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Elaniel woke up to the cascading echoes of the morning cock as it crowed outside her window, she removed the luxurious silks from atop her as she sat up in her bed. She raised her arms and stretched, stifling a yawn and yet failing she swished her brown hair, it’s delicate satin-like feeling wonderful as it brushed against her shoulder blades. She opened her eyes and proceeded, in her bedclothes, to the mirror and sat upon the marble stool. A pair of bright blue eyes, piercing and yet seductive stared back at her. She took time to groom and yet admire herself.

*Not bad for nineteen am I?* Yet despite her youth, and the longevity of her race, for whom three thousand years would qualify one as ‘old’, she nevertheless possessed a keen intellect, indeed this was further augmented with a cunning mind, for those that would look upon her would, if purely thinking of visuals, think of her as perhaps more suited to a bawdy tavern than the halls of scholars and wizards.

Not that such was to her fault and neither to her advantage. The natural gifts given to her served not only to augment her as pretty but for practical purposes were a great distraction to potential foes, although…currently sheltered as she was within the heights of the great city, they served less to distract wily dragons and huge minotaur’s and more to fend off the occasional Elven boy who forgets his decorum.

Today was the beginning of her pilgrimage, a rite for which of Elven kind were traditionally subject. She would be meeting with the Primarch, the ruler of this city: Teladia. She therefore wandered over to her armour cabinet, placing first her bra and thong on, which was no easy feat and necessitated shifting weight from foot to foot and doing a sort of impromptu dance and jiggle, for she was rather well endowed in both areas, the reason for which the fending off of aforementioned Elven boys becomes apparent. From thence she began to don the light mithril platemail. Thus lastly picking up her sword, she headed to see the Primarch….

“Galad’dril Elaniel” said the looming Primarch as she entered the main council chamber.

“Galad’dra Primarch Hashimir”

“It is always a pleasure to see such youth and vibrancy, I remember my own pilgrimage, you…are familiar with the pilgrimage yes?”

“Of course…” She replied “But….lets pretend I don’t and we go over it again…”

“Very well child, the pilgrimage is where a young elf must go out into the world, to experience it’s delights and it’s distractions, to learn one’s own place in the world and what destiny awaits them or the fate of their own choosing”

“…and I am to undertake this alone?”

“Normally no, one would take this journey, at least at first with one’s own generational peers, alas….you have none. You were the only one born in your year within the whole city; perhaps it is an omen”

“So….basically it’s like sending me out to die?”

“Not at all child, you have been trained and prepared, I will not lie however. This world is a violent one in places and some of ours have never returned, whether through deaths cold embrace or through finding their happiness elsewhere we do not know…”

Council clerks milled about as the two carried on their conversation, some passing documents to the Primarch to sign…”

“What will I find out there?”

“Yourself, although…” he chuckles to himself “That answer never sufficed for me when Primarch Aldaris sent me out…I suspect the same for you. Basically you will find friends, foes and glorious and not so glorious encounters of all types out there. Humans, other elves from other cities, dwarves, Halflings, Orcs, Drow, Demons, Devils, Angels, Dragons and many more things that remain to be discovered”

“It sounds wonderful!”

“Yes….but also potentially dangerous, you will be leaving in the morning, you will have this day to say your goodbyes to your family and friends.”

Elaniel had a list of people to visit: There was Westhamir the bartender, her best friend Lillaniel, her parents of course, as well as a visit to the blacksmith to ensure her equipment was up to scratch. It was Lillaniel she visited first…

“Ooh I am so jealous you get to go out and explore the world!”

“Don’t feel too bad, everyone leaves at nineteen, you’re only one year younger than me remember, you’ll be doing it next year”

“I wish you were able to wait, we could have done it together, imagine it…you the spellsword and me the wizard/healer, the long dusty road, good times, new food and drink, new people perhaps even some strapping young men too…”

“Lillaniel!” uttered Elaniel as she gasped at the implication of her statement.

“Well I didn’t really have a family and all I had was the magic academy to keep me occupied, since it’s mixed you’re never too sheltered from these things…ooh that reminds me you should probably as Westhamir about what you’ll encounter out there, he’s been and done it, but is also very chatty about it too”

“That’s a good point, and he’s next to be visited anyway”

“I can come with you, at least for visiting anyway, not for when you go”

Thus the two of them went to see Westhamir the bartender, because of the still early nature of the day, the tavern was pretty much empty…the marble and granite counters, benches were of an off colour white, the occasional crystal radiated light throughout, illuminating the various spaces of the tavern…

“Well well…what can I do for so pretty a pair of ladies this fine day?” Said the bartender.

“Flattery will get you…well most places….” Interjected Lillaniel as the pair ended up smiling after a brief chuckle.

“I suppose you’re here to learn about what you’ll face out there….well you’ve probably got questions so…fire ‘em at me…”

“What are the different races I might encounter?”

“Ooh there’s a lot of them, I’ll start with the more intelligent ones, as opposed to bestial or animalistic creatures….well first off you have us elves, most of us are polite, can reach millennia in age and oddly enough remain hauntingly beautiful and youthful to other races, of course there are divisions with the various elves. We live in high towers and marble/crystalline structures, the elves that live in the forests are more flighty and more apt to use a bow rather than the spellcasting we have grown accustomed to, they are more nimble and are fond of eating the meats and hunting the animals within their forests. Bizarrely, at least to me at first was how casually promiscuous they are!”

“What?! ‘Bizarrely promiscuous’ what do you mean by that?”

“Well it was a few years into my pilgrimage when I happened across a merchant caravan led by a forest elf couple, we sat by the fire and had a few drinks and I couldn’t help but admire his wife, he of course caught me looking and I was flabbergasted when he next offered me the tent with her for the evening!”

“Rather vulgar isn’t it?”

“I declined, politely of course. When I asked he told me that within forest elf culture they revere nature, and what is more natural than…well…doing THAT?” He states, a small sneer at the corner of his lips. “According to them, nature does not hold to sensibilities, males and females simply…rut…like animals, and he further explained that children are a blessing from nature, so they make no moves to prevent it! Because of this they are the most numerous of elves you will encounter”

“Any others?” said Elaniel, putting away her surprise at these revelations with a stoic face.

“Oh yeah….two more: The Stone elves and Dark elves or ‘drow’, the stone elves are those of us in times past that made out homes in rocky mountains and hills, these aren’t the natural places for us but stone elves have adapted somewhat, because of this, and because they frequent both the caverns and uppermost places of the hilly regions they have grown hardy but also standoffish, they not only have to contend with surface races such as humans and other elves but must also fight both dwarves who occupy the caverns as well as Drow pushing from the deepest parts and caverns above into their territory. So being beset on all sides has made them value strength, yet introduced a more stone-like colder demeanour. Drow…they’re crafty and cunning ones, never turn your back on one, and the females are far deadlier than the males! They have a matriarchal society and resent males as pets or breeding stock; they are highly supremacist and hold female Drow to be the best, followed by male Drow, then other elves and then everything else.

“They sound nasty” said Lillaniel

“Oh they are indeed, now onto the others. Well I mentioned the dwarves, they are tiny folk about 3-4 foot high at best, they drink a lot of ale, they get into a lot of fights, they often can speak quite vulgar and bluntly which, can shock for ones such as us, that said you’ll never want for someone else to have your back. Human are…interesting, I’ve never met a race so varied, different heights, different colours, different beliefs, it’s rare to find any human like another human, you can meet one that is vulgar and a drunk and the next is sober and pious! Random, mindboggling a race…”

“What about the less intelligent or common ones?”

“Hmm…well you’ll meet them soon enough, I wouldn’t be able to go through them all, way too many to list. But look….I have faith that you’ll be fine out there, besides…last a year and Lillaniel will come join you”

“That’s if I can find her!” Lillaniel mentions.

“So…good luck out there Elaniel and when you come back we can swap more stories eh?”

The visit to the blacksmith was quick and quaint, Elaniel had her equipment looked at and it was given full approval, all that was left was to visit her parents, but beforehand Lillaniel said her goodbyes, leaving Elaniel standing alone…ready to say goodbye to her parents….

Tears flowed as goodbyes were said, a hearty meal had been prepared by her mother, her father tries his best remain stoic but was still affected by the mood…

“My little girl had grown up so much” Her mother uttered between sobs.

“You be careful out there my daughter, the world can be a dangerous place sometimes” ventured her father.

“Thanks mother, thanks father, where is Vilrond?”

“I’m here!” turning all eyes to his direction, a small elven child of eleven years answered.

Vilrond was, being younger, of smaller stature than his older sister and yet the resemblance vis a vis the brown hair, button nose and the faint twinkle of the eye in curiosity of everything around them was unmistakable.

“You’re getting lumpy sis” he chuckled with a childs mirth.

“Vilrond!” Exclaimed their mother, “Where are your manners?”

Elaniel sighed, Vilrond was still at an age where discernment in speech had not been attained, and speaking a little more bluntly, without tact was inevitable, even for an elven child. Thus she felt no great offence.

“Ah little brother, you are right. So many changes happen around this age, it is only natural”

“Am…am I going to become lumpy too?”

“That’s….probably a conversation for mother and father to make, but, I can assure you yours will not be the same as mine” She stated, relieved to have avoided the issue, until Vilrond retorted…

“That’s good sis, because I didn’t want a butt on my chest”

“Vilrond!” once again exclaimed their mother. “I’m sorry my darling daughter he speaks without thinking sometimes”

“So girl…it’s time for you to head out on your pilgrimage isn’t it?” the deep voice of her father stated.

“Yes father, I…will miss you all but…perhaps there is adventure to be had out there”

“We all had to go through that daughter, you will find your adventure a plenty, though we also trained you in your spell craft and even unusually in swordplay because we ourselves know the dangers.”

“What were your adventures like?”

“How do you think we met? There are always other elves on their pilgrimages, the custom goes back to even before we split into the various races of Elves, though….you don’t really get many Stone Elves or Drow, some but….not a lot”

“Yeah, Westhamir said the most common is Wood Elves?”

“They are but, do stay away them as much as is possible, their ideas are…well…not good for refined company let’s just say.”

“..And Dwarves and Humans father, should I avoid them as well?”

“Hmm….dwarves I would, they can worse than Wood Elves for being rowdy, humans….oddly enough although they can be somewhat immature at times, they were at least tolerable, strange species…do you know their common manner of greeting is to clasp hands and move them in an up and down direction? Or that their womenfolk have a strange addiction to shoes? Their menfolk will argue over trivial sports, wearing one colour of garment and fighting those not wearing the same colour? Truly an oddity as a species.”

“I’ll be honest I’m in two minds about the whole thing, one the one hand father it’s adventure and finding out what’s out there and on the other I have no idea the dangers and what warnings I have received are to stay away from…well….everything!”

“Don’t let us put you off, there is probably more good times and memories to have out there, I remember a few…my pilgrimage I encountered a very small rural village, there was a travelling dwarven lass there: Golda, had a huge sledgehammer, bigger than her. She was my first travelling companion on our adventures, oh and she could DRINK! I knew Dwarves and ale are often associated but to see it for myself well…it’s quite the sight I tell you daughter. Mayhap you find someone too; I ended up with a whole team!”

“What was your pilgrimage like mother?”

“Not quite as garish and adventurous as your father, mine? I ended up working at a village tavern, got enough gold and hired a carriage to take me to Ilyford mage college, spent a few years there among stone walls, dusty old tomes and the odd occasional summoned creature milling about, nothing really spectacular”

“I see…I’m not sure what I’ll do…”

“That’s what the pilgrimage is for dear, to find out what you are good at and where you want to be in the world”

With that and with a meal and many tears and hugs Elaniel set off to sleep…

The morning brought once more the sunlight, refracting its glow across the crystal and marble towers and through the satin curtains into her room. Once more the usual daily dance, the shifting of weight to put on her underwear over her bottom, the usual placing and lacing of plates that formed her armour, yet this time each piece felt much heavier, perhaps in some way brought about by the knowledge of what was required of them. Perhaps it was mere psychological, and yet…it was no less palpable a feeling, here she was, leaving and having to let go of all that she knew.

All those times she spend playing, the trees she had climbed as a small child, the education she had received, teachers and tutors dispensing their lessons, the occasional arguments, the odd boy that would pull her hair. All added their weight, the weight of their memory…to the armour and the heaviness of the burden she possessed. Now all seemed as something she preferred she could live again, not having to worry about leaving. She stared up at the gates of the city, the elven watchmen and women who, understanding themselves what she was experiencing, maintained a solemn silence as they slowly opened the gate…

Chapter II

\*Creak\* as the rusty and old hinges moved once more, the slow arc of the opening door blinding Elaniel as the sun shone into her eyes, beyond….the beyond…she had never envisioned herself standing there, gazing upon an open road, having to leave it all behind. She knew she would eventually of course, but to finally be in that moment, that scary moment of beginning which one hopes, in time, will render memories of fondness and nostalgia, was one she had spent not thinking about at all, in only perhaps sparingly.

*This is it….the gate is open…I have to leave it all behind, the guards are being patient, they’ve gone through this as well haven’t they?* *My heart it’s….it’s beating so fast…here I go, a whole new life….*

Another creak, slowly heralded the closing of the gate, now…only the open road remained. With a small trepidation she began to put one foot in front of the other.

The decadent structures of the city and outskirts eventually gave way to agricultural fields and a slow descent from a road into a dirtpath. Along the way she both cautiously and with curiosity glanced at the crops, the animals, and the occasional farmer. It was not something she had directly ever experienced and so she made an effort to take it all in.

*So much greenery and animals, but that smell! My nose has to go through this?!*

Of course! She had never directly experienced such, so her thoughts, although curious were tempered by the everyday reality. Such as the unique farmyard and countryside smell.

Character List

Elaniel – The main protagonist of the story. A young elven woman with blue eyes and brown hair. She grew up in Teladia, an elven town/city. Generously endowed, to the frustration of the blacksmith who had to make her armour. She is at 19 to leave and explore the world. Due to her youth, race and sheltered upbringing she has the aloof nature and lack of knowledge of the world when she begins her journey.

Vilrond – Elaniels younger brother and still tactless as he has not yet mastered what should and should not be said. He has the immaturity of his youth.

Lillaniel – Elaniel’s best friend and 1 year her younger. Has mage talents and is a student of the Teladia magical academy. Having been in mixed dormitories she possesses a little more knowledge of the world and the opposite sex than Elaniel does. Has blonde hair and blue eyes and a more flirtatious nature than her friend.

Westhamir – The bartender of an establishment in Teladia. A former adventurer all across the land he has seen all different races, locations and things.

Halkah Nerimane (Party Member) – A 24 year old Futanari Neko (cat-girl) whom Elaniel befriends on her adventure. Like her domesticated counterparts she has the curiosity, playfulness of her feline ancestry alongside an observing wry demeanour and the libido of a randy tomcat due to her ‘appendage’. Because of this she has adopted a very casual approach to sexual matters and indeed preferences. Has dark blue fur and eyes alongside fur on her tail, ears and some on her legs and arms. She is trained in the use bow, dagger, poison, stealth and body language. Due to her cat eyes she can see perfectly in the dark. Her ‘Appendage’ is 11 inches long. She had a very sharp, sarcastic and witty tongue that she will use in verbal conflict.

Balki ‘Baldy Balki’ Clayborne (Party Member) – A vulgar, foul mouthed dwarf with a bald head and massive brown beard that Elaniel finds on the road when she stops in at a tavern along the way. She find him outside the bar, having a disagreement with another patron. Which ends with said patron at the end of a large sledgehammer. Noticing Elaniel looking on with a shocked expression he makes a vulgar comment, then sensing her naivity offers a drink and some basic lessons of the world interspersed with profanity and sexual comments. Which further shocks Elaniel, Balki then decides to guard said naïve young elf and offers to accompany her on her journey. She accepts but asks if he can tone down his rude language. To which the dwarf is shocked, as up to that point he felt he had been completely polite according to his culture. Realising they both have something to learn they move on…

Dagel Fe’Hurst (Party Member) – A conflicted male drow character. Due to his upbringing in a strict women dominated matriarchal society, where defiance of any drow female entitles a male to the death penalty (Unless that male has a mistress he is pledged to who rescinds the other females order). Dagel carries this deep seated submission into his surface relationships and dealings, Among Elaniel, Halkah and other female and feminine looking characters he is naturally quiet, demure, docile, submissive and apt to obey completely any request. He naturally sees females as superior and as Elaniel is the de facto leader of the group, he sees her as his mistress, with the other females as other figures to be obeyed. This personality however rapidly changes to a fierce, moody, aggressively competitive one when engaging with other males since, in drow society, males are ranked in order of how pleased their mistress is with them. The highest rank being that of consort, thus he sees the other males as competitors.

Felora Nettleleaf (Party Member) – A promiscuous and sexually natured Forest Elf, the race of ‘free love’ and removing barriers between people. Felora is a cleric and healer and perhaps the only character more endowed than Elaniel, and certainly more lewd. Free with her affections, with the blessing of her culture and husband she has ways of ensuring health than just leeches and a suture kit. She has a seductive personality, blonde hair and blue eyes and wears clerical robes with conveniently placed slits to show off curves as well as buttoned flaps in certain places for…well…convenience, a girl gets cold you know…

Brandyl Everest (Party Member) – A human mage of 18 recently leaving his apprenticeship with a mage, with brown hair and green eyes. He spent his life as an apprentice under a master wizard and as such is, like Elaniel at first, completely dismayed at the oddities of the different races and cultures. He has a very noble, scholarly personality. Hailed from a wealthy family back home.