisingly futuristic clothing.

Those that are not considered locals are the service reps for the escilons, a military/security/maintenance service entrusted to keep the advanced tech working. The clothes of this order are flowing gowns and coats of advanced synthetics that glow various colors, mostly aquamarine, yellow, and blue, but other colors are represented.

The adventurer walks along, getting suspicious glares by the all female security force dressed in out of place power armor, but the citizens, mostly female, smile and greet him, some even try to take selfies with him. He continues on looking for a place to grab a bite to eat.

### **EXT. GOLDEN PASTURES CIVIC SQUARE - SAME TIME**

The square is like a park and campground with high tech looking picnic tables surrounded by bushes and flowers, and a few other tech constructs. It is a fair/carnival atmosphere.

There are people, women outnumbering men 3 to one, are lounging, some play games, some card, most via floating VMDs, some even watch others play these games, there is a barbeque and some sports being played.

We pass service reps working on signs, levitators, and other tech directly related to the ancient structures, scanning the emitters and making adjustments, one does something wrong and a puff of smoke erupts. Most ignore it.

The only other people 'working' are on the older end of the spectrum, but most of the work is done by the machines, the people just talk to customers and serve, in some cases robots take care of that too.

He finally finds an open air diner like restaurant and approaches. Without hassle he sits on one of the bar stools. As his bracelet nears the polished marble looking counter a light blue green glow manifests around him, starting to accelerate his healing.

The bartender, PAIGE (F) 20s turns her head, double takes the smiles and approaches, leans on the counter.

PAIGE

Ah, hello, adventurer, welcome to Golden Pastures, are you here to enjoy the festival?

He smirks uneasily and after a look around begins.

ADVENTURER

Well, uh, not specifically, just a little food and rest...

PAIGE

Adventurers like you are amazing, I could never do what you do...

ADVENTURER

(under breath) by design I'd wager. (aloud) Not something I would have picked if left to my own devices. (pause) Look, I'm a bit fatigued and just need some food. I could use a nice steak...

She grimaces, confused about the word steak.

PAIGE

Uh, not really much call for that, round here. We do have a nice red bean and rice pilaf...

He smiles politely and sighs

ADVENTURER

Sounds uh, nice, I guess. But I could really use something more, filling. (beat) Beef stew perhaps?

She smiles brightly

PAIGE

Critter makes an amazing miso soup!

A serving bot turns around and beeps enthusiastically.

ADVENTURER

Again, not... I need something to recharge...

PAIGE

Not much call for that around here. You can try the escilon commissary...

He holds up his bracelet and shakes it a bit.

ADVENTURER

Wouldn't want to trespass...

She is confused by the concept of trespassing.

He pulls out some gems and drops them on the counter, she curiously examines them

ADVENTURER (CONT'D)

Please, I can pay...

Finished with the gems, she thinks for a moment and shrugs.

PAIGE

I can have Critter get some...

The machine called Critter obediently approaches, selects some gems and trundles off.

PAIGE (CONT'D)

But tell me, what can we do until he gets back?

We turn away from this interaction and move in on a trio of teens as they enter and walk amongst the masses: GALEN STRADIC (M) tall average teen with sandy blond hair, his

friend STONE BAKER (M) teen on the leaner side but lacking muscle, and TRAVIS HASKUL (M) average teen

STONE

...Bread and circuses man, they are just trying to distract us.

TRAVIS

Yeah, I know, All fun and games its great, (beat) but you mean that in a bad way. Yeah, you keep saying that, day in and day out. I still don't understand what your going on about.

STONE

They're trying to distract, us, man...

GALEN

Who? From what?

STONE

Exactly, people we don't know who don't care about us are controlling our lives, its all about their power, they just keep us asleep and unable to think...

GALEN

Yet, we do. So board and yet always surrounded by spectacle with nothing real to do...

TRAVIS

WE? Your the only one that wants more. No idea why, I'm good, and Stone, well, he's Stone...

STONE

You keep saying that you want to be 'in control', or whatever. But we cant be, no one

is, dust in the wind, man. Even the MPR, she don't really have power, shes just going through the motions, and stuff, a slave to her own power. Life has no rails, man! Just play along, and enjoy...

GALEN

Playing implies making decisions...

TRAVIS

There are idle games...

STONE

Everything is idle man...

GALEN

This whole place is on permanent easy, I need a challenge...

STONE

No, man, you only think you do. You know if you get ascended, there is no coming back, and you will have bit off more than you can chew, and be all out of resets.

GALEN

Like you would know...

STONE

Has anyone ever come back?

GALEN

Doesn't prove anything, if you get to leave would you come back. Well, maybe you would. OUT there is entirely different, exciting!

TRAVIS



Well, just like a glitchy bot, exciting is dangerous, we can't handle

GALEN

We have never tried...

TRAVIS

We just need to enjoy Stone's bread and circuses, let escilon deal with the glitchy bots and dangers, it's their job, and they have to work. The aldrinari always on their backs, forcing them to scrape by for scraps, so don't take their jobs, let them work...

They all sit at a picnic table

GALEN

How are you not exhausted, doing the same things, day in and day out. Golden Pastures hasn't changed in years...

TRAVIS

We're not exhausted because we don't do anything. And who would want our pastures to change, it's great!

STONE

Think about it, Len, we keep hearing about this ascension, but don't know anything about it. For all we know, they just slap the ascendants with the title of adventure and let them wander around and get killed in the wilderness, population control without the need to work.

TRAVIS

Yeah, look at those adventurers. Always struggling and never getting anywhere. And that's just the basic levels of the power you think you want. They wanted it, and couldn't

handle it. It's best to stay in the communities,  
where nothing bad ever happens.

STONE

Nothing happens at all, man, that's the point.  
The unknown needs to stay that way.

GALEN

Just because we don't see it happening,  
doesn't mean nothing happens. One day the  
facade will crack, and we will have no idea how  
to handle it. We have to seek out the problems  
before they arise so we can solve them before  
they get out of hand...

TRAVIS

Agree to disagree.

#### **EXT. ELYSION SHORES - SAME TIME**

BLAIRE HOLIDAY (F) teen strawberry blond, and her friends: NATASHA KERES (F) teen raven hair, AKEIDA YESFIR (F) teen brunette, and ZORAIDA LAINE (F) teen platinum blond, gather in an open restaurant high on a cliff face facing an endless green blue ocean, the town participating in their own 'carnival' party, though similar things are going on, just more ocean themed.

ElySION Shores is a small crystal-eco Marraco/Venice overlooking the ocean with tree sized mushrooms and ferns. As in golden pastures, women vastly outnumber the men.

As the group walks, glitches appear to follow them while they are unaware of the glitches.

ZORAIDA

You should see the exhibition hall, all those  
beautiful projects. Why Didn't you submit  
yours, Blaire?

BLAIRE

(shrugs) I did. Lot 116703.

NATASHA

That ugly thing? And you weren't even first.  
You are so much better than that. If you would  
just try...

BLAIRE

I'm not going to sweat it, it doesn't really  
matter, and you know it. We're not getting  
selected, and that's the best thing for us.

NATASHA

If you don't try...

AKEIDA

If you're so dead set against being selected,  
why submit at all? No one is forcing us...

BLAIR

The dog that doesn't bark, Keida.

ALL

What?!

BLAIRE

It would be too noteworthy if I didn't. I have to  
keep as low profile as possible.

ZORAIDA

Ugh, your still on that? Enjoy life, otherwise,  
what the point of growing up on the shore?

They approach a table as a major glitch occurs.

NATASHA

Uhg, not this again. Think the escilon could  
keep things functional. Lets try over there.

As the girls walk off, a group of 7 escilon techs, MERIDETH, CHEL, O'HERA, ELSA,  
MAGGY, YESMITH and JONES, all female 30's, in their out of place powered armor  
looking uniforms, with glowing edges of purplish red, the body silvery, coppery and

golden, there are also several settings of gemstones, enter the area checking readings on data pads and VMDs projected from their talismens.

Chel is a mute and only communicates through sign.

JONES

Isn't this a little excessive? Seven techs for a minor series of glitches?

ELSA

I know? Why is it, that we always get these bug hunts?

MERIDETH

Ah, well you know, murmurs of unrest...

They all look around in confusion

MAGGY

Unrest? Here? I grew up in a place like this. These girls dont have a care in the world.

MERIDETH

It's not the plebus, it never is. It's all about the upper crusts and their power plays that only they care about or understand. All the majority of them want is to be left alone and provided entertainment

ELSA

...Except the ones that want to entertain or be creative...

MAGGY

Or those like us that need structure...

O'HERA

Letting the Altinari tell us what to do, and keep the others in their silos. Kinda makes you wonder...

Chel taps O'Hera on the shoulder to get her attention

CHEL

[Carefull, if the Altinari cant control you, they will reclass you as an Adventurer]

MERIDETH

Ah yes, the illusion of choice, like choosing this over security...

CHEL

[Yeah, you can't imagine being on the security for the likes of lady Azaizal]

O'HERA

Yeah, doing that makes these bug hunts like a stroll through the daisies.

YESMITH

The readings were localized around here, but not any more... its like these bugs are scared of you Deth...

MERIDETH

I'm good, but not that good. You know who is surprisingly good tracking bugs? The Damhán Alla...

O'HERA

That bitch? She may be called the spider, but, she was never a tech...

ELSA

Yeah, women of powerful houses like hers are never escilon.

MERIDETH

True, Kaida was never a tech, but she was in charge of diagnostics at DARPA before she was named Damhán

CHEL

[She was always lucky, even back at Agripa Prep...]

MERIDETH

Yeah, there is nothing here, let's split up.

We return to Blaire and her friends.

ZORAIDA

...I don't really think you can call proper nutrition a fix. You know they need special nutrition not found in other food so their nodules develop and function...

AKEIDA

Or so we're told, Just ignore them, they'll go away.

ZORAIDA

Lies, drugs, or whatever, I'd kill for that kind of power, influence...

BLAIRE

Wouldn't say that too loud, Zora, it's a dog eat dog world in the enclaves, and unless you're cold, calculated, and vicious, you can't survive...

ZORAIDA

You think I'm not? Crap, why are the lights flickering?

A robot server trundles up, but when it gets close to the group it glitches out. It smashes Jones over the head, Blaire catches it's hand, it shivers and beeps. Part of the aquamarine inlays explode. Occasionally sparks even fly from Blaire's hands

The escilon draw weapons, the crowd clears out. Some of the escilon shoot at the robot and others stop Blaire's group from leaving. The escilon work to keep everyone safe and establish a perimeter.

As Blaire's emotions flare, lights flicker more and more inlays glitch/short out and explode, people's data pads fail. After they take out the server, the escilon body slams Blaire and forcibly places a shackle covered in glowing alchemical symbols on her right wrist.

They snap the device closed, punch in a code of alchemical symbols, the device lights up, red cracks appear but are soon green-shifted to aquamarine then fade entirely. Slowly all the chaos stops.

MERIDETH

What that hell was that?

CHEL

[Our equipment is shorted out, I'll need to get a hardline to...]

MERIDETH

Do it, (to Blaire) explain yourself!

BLAIRE

I get attacked by a robot and you cuff me? You tell me what's going on!

O'Hera looks over the shackle and looks at her commander.

O'HERA

Ma'am, the shackle is suppressing it, that can only mean one thing...

BLAIRE

...What would that be?...

O'HERA

...Proto Othala Thurisaz, must be a pretty high count too...

MERIDETH

She has a talismen, check it.

MAGGY

Why would she have a talismen at her age, here, outside the enclaves?

ELSA

I think we can guess.

O'HERA

Shorted, another sure sign...

MERIDETH

So, are you legacy or spon-genis? Rebel sleeper lying in wait...

The question shocks Blaire she replies nervously.

BLAIRE

I think I have a line that stopped a few generations ago...

MERIDETH

Legacy, then. Well, for everyone's safety, you're coming with us, we'll get the full story at the station.

### **INT. HIGH SCHOOL CAFETERIA - MORNING**

The cafeteria is of a decent size for a middling institution. There are long tables and round ones, many of the chairs are empty, the ones that are occupied are used by pre-teens boys, there are no doors in the building, just archways.

This is the annual 'elevation evaluation' season, something similar to a science fair. The boys are getting antsy, they want the elevation just as much as the girls.



The school administrator, an older female, average, long sandy blond hair, long flowing robes with illumination on the edges with a similar look to the armor of the escilons, enters and is immediately bombarded by questions about why they are here.

ADMIN

I know you are excited, and like the girls, have been looking forward to the evaluations, but unfortunately you will not be participating.

The boys are not happy.

ADMIN (CONT'D)

The council has decreed that this cycle only the top girls will be eligible for elevation.

BOY 1

But if we don't get selected now, we will never have a chance, I don't have what it takes to be an adventurer...

BOY 2

Yeah, I know, right? Why is it, that when there is a restriction, it's us that get passed over.

BOY 1

And why is there a restriction anyway?

ADMIN

There are resource concerns, the elevated require certain nutrients and such to live, our tech requires certain scarce raw materials, the elevation process is cost intensive, and girls are considered more heavily, because they have a higher success rates and eventual PG counts. It's a simple playing of the numbers. If the harvests and other resource collections are successful, I am assured you will be up for consideration next cycle...

BOY 1

Oh yeah, cause they never did this to us in the past...

ADMIN

Well, if your that disgruntled, this just means the adventurer permits will be easier to come by...

There is sudden silence. The two boys that had been at the head of the protest ease back and sit well away from the Admin.

BOY 1

Oh, uh, no, not disgruntled, more uhm...

ADMIN

Please, I know your frustrated and I would be too, you just have to have faith in the system. (beat) In the meantime, please enjoy the pizza party, just for you, the girls don't get any of it.

The administrator leaves as pizzas are brought out, telling the escilon guards, 4 women in powered armor, to keep the boys from leaving.

The boys rush the servers and nearly clean off the trays and boxes in the first go, but more are brought out.

After getting a few slices, Galen finds a spot to sit alone. He is soon approached by Travis. They sit in silence for a moment munching on pizza

TRAVIS

I don't get it. You spent the past year getting ready for this, yet when your hopes are shattered, you just take it in stride. I would have thought you would be raging against the machine...

Stone approaches and sits down as Galen grumbles.

GALEN

Who says I'm cool with it? I am silently regrouping, planning a new battle. I'm not

giving the matriarchy the satisfaction of being visibly angered by their constant machinations.

STONE

Seriously? After they cut off this, and you have no other artsy talent, too independent to be a contender, the only other option for you would be Adventurer...

GALEN

(sighs) that's really what I'm afraid of. I have no illusions that I can entertain, be a team player, or survive the wilds. It's just too big of a difficulty spike, and we, I would have no redos...

TRAVIS

Yeah, and all this talk of resource concerns, but it's only the Adventurers that I see pay for anything. (beat) We even get pizza when they want us distracted.

STONE

Yeah, those who control the pies control the world, Man. You think Fennic stands a chance this year...

GALEN

Hate to say it, but Stone is right. Sort of. They control the flow of not just resources, but information and people, even mercantile and contenters don't get to go and sell what they want. All the more efficient... (groan) I have to find a way to use this. There may not be any other chances. (beat) Think about it. There have been fewer and fewer elevations, even when they let boys into the club. Last year there were only five girls... It's like they can't

support the numbers they used to. And Fennic is just not that good, never were...

Another friend of Galen's pokes her head out of the kitchen. This is MARY KLINE (F) , a teen Gina Carano.

MARY

Len, I have a problem.

GALEN

Yeah, the competition starts in like five minutes, if you're not at the booth when the judge walks by, you lose your chance, pizza?

MARY

It's not working, the arm only stutters up and down, that's even more embarrassing than not being at the booth.

With a sigh, Galen gets up and hands his pizza to Travis and looks around before strolling into the kitchens.

GALEN

(to himself) May the odds be forever in our favor...

### **INT. SCHOOL'S GYMNASIUM - LATER**

The gym is full of girls with their 'elevation' projects. Many are organizing their booths and going over their projects, they are all super nervous.

The booths all have VMDs over them, indicating the owner of the project, and other details. The floor is polished tiles with the glowing lines of the aquamarine lines ubiquitous of the tech.

Among all this hustle and bustle is a rather androgynous lone male student, JERRY SCOTT. Unlike everyone else he is wearing a suit. He preens in front of a mirror as the head judge, CLARISSA STEVENS (F) 60s white hair glowy metallic fiber robes, walks up and glares for a moment.

CLARISSA

This section was registered to Jerry Scott.

JERRY

You're looking at him.

CLARISSA

Ha, not even trying to hide...

JERRY

And why would I?

He hands her a plastic page with glowing letters just above the surface.

JERRY (CONT'D)

You'll see I am the top of my class...

She doesn't even look at the page before ripping it up.

CLARISSA

Males weren't to be considered.

JERRY

And that is your mistake, shutting the door on someone so talented...

CLARISSA

Hunh, doors. Look...

JERRY

I know we can work something...

He is approached by two of Clarissa's 'aspects', robotic constructs made to resemble the user controlled directly by the user's brain. Jerry's arms are grabbed, he is lifted up and carted away. As he is carted off, the school's administrator walks up.

CLARISSA

(offhandedly to Jerry as he is dragged off) You may have been correct that nothing is set in stone, but you really need to learn the right

way. (to administrator) Looks like we have our first adventurer volunteer.

JERRY

**NOOO!!!**

Mary and Galen sneak to the back where her project, a pick and place robot sits spasming.

GALEN

Yeah, I'd say you have a problem.

MARY

It's not responding to any commands, I've tried turning it off and back on, and it just goes back to...(beat) Well, this.

GALEN

Really, just a power reset, that was all?

He starts opening the programs and diagnosing.

MARY

I did all the soldering, much of the fabrication, you were the programmer, You know I can't read alchemia.

GALEN

I'm the one that came up with this and repurposed all the old age semiconductors. Hunh, a runtime error, give me a sec, I have to redo some of the subroutines.

MARY

Hurry, it's started. Why does it look like you know exactly which was changed?

GALEN

You're not a judge...

The judges, women, mostly 30's, white hair walk around the fair talking with the presenters and making notes. Galen works trying to stay hidden.

As he works, a judge, AGNESS ROSE, F 30's long white hair, and two of her 'aspects', approaches and watches in silence.

GALEN

If we can get this old age tech working we could reduce our dependency on magecraft and...

AGNESS

You think we haven't tried that? It's been 3 hundred years since this age started, the Event caused a lot of damage. (beat) Males were not to be considered this year.

GALEN

Uh, so I hear...

MARY

We did this project together, before we knew. There was a problem with the program...

Her 2 aspects grab Galen's arms and start dragging him away.

Agness makes a note on a data pad, the language displayed is based on the old character set of alchemists.

GALEN

Really, just fail her, you're not even going to look at it, just because I was here? At least give *her* a chance!

The aspects stop, she turns to look at him with a raised eyebrow.

AGNESS

Interesting that you can read my notes. Are they violating the trust and teaching Alchemia now? To boys especially?

GALEN

Uh, uhm, no, I can't read, reading is for losers.  
I just...

After some thought, Agness turns to the robot and activates it.

The machine starts up, small items shake and levitate to form a grid. The robot arm moves up, down, left, and right finding the limits and determining where the arm is and tries to pick one of the displays but crushes it.

MARY

Shit.

Agness turns off the machine before it could crush more, and gives it a once over, noting some bad cold shunt soldering connecting the claw's pressure plate and cpu.

AGNESS

Hunh, poor soldier job. (beat) Hydraulic driven?

MARY

I soldered that...

GALEN

Pneumatics, and the position sensor set is magnetic, the piezo...

AGNESS

No AEtheria?

MARY

Just repurposed silicon semiconductors from the old age.

AGNESS

Where is your eval?

Mary picks up a plastic looking paper with a DNA report, as well as grades and physical stats, strength, speed, ect, from a nearby podium and hands it to her with shaking hands.



Agness looks it over and puts it in a manila folder.

AGNESS

Congratulations, you have been selected. Pack this up and have a chat with your transition counselor. (beat) As for you...

GALEN

Males were not to be considered, I don't...

AGNESS

Interrupting your superiors is not a good idea, especially for one in your precarious position.

One of the aspects lets go of Galen and starts off to find the Administrator, the other starts dragging Galen away again.

AGNESS

You are to wait in the administrator's office while we figure this out. Try not to mess anything else up.

#### **INT. ADMINISTRATOR'S OFFICE - LATER**

Galen sits in a plastic chair in front of the administrator's desk, the Aspect 'at ease' eyes watching him.

After a moment Agness and the administrator enter.

AGNESS

This is all his things?

ADMIN

In this facility, assuming he hasn't hidden anything.

AGNESS

We're going to need to borrow your office for a moment. (beat) When my supervisor arrives, please have her come in.

The admin grimaces.

ADMIN

(under her breath) As if I could stop *her*.

The Administrator bows respectfully and backs out of the office.

Agness sits on the desk curiously watching Galen. After a moment she tosses his notebook at him.

AGNESS

This is not for the masses, easier to keep the peace when certain knowledge is out of reach. (beat) Of the masses.

GALEN

I'm sure the elites don't do their own maintenance. It falls to people like me, us. (beat) Those that don't have, abilities. (shrug) Can't fix things if I can't read the instructions.

AGNESS

You'd be surprised what is expected of many. But yes, working the AEtheric refining and other crafting equipment is not directly controlled by the Matriarchy. There are casts between it and (beat) the plebus.

GALEN

You mean me?

AGNESS

Perhaps not for much longer.

The judge's supervisor, Clarissa storms in. She completely ignores Galen.

CLARISSA

Males were not to be considered.

AGNESS

He is learning Alchemia, autodidact. He also contributed greatly to a non-AEthereic legacy device.

Galen looks at the aspect.

GALEN

Do you ever get used to being ignored?

ASPECT

This body is controlled by me, Agness, through my will, it is just like any other limb.

GALEN

So, (beat) you're like a vestigial foot?

ASPECT

It takes great concentration to communicate through an aspect, especially when I am involved in another conversation, please shut it. You'll learn soon enough.

Clarissa looks at Agness with a raised eyebrow.

CLARISSA

Really? Where is his eval?

AGNESS

Males were not to be considered. My third is retrieving the report from the archives, this would be so much easier if they had their talismens. I should have it... Ah.

The last aspect turns into the archway and hands Clarissa the eval.

GALEN

Do you have any aspects, where are they, how do I get one...

CLARISSA

I almost want you to be accepted, you need to learn respect, and I am sorely tempted to teach you. All escilons have aspects, based on one's ability to control them determines the amount and capabilities.

ASPECT

She has five, and they are...

Clarissa speaks directly to Agness, who 'playfully' chooses to stick to using her aspect.

CLARISSA

It is rude to speak through aspects when one is physically present, I may have to teach you manors too.

ASPECT

We have all night, no need to report...

CLARISSA

Not now, and never in front of children. (to Galen) Your overalls are quite good, no known lineage, probability of success... (beat) 95 percent. (to Agness) Talk to transition, I'll smooth it over with the Matriarchy.

### **INT. RECOVERY WARD REC ROOM - WEEKS LATER**

The room is full of teens in hospital gowns in various stages of recovery. Some are too vexed to move, others are faring much better, playing card or board games with others.

The eggshell walls with silver and gold lines, have VMD pictures, moving and still, some watch as if a TV program.

Galen, who is wrapped in a blanket weakly sitting in an armchair trying not to faint, or puke again, stares at a VMD 'Risk tactics' type board game.

We see a time lapse of a game starting with 6 players, at first he is losing, then it looks like he will win when he knocks out #6, EDNA, (F) black bob cut short hair, knocks out another, then blitzkriegs through #4.

Now, Edna has conquered half the map, while he and the third, TRISH, (F) multi colored pixie cut, in a wheelchair, are fighting over a small island continent, it's his move against the third player, who only has two territories left.

GALEN

West Arlight plains to Kasteil wastes.

From a 'hand' displayed to her, a card is placed on the map.

TRISH

Emergency scramble, Regent fortress  
reinforces...

A card from Galen's 'hand' falls to the board.

GALEN

And now I get to use my commander card,  
supply line ambush, your troops are  
surrounded, all my attack rolls are double.

Three red D10 and 2 black are rolled in the VMD and Trish loses. Trish's troops are obliterated and Galen's takes over both territories.

TRISH

I don't know how, but you're cheating.

She wheels away in her wheelchair in a huff.

EDNA

You haven't won against me in three weeks...

GALEN

You're not dying...

EDNA

You can try, but we both know...

GALEN

Well, one must choose their battles, and, this one is over.

EDNA

Believe it or not, you are a challenge, order of enemies is the answer for you. But, being epic, I make it look easy. Keep in touch, Greenie.

As Edna walks away another, BLAIRE, who is in street clothes approaches.

BLAIRE

So, you're the only male that made it this year, (beat) Uhg, you look like you might not have made it.

GALEN

I feel like I'm dead, so it's a set. too bad I can't trade it in for more troops. I'll beat her yet. (beat) Why isn't death following you, how are you already well enough to be in real clothes?

BLAIRE

I was watching for a bit, you actually really lost 12 turns ago. Should have massed and blitzed for her fort, probably lose half the force then, but the reinforcements would have made up for it. (sigh) I actually didn't get the ascension inoculation, I'm what you call, a legacy. My lineage stopped producing PG, allegedly poison, and moved out of the enclave, and my body started producing it, somehow, though i can't get straight answers from anyone..

GALEN

So, you came to rub your nose in your good luck?

BLAIRE

No, due to a unique situation, I had to be adopted by relatives still in the Capitol, something about control issues. And here is really the only transition point in the region.

GALEN

So, you in recovery to mock us?

BLAIRE

Mock **you**, mostly. Nah, I just wanted to meet the only boy that made it.

GALEN

Playing some numbers, setting up 5d wizard's chess...

BLAIRE

This is a game I didn't want to play, and I'm just looking to get out alive...

A NURSE, (M) mid 20s approaches with a data pad.

NURSE

I see you are finally responsive, Mr. Stradic. How are you feeling?

GALEN

Like Death is late. How is it, some are bouncing with life, and others are almost dead...

BLAIRE

Or completely dead.

NURSE

Well, that depends on the probable PG count, the higher count you will have, once all this recovery nonsense is done, the more you will

feel like death. Did Dr. Olga not cover this?  
Anyway, yours...

He starts manipulating his data pad.

Collective gasps erupt as a regal woman, KAIDA MORWEN, 50's white hair in a bun, her talismen is more decorative than the standard business looking ones of everyone else, and her entourage, all women in their 30's, enter, she looks around and zeroes in on Blaire.

KAIDA

Is that my new daughter? It's sad that she is so plain... (beat) and surrounded by such foul creatures.

GALEN

What creatures?

NURSE

(whisper) She means us, men, many of the Matriarchy are a bit sexist.

KAIDA

And not without good reason, there is precious little you're kind is good for.

NURSE

Many like some of the services we provide.

She sneers at him and embraces Blaire.

KAIDA

Come, we have much to do to get you ready for school, you mustn't give your new family a black eye.

BLAIRE

Definitely not my intent, but what of him?

KAIDA



What of him? (beat) Probably go through the trials like all the ugh others.

BLAIRE

One man this year, probably worth a little...

KAIDA

You, Nurse, What is his count?

He checks his notes and stumbles to reply quickly

NURSE

Still undergoing morphis, but projections are upward of three hundred Uraz.

KAIDA

Three hundred and Uraz, that is something special. I don't have a studding license, but it shouldn't be too difficult. Come, boy. No need for you to compete, I shall be sponsoring you.

He starts struggling to follow, Blaire pushes him back into his wheelchair and pushes him after Kaida

GALEN

Three hundred Uraz?

BLAIRE

PG count, parts per billion, 450 theoretical max, over three fifty health issues start showing up, but still powerful, and worth studding. The futhark qualifier describes the type of magecraft your will be suited for. I'm Othala Thurisaz, tech and lightning. Uraz is rare and means you could potentially do it all, but having so many globulnodgels means even with a high count it will still be an uphill battle, to do much more than simple tricks, but still valuable.

GALEN

Why the sudden interest in me?

BLAIRE

It may not be my game, but if I am to play, I will stack the hell out of my deck, and its not sudden. Come'on, I don't think that woman waits for anything.

### **INT. MORWEN MANSION, FOYER - EARLY AFTERNOON**

Blaire and Galen Follow their new guardian, weirdly insisting they call her 'Mother' into the entrance of the mansion. Galen is sipping a glowing electric blue colored liquid from a stoppered jug, it is helping him feel a little better.

Much of the staff is waiting at the far side of the room, a quartet waits near the entrance waiting to assist the mistress of the house and greet the new arrivals. They are dressed in flowy glowing Sari/traditional chinese and/or japanese type robes that flow like silk, but the edges actively emit a soft light, much of the male staff has more revealing garments than the women.

The ceramic like walls have decidedly less circuit like lines than most others, they also appear to be more decorative than the outside and more public places.

The six sided room has a table in the middle on a mosaic that is 'displayed' on the floor, and two grand staircases going up the sides.

KAIDA

Welcome to your new home, Blaire, dear, you shall have full reign as any heir apparent would, Boy, keep to the main areas and your room for now, I shall have to ponder what your usefulness entails. (beat) This is Ananastasia, my head of staff, she will see to your questions, and ensure your things get to your rooms promptly. I have important matters of state I am late attending to.

Ananastasia is a tall red head of about 30, graceful and deceptively powerful.

Kaida exits as Ananastasia approaches with some members of the staff, including only one male, DUKE, 20s light brown hair lightly muscled; he is the head of the escilon maintenance crew.

GALEN

Wow, a head of staff, your new mother must be pretty high up the echelons...

BLAIRE

**Our** new mother, 'Brother'. She is one of the 8 ancient houses, last of her line, apparently...

ANANASTASIA

Which is why she jumped at your adoption, you were going to get taken in by her cousin, Contessa Valiant, and not as an adoptee. But end of lines have a bit more leverage. (beat) As for you, she actually talked to you, interesting.

GALEN

And why would such a, (beat) powerful woman be last of her line?

ANANASTASIA

You're in Valdisia now, learning your place should be at the top of your to-do list, but, that segues neatly into the answer both of you need. The one place she believes men to have a place, she chooses not to take part of. She is not alone in that view, its becoming more and more dominate, its leading to... Not a concern for you.

BLAIRE

I thought male numbers in Valdisia were lower because of lack of survival odds and power...

ANANASTASIA

That is part of it, but, men do tend to bully their way into leadership of whatever group they are a part of, even in some cases that which should only be feminine, that is something the original matriarchs planned against, and so, male populations of the upper Echelons are kept to bare minimum, keeping the price of, certain services high, and those that can provide them a certain power. (beat) The women running the show, that is, not the men themselves. (beat) But for now, Duke will take you to your rooms in the old Dungeons, and milady, I will take you to your rooms in the tower.

Anastasia leads Blaire to the grand staircase as the staff disperses and Duke approaches Galen.

GALEN

This might have been a mistake.

DUKE

You have no idea.

**INT. MORWEN MANSION, TOWER HALLWAYS - LATER**

Anastasia leads Blaire down a long brightly lit hall, the ever present light lines along the ceiling and pumping a lot of light into the air, as they approach, the light gets brighter, as they leave, the light dims.

There are many small tables covered with knick-knacks and a few chairs and chaise lounges.

ANANASTASIA

...You are the second in line of one of the oldest houses in the world. Your word carries weight.

BLAIRE

What if I choose not to...

ANANASTASIA

You would be chewed up and spit out, your lack of impetus starting the downfall of half the Onseely court as they start to rebuild.

BLAIRE

Really, half?

ANANASTASIA

The strings of power may have multiple filaments, but they touch so many things that one weak link is enough to take down dynasties, some links are more important and unbalanced than others. Only those in the fringes can choose to stay out of the game and not destroy the world with their lack of ambition. You are now far beyond that, don't even try to see that box, it's no longer for you.

BLAIRE

That's, not what I wanted to hear.

ANANASTASIA

The clash of crowns is not about desire, but survival not of you, but our way of life. Once the series of systems are in place, a minor disruption can unsettle it all and kill millions, and nothing from the outside can cause deviation. I'll thrive regardless; (darkly) don't make me have to turn you into a puppet, I simply don't have the time. (beat, then more cheerily) Though this wing has not been used since Miss Morwen was young, it has been cleaned and maintained, let us know if anything does not meet standards. (beat) Let me know if you get any back talk from the staff. Ah, here we are.

They stop in front of a set of gilded double doors. As Ananastasia indicates, the doors open.

**INT. MORWEN MANSION, BLAIRE'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

The pair enters, as they do, the lights brighten and the shades open.

The room is shiny ceramic, mostly forest green as opposed to the off white of the rest of the mansion, the only soft surfaces are the bed and a few chairs. There is a desk in front of a window.

There is a large area in the middle of the room with the aquamarine inlay in a hexagon with a few hand weapons in holders around it.

BLAIRE

Wow, it's so, (beat) sterile.

ANANASTASIA

Yes, a proper room for a proper young Altinari.  
(beat) You, disapprove?

BLAIRE

Its, more that, well, I am used to sharing first off, it's the way in the communities, and (beat) carpets and wood, Its just so, (beat) alien.

ANANASTASIA

You are no longer a plebus, you are a Altinari. Sharing rooms is simply not done. And as far as the décor, I suggest you get used to it. The soft touch is no longer yours.

With that chilling statement, Ananastasia takes her leave.

Blaire wanders to the weapons area, picks up a sword and gives it a few swings.

BLAIRE

I'm not cut out for this.

**INT. MORWEN MANSION, DUNGEON HALLWAY - SAME TIME**

The passageways of the dungeon were obsidian black with the wall circuits redshifted from aquamarine; more of blood than water. Each footstep echoing.

DUKE

It may be called a dungeon, but it's really more of a basement, I doubt it's ever been used as such. This is where most of the equipment for the building maintenance is, as one would expect. All of the male staff, the five of us, and now you, live down here.

He stops in front of a simple door, pulls out a key, unlocks it, and pushes it open, as it swings open he hands Galen the key.

GALEN

Wow, mechanical lock, don't think I have ever seen one of those.

DUKE

Well, because most are unfamiliar with them, they are the most secure locks in the world. (beat) This is the Guard Master's room, the best sleeping chamber down here, been a while since it's been used.

#### **INT. MORWEN MANSION, GALEN'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

The large room has institutional carpeting and a rug at the foot of a twin sized bed. There is a half wall of light brown wood paneling, the rest of the wall is the familiar shiny ceramic but it is a milky color with that same aquamarine inlay. There is a large wooden desk and a set of dumbbells and a bench.

GALEN

Cozy.

DUKE

We take what we can get. I only have a bed, my office has the desk and I have to share the communal weight room.

GALEN

It sounds like you have a problem with that, though I don't know why, communities share everything...

DUKE

We are males serving in a female world, it doesn't matter how smart or skilled you are, you're not going to get anywhere unless you look good.

GALEN

That's a weird thing to say. (beat) I was selected because I made a device...

DUKE

Just because that is why you were selected, like I said, it doesn't matter how smart you are, or skilled, you have to look good to get in the door. (beat) If I were you, I'd work on my abs and biceps. The staff is at your disposal for tips and stuff, but you are not escilon you are diocese, they are all going to resent you, be careful...

GALEN

Do you resent me?

Duke, who had been about to exit, pauses for a moment before turning back.

DUKE

You are in that weird state, despite a position of relative authority, you have no real power, but are expected to be in charge, your 'lessers' will expect the world from you, your 'peers' will laugh at you, and your superiors will ignore if you are lucky. You will be responsible for people that will hate you, and wont be able to do anything about it, or for them. Good luck, your going to need it, few men survive their first years of ascension, especially as one form a



community, those that do quickly learn their place and never move on, that is the way it is, and the sooner you realize it, the better for you, and everyone.

With that, he leaves, pulling the door shut behind him.

Galen shuffles around and makes his way to the weights. He experimentally tests a few and sighs.

GALEN

Judged for my body when all I know how to do is deep work? I am so screwed.

### **INT. MEDICAL CENTER RECOVERY ROOM - MORNING**

The blue white ceramic walls are just shy of being called shiny. There is no door, but a small archway with curtains. There are 6 beds, 3 along each wall, and there are tracks for curtain walls between the beds that all look like Star Trek style original series bio beds. VMDs above the heads show vital stats.

Mary is in the middle bed on one side, and there are two others on the other wall at the ends. Mary is ashen and pallid, her blanket is tucked all the way up.

Galen enters and smiles when he sees Mary, he walks over and hands her a get well present. Galen is dressed in grayish glowing Sari type robes lit at the edges with a soft dancing rainbow.

MARY

Look who finally decided to visit.

GALEN

Things have gotten strange, Mary.

MARY

No kidding, they dressed you up as an off duty escilon...

GALEN

Actually, I got made into a dioces.

MARY

Well, now they see what we all saw.

GALEN

Yeah, well, its actually more complicated than that. How are you?

MARY

Oh, great, look at me, I was going to run a marathon, care to join?

He smiles and hands her a vile of glowing blue liquid.

GALEN

It tastes like absolute ass, but trust me, it helps.

She accepts it, and after an attentive sniff, she drinks it all in one gulp. Her skin almost immediately looks better.

MARY

Uhg, you weren't kidding! Now I'm glad I wasn't given any...

GALEN

Really?

MARY

I've seen some others take a dose...

GALEN

You haven't gotten any yet?

MARY

Something about it not being covered under my HMO, whatever that is. Like they want to keep me sick....

GALEN

All the better to control us...

MARY

Now you sound like Stone.

GALEN

I'm thinking he may not be too far off the target.

He looks at the health readouts and hold out his hand.

MARY

What are you doing?

GALEN

We're supposed to interact with the tech  
without concentrating, but...

The display glitches then shows 325 ?? (Ehwas Lagus, can't find futhark)

GALEN

Dark magic and water, but those numbers, no  
wander you're not doing so hot. (beat) don't  
worry, I'll make sure you get more manajuce.

### **INT. TRIALS ARENA - DAY**

{may be removed or modified at later date} montage start:

This is a succession of scenes to show A- what the trials are like, and B-the difference between being 'adopted' and/or growing up in the system, and having to fight for it, part of the dichotomy of the title.

We first see a succession of teen girls close up facing the camera with clenched fists, some have embers, some sparks, some lightning, some flames, some frost effects or a combo. These abilities are not that strong.

### **INT. MORWEN MANSION, GALEN'S ROOM - DAY**

Galen is reading at his desk, Duke enters approaches watches for a moment before spinning Galen around in the chair, grabs the book and hands him a dumbell.

### **INT. MEDICAL CENTER RECOVERY ROOM - DAY**

Mary, still looking like death warmed over, watches on of her roommates leave, then slip a drink from a vial of the glowing blue liquid.

**INT. MORWEN MANSION, BLAIRE'S ROOM - DAY**

Ananastasia and Blaire are having an intense sparing session with blades, Blaire is clearly outmatched and Ananastasia is enjoying toying with her.

**INT. TRIALS ARENA - DAY**

We watch a cadre of teens going through training kata, the forms are not impressive, there is some phasing, like white belts first learning

**INT. MORWEN MANSION, GALEN'S ROOM - DAY**

Galen is working on a large robotic device, Duke walks up behind, taps him on the shoulder. When Galen turns around Duke holds out a jump rope, Galen looks at it, glares at Duke and grabs the rope.

**INT. TRIALS ARENA - DAY**

The arena is set up like a competition kitchen with teens behind tables with cooking implements and baskets.

The scene goes black as the words 'Ala cuisine!' appear.

**INT. MORWEN MANSION, BLAIRE'S ROOM - DAY**

Blaire is seated at a desk, Ananastasia is in front of her and a map of the region, 'Juliana Augustinium'. Ananastasia is lecturing and Blaire is furiously writing notes.

**INT. TRIALS ARENA - DAY**

We watch an 'MMA' style fight for a moment. This is merely part of the trials, only the activity is important, not the victor, it is encouraged for the participants to really let loose and have fun.

**INT. MEDICAL CENTER RECOVERY ROOM - DAY**

A doctor gives Mary, looking better, an exam, she finds an empty vial, sighs, shakes her head and continues the exam.

**INT. MORWEN MANSION, KITCHEN - DAY**

Duke is working a blender and after a moment turns it off, pours the pinkish brown glowing liquid into a cup and puts it in front of a sweating and clearly exhausted Galen. He grimaces at the shake.

**INT. TRIALS ARENA - DAY**

We watch another round of Kata, but the forms are closer to mastery.

**INT. TRIALS ARENA - DAY**

There are 4 large tables with teens behind them. the tables are loaded with the bits and pieces of a complex device. A countdown appears on the screen, at zero the girls furiously grab pages of schematics and start trying to assemble the devices.

**INT. MORWEN MANSION, BLAIRE'S ROOM - DAY**

Blaire is seated at her desk with a test and books in front of her and Ananastasia staring intently at her.

**INT. TRIALS ARENA - DAY**

Time lapse of Edna in the middle of 4 VMD projectors dominating 4 simultaneous risk games each with different opponents.

**INT. MORWEN MANSION, GALEN'S ROOM - DAY**

Duke is spotting a struggling Galen as he bench presses.

**INT. TRIALS ARENA - DAY**

We see a similar succession of contestants clinching their fists to the camera as the first scene of the montage, but the abilities are much stronger.

**INT. MEDICAL CENTER RECOVERY ROOM - DAY**

Mary is not looking too good again, the health monitor shows minimal activity, doctors look on with concern.

**INT. MORWEN MANSION, BLAIRE'S ROOM - DAY**

Ananastasia and Blaire are sparing again, Blaire is holding her own until a slip up. Ananastasia is standing over her with her sword to Blaire's throat, a disappointed look on her face.

**INT. TRIALS ARENA - DAY**

Trish is in her wheelchair, members of escilon are putting a headset on her.

With the head set in place, we zoom out to see a generic uncanny valley, mannequin looking aspect being controlled poorly by her.

**INT. MORWEN MANSION, BLAIRE'S ROOM - DAY**

Blaire and Galen are in the middle of the room holding their hands up, sparks are sputtering from Blaire's hands, occasionally a arc jumps between them.

Galen's hands shift between frost, sparks, and embers.

Anastasia and Duke are watching intently, ready to berate either for failing to manifest their powers.

**INT. TRIALS ARENA - DAY**

The teens are in rows and columns, like a military graduation, as a little confetti flies and the closing ceremony of the trials winds down.

End montage.

**INT. MORWEN MANOR, DINING HALL - EVENING**

The hall is large, the memories of past gallas lingering.

There is only one long table, Kaida at the head, Blaire to her right, and a few chairs down on the left is Galen. They talk about recent events as they wait to be served.

{add more conversation?}

KAIDA

I hate to be so harsh, but It is a mother's duty to prepare their children for the trials of life. You must have faith that I am in a better position to see what you need, if my methods are harsh, survive to prove to yourself if it was all worth it.

BLAIRE

Sure, we are gaining ground, have learned quite a bit. But I am not used to all this structured time. Kinda want some time off like...

KAIDA

You have no idea of what others must do, and what you could have been doing. You are at a different difficulty than you were born in, to survive you must be pushed harder than you

ever thought you were capable of surviving, just to keep up. Once you are properly trained and positioned, you will see, and understand.

GALEN

I thought I was just breeding stock?

KAIDA

(mostly ignoring Galen) I do sympathize, you are young, and in a strange world you have never had to understand before. But we must always present a dignified front, and appear to excel in all pursuits.

BLAIRE

I get it, but how many history lessons do I need?

KAIDA

Six hundred years is quite a bit of history, to properly maneuver, one must at least have a passing familiarity. Tearnafeiy is a dangerous world for those at the peak. One must be prepared

GALEN

Oh yeah, **you** are doing a brilliant job...

KAIDA

My staff is an extension of my will. There are things I must do, and my staff fills in where they must. Emotion is a dangerous thing, you should direct your insolence to enemies, an angry opponent can be controlled more easily, and I am not one to be on the wrong side of.

The staff emerges with plates of food and place them before the trio.

GALEN

Steak and eggs again? I know a girl that makes a great miso...

BLAIRE

(hoping to ease the tension in the air) We are Altinari now, our nutrition needs are different. Be thankful we can afford what we need, and can get what we want in time.

KAIDA

At least you're learning something, I have some fresh fish brought in for tomorrow. Be on your best behaviour.

#### **INT. MORWEN MANOR, TOWER HALLWAYS 1 - MORNING**

Galen rounds a corner casually looks around, kneels down, opens a 'hidden' panel, pulls out a deck of cards and looks through it. Finding a card he likes he places it and closes the panel.

#### **INT. MORWEN MANOR, TOWER HALLWAYS 2 - MORNING**

Blaire strolls down the passage, near the middle, she pulls out some rice paper with something written on, adds a few symbols and sticks it to the wall

#### **INT. MORWEN MANOR, TOWER HALLWAYS 1 - MORNING**

Galen is on a ladder messing with a light fixture.

#### **INT. MORWEN MANOR, TOWER HALLWAYS 1 - LATER**

The halls are mostly empty, a quiet before a storm.

Without warning Galen rushes out, looks around frantically then steps up to the wall.

He places a hand on it and a 'menu' hovers over the smooth surface. using mostly his mind he searches through menus and selects icons.

A noise down the hall catches his attention, he returns his attention to the command prompt and selects enter.

The menu disappears, he rounds a corner and a VMD of him appears looking as if he is about to attack.



Blaire rushes in, is about to attack the VMD, grimaces, and makes a motion. The VMD fades away and a ghostly image of Galen's last move appears before her.

She carefully approaches the corner, with a start Galen combat rolls into the open, throws a fireball and darts off.

Blaire uses lightning to deflect the fire and follows quickly.

### **INT. MORWEN MANOR, TOWER HALLWAYS 2 - NEAR CONTINUOUS**

Galen rounds the corner, stops short as he approaches an unexpected wall. Blaire approached behind him.

BLAIRE

That is how you bait a trap, 'dear brother'.

She closes the distance, they exchange a few blows. Galen manages to flip her against the wall, she passes right through it.

GALEN

Glamor? Really?

His talisman glows and the wall shimmers and evaporates as if made from mist. Blair is standing watching.

BLAIRE

Peekaboo!

She zapps him with some lightning, he struggles a bit then manages to deflect it and throws a fireball at the ground before running off.

After blinking profusely, her vision comes back and she growls and charges after.

### **EXT. MORWEN MANOR, FRONT ENTRANCE - SAME TIME**

Like many mansions, the front door has a vehicle port under an awning. A vehicle slows to a stop in front of the steps. A servant approaches as the door opens and helps first Kaida, then MALEFICENT SFORZA (F), 40s, KATARINA SFORZA (F) teen, then Ananastasia out. The passengers depart, the door closes and the vehicle starts off.

KAIDA

...The Matriarcha Prima Respublicae, is the longest serving leader of our great sea. A few

health issues are to be expected, we just have to keep the major issues out of the headlines.

MALEFICENT

A normal Damhan alla would take advantage of this situation, Darling, to at least establish her own base of power...

KAIDA

(smiles evilly) You know our power base is without equal, we have both spent the last two years spinning our web. It is only needed that we wait for the right battle. Now is not it. The mere illusion of steady state is far more useful than visible machinations right now.

MALEFICENT

You know the facade is cracking, if we are not prepared, the transition will be far more troublesome than then a contested conclave.

KAIDA

You know my actions are far more subtle, rest assured I am making discrete moves. Acting at the wrong time is just as dangerous, if not more so, than letting the glamor lapse

They pause just before the door and Kaida leans in to whisper quietly to Maleficent

KAIDA (CONT'D)

You know better than most, the greater the power the greater capacity to make one's own luck. And it all starts with networking, thank you for bringing your daughter to help, mine needs more help than she will accept from me.

**INT. MORWEN MANSION, FOYER - CONTINUOUS**

A skeleton crew of the staff await the arrival of Kaida.

Kaida, Ananastasia, Maleficent and Katrina along with their aids casually enter as Kaida welcomes them to her home.

KAIDA

...Welcome to our lovely Manor, Katarina dear.  
I shall have a word with...

Blaire and Galen burst out of an upstairs hallway, casting fire and sparks at each other.

Galen vaults over the railing, combat lands and rolls right in front of Katarina who casually lifts an eyebrow as he rises uneasily in front of her.

Blaire stops just short of jumping, eyes wide with shock and fear.

Kaida is not mad, just disappointed.

KAIDA (CONT'D)

...Now I know why you didn't confirm the appointment. (to Blaire without looking at her)  
Please make your way down in a dignified manner.

MALEFICENT

This is why adoption is so troublesome, darling, I did warn you against it. No control in the formative years. I assume you are the boy?

GALEN

Uh, yes, hello...

KAIDA

Only when spoken to please. Yes, and as a boy, obviously a more troublesome case.  
Please give your betters space. But remember, a true master can use all tools, even in ways they were never intended

Mechanically Galen steps back and offers a slight nervous bow. Blaire comes to an uneasy stop next to him.

KAIDA (CONT'D)

If you two are finished shaming the family, perhaps you can take time out of your busy schedule to entertain your guest. In a dignified manor. The adults have things to discuss.

With that Kaida, Maleficent, and their staffs stroll off into the Manor continuing a conversation started earlier.

With the adults gone, Katarina speaks up.

KATARINA

No need to practice for fool errant, the competition isn't that fierce.

GALEN

As the current title holder, I'm sure you will prove...

KATARINA

Do you know who I am?

GALEN

Haven't had the pleasure...

BLAIRE

She has the Sforza crest...

KATARINA

Katarina. Sad to see the Morwens are now only half a generation from extinction. (beat) I was so hoping for a challenge.

Galen and Blaire are silent for a moment, Blaire in simple shock, Galen trying hard not to be antagonistic.

GALEN

I could use some pie. You want some pie?

**INT. MORWEN MANSION, KITCHEN - LATER**

Galen, Blaire, and Katarina are seated at a table, steaming beef pot pie ready to be devoured in front of them.

GALEN

...The secret is a proper marinade before you bake...

KATARINA

At least one of you isn't a complete disappointment. (to Blaire) Have you considered where you're pledging?

BLAIRE

I suppose it depends on how easy it is to avoid bitch tarts...

KATARINA

(scoff) Uhg, you're worse than Valencourt. You have no clue what the battle or the stakes are and still insist on being insufferable. (beat) Now I am not so sure how best to use you.

Blaire is quiet for a moment.

BLAIRE

Look, I just want to keep my head down...

KATARINA

You just don't get it do you? You're a Morwen, avoidance is simply not an option for you. (beat) Let me use small words so even your brother can follow. You have the ability, even if lacking desire, to unsettle and challenge the Onseely court. That is dangerous to them. Even offing you would cause too many waves to be weathered. Therefore the court needs to control you. The best way for that to happen, is to have you on the court. Yes, you have a seat waiting and there is nothing you can do about

it. Whether you like it or not, you have to play the game, or get played. It's that simple. (beat) Your best bet is to find a guide...

GALEN

Is that an offer?

KATARINA

(menacing look) You are too smart for your own good. (beat) Ironically you need to learn your place.

GALEN

I actually hear that alot. Other than finding the right puppeteer, do you have anything to say about what to expect in the coming months?

Katarina takes a large bite of her pie and makes a show of thinking hard.

KATARINA

Ya know, advice, at least good advice is seldom free...

BLAIRE

Neither is good faith negotiations, what do you propose?

KATARINA

(nods approvingly) So, you can learn. (beat) There has been plenty written on gaining and wielding power. I would advise you to keep quiet unless you have to speak up, let others make the mistake of labeling you, then tear up the label to make your move. Something is going down, even our mothers are concerned, and they are next to the top seat. In the immediate future, work with me, in good faith, and I will do the same, mother would want it that way.

**INT. MORWEN MANOR, TABLARIUM - SAME TIME**

Like a home office/den combo, the tablarium is an office with an area for drinks and entertaining other dignitaries. Kaida and Maleficent enter, Kaida motions for Maleficent to have a seat and prepares some refreshment before taking a seat as well.

KAIDA

I really must apologize, I had thought they were trained better...

MALEFICENT

But you didn't train them, did you, Dear? Not from the beginning at least, they were molded long before you came into their lives. As I predicted.

KAIDA

Our futures are determined by forces far beyond our control. Yet we seek harbor against the storm. Both our House's future is on her, and I am ill equipped to mold her. As you have pointed out, the clay is already curing. Despite myself I have taken to both of them, I find it odd to consider the needs of any with little to benefit me.

MALEFICENT

Ah, welcome to motherhood, sooner than I would have thought, but, such is the unfortunate way of the heart. As I promised when you undertook this scheme, I am here to help, it would do neither of us any good for your house to die out. While I do have insight into daughters, few of us are prepared for the terror of the masculine...

The pair partake of their refreshment for a moment before Kaida speaks up again.

KAIDA

I have noted my lesser supervisor of escilon has taken the boy as a project of his. Not certain what the intent is, nor how much he can take.

Maleficent evaluates Kaida for a moment before responding.

MALEFICENT

Supervisor, or boy?

KAIDA

Precisely.

MALEFICENT

Daughters I can teach you to deal with. A son? That might be a project even you might not be up to.

KAIDA

I see what you're doing, and I hate myself for being compelled to prove you wrong.

MALEFICENT

(smiles) What is it that is said, all are tools for the aware mistress, even her own ego can be a tool for herself or others?

KADIA

As much as I need to learn how to mother, we have a greater problem to discuss.

MALEFICENT

The missing shipments.

KAIDA

I rechecked the numbers, what was requested was received.

MALEFICENT



Who would have the skill or need to perfectly change records? We are missing something.

KAIDA

Indeed.

**INT. MORWEN MANOR, GALEN'S ROOM - MORNING**

Galen sits at the desk reading. A knock sounds at the door, he quickly hides his book, then remembers Duke never knocked, and puts the book back on the desk.

GALEN

It's open!

BLAIRE (O.S.)

Looks closed to me!

Galen gets up to open the door.

GALEN

It's actually manual, you have to open it yourself.

BLAIRE

We grow up with no doors, all the doors upstairs are automatic, then there's the dungeon. (beat) Man I hate this place.

GALEN

It'll definitely take some getting used to. (beat)  
What do you need?

BLAIRE

Apparently, there is stuff we need for school, and I would like to go into the city to get it, rather than just order it. I just got to get out of here, its so, ich...

GALEN

Yeah, this place is not the most fun. Never thought I'd miss the festivals. I need to get away from Duke and his obsessive workouts.

### **EXT. VALDISIA APPROACH - MORNING**

We are following a flying vehicle into a mountain of glass, structural ceramic, composites, and steel on top of an inaccessible mountain.

Multicolored lights flash amongst buildings. This is a Tokyo/Dubai/Times Square hybrid of the future, this is the capitol of the nation. Along the ground are a few structures, but mostly plains forests; fern, deciduous, and mushroom, and little sign of a path through it.

#### DIGNIFIED NEWSPASITION (V.O.)

The Commemoration of Unity is in full swing. This solemn occasion is our annual reminder that only united can the Matriarchy stand. Back biting and infighting are not to be tolerated, we are the greatest, most civilized the world has ever seen.

#### GALEN (V.O.)

Wow, they sure do celebrate differently in the big city. Where is the carnival atmosphere, the gaudy décor?

#### BLAIRE (V.O.)

They don't need distraction here, that could be dangerous, . At least they have a light show.

### **EXT. VALDISIA SHOPPING DISTRICT - DAY**

The city is full of large towers all constructed of advanced composites and ceramic. The aquamarine lines visibly pulsate are they transport power and information on a scale neither Blaire nor Galen had ever seen.

There are a few plants in tall planters and many dancing fountains, it is completely alien to the teens.

There are a few vehicles on the ground but most are in the sky taking off and landing from high balconies.

There are a few escilons working on some of the tech, but they are far and away more professional than the ones in the community, more meticulous measurements, exclusion zones and no visible mistakes.

The gilded limo style vehicle with the coat of arms of the Morwens, a unicorn slaying a dragon, lands near one of the larger fountains.

The door opens and Blaire steps out followed closely by Galen.

BLAIRE

Wow!

GALEN

Definitely not in the communities anymore, this is more calming and contemplative BGM than I'm used to. I'm not missing the musical echo, but it is weird to be able to think. Damn, I hope Mary is alright, she wasn't too good when we left the hospital.

Blaire checks her talismen, VMD floats above her wrist with a to do list.

BLAIRE

I'm sure she's fine. (beat) Well, we need to stop by the uniform shop...

GALEN

Wait, uniforms, back home we just wore whatever?

BLAIRE

Yeah, us too, but, apparently being altinari, means we never get to dress like we want ever again. (beat) We also need a few aetherion fragments, some memory crystals, and escilon tool sets. (beat) Yeah, even though we are nobility, we will have to take things apart in classes, even if just to see how it works and fix in emergencies.

GALEN

I actually prefer to work with my hands and build and design things. (beat) Well, the aetherion shop is over there, let's stop there first.

They start off towards the store. At her approach the doors open and she passes the threshold with ease.

Galen, however, gets repelled by the force field. He keeps trying, people start to notice and security, much like the aspects he has seen before start approaching.

Eventually an energy field surrounds him and forces him to his knees. Blaire steps up to try to help but is stopped by the leader of the security group, a tall female.

SECURITY SGT

Don't worry, ma'am we'll take care of this.

BLAIRE

Take care of what?

SECURITY SGT

This, (beat) boy, was stalking you...

GALEN

I wasn't stalking her...

He gets knocked in the back of the head

SECURITY SGT

Speak when spoken to, boy.

They start to cart Galen off.

BLAIRE

What, what are you doing?

SECURITY SGT

Taking him into custody, stalking with intent to trespass is a crime in Valdisia...

BLAIRE

First off, that is a stupid rule, secondly, that's not how it is in the communities, there is no concept of trespassing or theft...

SECURITY SGT

Ignorance of the law is no excuse, this boy was trying to go somewhere he is not allowed, he must be punished, or he will never learn.

GALEN

We just ascended, we're supposed to get school supplies.

SECURITY SGT

A likely story. There were no new males elevated this year, if there was the trials would have been much more...

BLAIRE

He's telling the truth, aren't you even going to check his talismen?

SECURITY GUARD

He probably stole it.

GALEN

From who? Why would I steal something from someone who has no access?

SECURITY GUARD

Shut it dumb ass.

Blaire moved to activate Galen's talismen; she is prevented from doing so.

The Sergeant moves to check Blaire's talismen

SECURITY SGT

Look, miss... (beat) Oh, shit.

The others release Galen and the gathered crowd takes a knee

SECURITY SGT (CONT'D)

I'm sorry miss Morwen, I had no idea, please...

GALEN

Well, that escalated quickly...

BLAIRE

Shut it, Galen. (beat) It's fine, Sergeant. I won't report you as long as you tell me how to get my brother into the shop.

SECURITY SGT

His accesses would have to be updated on his talismen...

SECURITY GUARD

You might be able to talk to the shop stewards of any store you wish to enter for a temporary access...

BLAIRE

Thank you, you may leave. (beat) I said go.

The guards hurry off as Blaire moves in to help him up.

GALEN

What have we gotten ourselves into?

CUT TO BLACK.