

Awakening

The constant hoofbeats of the horses woke Kileon from his deep sleep. When had he fallen asleep? He couldn't remember. One after the other the hoofbeats fell on the stone road. "Where am I?" he wondered as he raised his head from the wooden seat he found himself on. The pressure all around his head was unbearable as if a hammer had struck it and crushed it against a steel wall. Opening his eyes he found the world a blur before him. He could hear whispers coming from close by but he was so disoriented he could not tell from where.

He attempted to close his eyes and open them once more. It was clearer, but not adequate to make out details. The breeze blew by and he picked up the smell of snow and pine needles. Again he opened and closed his eyes and slowly his vision began to focus. He found himself in a carriage with several other men traveling down a narrow road in a forest. Around them armored soldiers escorted them with stern unblinking faces.

"Where am I?" he wondered once again. The man opposite from him saw as Kileon looked around confused. "Welcome back friend," the man said. The others in the carriage turned to look at him. Hesitantly Kileon spoke, "Where am I?" he asked. The man laughed and the others around him snickered. "On your way to the ball," one man said sarcastically from his right. The others laughed once again. It was then that Kileon noticed that his hands were bound together. A flash of panic and confusion shot through him. He looked around at his companions and saw that they were all bound by hands and feet. "I'm a prisoner?" he asked, shocked.

While the men laughed at him once again Kileon began frantically searching his memories for the answer to his current situation. "I left Hammerfrost at least a few months ago," he began, as he remembered escaping as a fugitive from his families ancestral home. One after another he connected his memories until he the last he could recall.

He remembered the group of refugees he had encountered as he attempted to cross the border into Cyradul. They had traveled for a few days together until they reached the border. That night a young child began squirming and screaming at the top of his lungs. When everyone in the camp rushed to hush him to prevent detection the child lashed out and began biting and clawing. Kileon remembered the moment the child had ripped his mothers throat out and watched as it began to devour its father. The last thing he could remember was fighting the little beast as it attempted to make prey of him. The child had bitten into Kileon's left leg, and after that he only remembered falling.

"Falling," he whispered to himself. Incredulous as to how he had gotten there. "Whats yer name boy?" the first man asked. All eyes where once more on him. "Kileon," he stated looking down at his hands and noticing the dry blood on them. "Kileon?" the man asked. "Strong name, that. My name is Bargsten." Kileon nodded and looked around at the other men. They where all very much the same. The whitest skin he had ever seen and colored eyes on most of them. They're hair varied from black to blonde, or even red. The beards on a lot of them even seemed to be a different color from the rest of their hair. "Who are these people?" Kileon wondered feeling desperate for answers.

“How did I get her...” Kileon was interrupted by the loud crack of a whip just as a painful burning sensation appeared on his back. “Quiet prisoner!” shouted one of the soldiers that escorted them. “Leave the boy alone, ye good for nuthin Imperial,” Bargsten said, angrily just before the soldiers behind him whipped him as well. “I said quiet!” the soldier said once again. Kileon saw the men around him glare with fury at the soldier but none of them uttered another word.

For what seemed like an hour they made their way down the same road with no one speaking. Not even the soldiers. Sudden horse gallops emerged from ahead of them, at one point, as a larger group of soldiers met up with them and began escorting them down the road once again. Kileon remained lost in the whole situation. Not only did he not know where he was, but somehow he was an imperial prisoner, the very thing he had been running from since the beginning. “Bastards,” he thought, as he looked around at the soldiers. He didn't know any of them, but just the fact that they where Imperials was enough to make him hate each and everyone of them down to their very core.

Soon he could see smoke rising ahead of them, and shortly after that the roofs of different buildings. “Open the gate,” shouted one of the lead soldiers as they approached the village. Kileon could hear the laughter of children, and the yelling of their mothers. The banging of steel on an anvil, and the roar of the forges fire. The gentle turning of a mill, and the different sounds the farm animals made. “Welcome to Harveston,” said an all too familiar voice. Kileon turned like a dart to face the man who had uttered those words. A short man with a short yet detailed military hairdo. His hair was brown and his body was lean underneath his imperial officers armor. “Korven,”

Kileon whispered, with hate. The carriage made its way past Korven and the soldier he was speaking to and headed towards the center of the village. Kileon glared at his nemesis with hate.

“Damn imperials,” Bargsten said. “They think they can just march into our country and force their laws upon us.” The other men grunted their approval. “Country?” Kileon asked. “What country is this? You’re not a part of the empire?” Bargsten eyed him with confusion not believing he didn't know his were abouts. “Why yer in Skaros, boy. Greatest land in all of Tanera.” “Skaros?” Kileon repeated with disbelief. He had been in Worrowend the last night he could remember, and crossing on his way to Cyradul. That was easily a days ride from any border with Skaros. “How did I end up here?”

Arriving to the town square the carriage stopped next to a sight Kileon knew all too well. The executioners block. “Here we go,” said one of the men to his left. “Alright you snow rats,” shouted one of the soldiers. “Time to meet your makers.” As the soldier sat upon his horse smiling his comrades began unloading all eight men from the carriage. Kileon saw as Korven and other officers approached the center of town just as all sorts of villagers began peeking out of their shops or market stalls to view the spectacle before them. Clearly this must’ve been the event of the morning for everyone.

Kileon and the other men where all marched off the carriage and lead up to the left steps of the executioners stage. “Gather round!” shouted an imperial soldier. One after another Kileon and the men where formed up and made to wait as the audience for their execution arrived. “How did it come to this?” Kileon wondered. All that running and fighting simply to face the same fate he had been running from all along.

Korven and other imperial officers stood in the front row of the crowd in order to have the best view. "I haven't been recognized," Kileon thought to himself. From somewhere to his right Kileon saw as the man with a black hood rounded a corner and made his way to the stage with his chopping axe in hand. "The executioner," muttered Bargsten. As the man made his way up the steps one of the imperial soldiers began addressing the crowd. "Citizens of Skaros. For years our empire has fought for you. Clothed you, fed you, sheltered you. His imperial highness has been good to you." The crowd remained silent. "Why do some among you then insist on taking up arms in rebellion against the empire?"

On the stage two soldiers escorted the first of the eight men forward and made him kneel over the executioners block. "Let this be an example to you," continued the soldier. "Of what happens to those who dare stand against the might and glory of the empire." In one swift stroke the executioner brought down his axe and the mans head rolled away from the rest of his body. In the crowd people turned away in horror. While the soldiers all smiled and applauded. "Next!" shouted the executioner, and the soldiers shoved the next man up to the block. Kileon did not know these men, but seeing that they where apparently rebels who resisted the empire was something he was all too sympathetic about.

As the axe dropped and took the life of the next man Kileon stared with hatred at Korven. There stood the man responsible for everything that he had suffered. The man responsible for the death of his family and so many others. The one who had been hunting him for all these months, and without even trying here he found himself his captive. "Humiliating," Kileon thought to himself.

“Next,” shouted the executioner once again. It was only then that Kileon realized that he stood next in line. As the soldiers grabbed his arms and escorted him forward Kileon tried his best to resist and pull away, but it was useless. The shackles around his hands and feet rattled and clinked every time he tried to pull way, but in a matter of moments his head was lowered over the block and his neck was left exposed. “I’m not one of these rebels,” he wanted to scream, but he knew that if Korven recognized him his fate would be the same in the end. “Better to die as one of these rebels and have Korven and the empire think that Kileon Yanthrel escaped their grasp. Than to give them the satisfaction of knowing it was him that they where killing.

His eyes briefly met Korven’s and Kileon turned away to avoid being recognized. “Ill be home soon brother,” Kileon thought and allowed a smile to cross his face. He could hear as the executioner hoisted the heavy axe over his head preparing for the final swing.

“Stop!” Korven shouted suddenly. Kileon felt his heart drop. “No!” he thought. The thudding of footsteps rushed up the stage and soon he felt a rough jerk on his right shoulder. Standing above him looking down with a shocked and yet satisfied expression was the man he had watched stab his brother through the heart. “By the God’s,” said Korven, with his high pitched yet rough voice. Kileon glared at him without saying a word. “Kileon?” he paused to examine his face, and then an evil satisfied smile crossed his lips. “Kileon Yanthrel, how in the blazes did you wind up here?” Korven began laughing mockingly and crouched down to be at eye level with him.

“I’ve spent months of my life and countless resources trying to track you down, but when I am pulled away from my hunt to address matters in this shit stain of a

country you fall right into my lap.” He continued to laugh and excitement crept over his voice as he continued to stare at Kileon in disbelief. “By the twelve God’s above you look absolutely terrible,” he continued. “Had it not been for those famous clear eyes of the Yanthrel’s I hardly would’ve recognized you. Kileon remained silent. Korven simply smiled and stared at him as if he’d just won the grand prize at an auction. “How sweet justice is.” Korven said and looked stood straight to speak with the executioner.

“Make this ones death as painful as you possibly can,” he ordered. Nodding the executioner signaled to the soldiers and they ran over the rearrange Kileon’s position. They placed his left arm over the block to begin. “Death by dicing!” he shouted. The crowd around them began to mutter. Some even began to walk away not wishing to witness what was about to happen. One last time Korven turned to meet Kileon’s gaze and said, “ I shall have your limbs spread out across all corners of the empire. Your legs shall go south, your arms will travel east and west, your torso will be sent to the north, and your head.” He paused. “I will send your head back to Hammerfrost so that all can see what became of the last of the once mighty House Yanthrel.”

“Ye bastards!” Bargsten shouted from behind him. The noise of the crowd grew in intensity as the executioner hoisted his axe high above his head. Korven smiled devilishly with his hands held behind his back standing proud and satisfied at the spectacle he was about to witness. “I may perish today, Korven!” Kileon screamed. “But sooner or later the wrath of House Yanthrel will destroy you!”

Korven’s smile only widened. “I doubt that very much,” he stated, and then nodded to the executioner to proceed. As the blade descended to separate his arm from his body a scream emanated from the crowd. “For Skaros!” it shouted and then

mayhem ensued. Bargsten ran and dove tackling the executioner just before he could finish the job. "Imperials to arms," shouted Korven looking around him and seeing the villagers all taking up arms against them. Kileon stood up in a hurry and launched himself at Korven. The imperial officer tried to draw his sword, but Kileon, despite being chained by hands and feet, barraged him with blows from all angles.

The two wrestled onto the floor and rolled off of the stage. Kileon leaped up to try to remain dominant in the situation, but Korven rolled backwards and was able to draw his sword. All around them the villagers fought with the imperial soldiers. "You die here," Korven hissed angrily. Kileon assumed his fighting stance and prepared for the attack.

Far away Kileon heard a loud pounding sound. The imperial soldiers were beginning to pull back from the scuffle with the villagers towards the gate. "We're under attack!" someone shouted. "It's the rebels!" "For Skaros!" shouted more and more voices as the pounding grew in intensity and was followed by a crashing sound. "They have broken through!"

Korven turned to look at the incoming conflict nervously, and Kileon took full advantage of the opening. He launched forward and with his chains he ripped the sword from his foe's hands. Using his full body weight Kileon attempted to take Korven down, but the trained officer shook him off and struck him twice in the face with expert precision. Falling back Kileon began to realize how weak he felt after everything that had happened. "However I ended up their prisoner the journey has not been easy on my body," he thought to himself. "Die!" Korven shouted drawing a knife from his boot and lunging towards Kileon.

Just then an arrow zoomed through the air and stabbed into Korven's back near his left shoulder causing him to topple down. Kileon tried to rise to continue fighting, but his body trembled and collapsed under its own weight. "Bloody cowards!" shouted Korven as he rose holding his shoulder tightly. The knife fell from his grasp, but he continued walking forward towards Kileon with death inside his stare. "We must retreat. Captain!" screamed an imperial soldier, galloping up next to Korven and handing him the reins to the horse he pulled behind him.

As if pulling him out of his fit of rage Korven looked around to the soldier and then to the battle that ensued around them. Kileon felt as two firm hands grasped his sides and lifted him off the ground. "Stand, boy!" shouted Bargsten. The remaining prisoners stood behind him, all of them armed now. Korven took the reins hesitantly and mounted the animal. "This is not over, Yanthrel!" he shouted as he galloped away. A horn blew threw the air signaling the imperial retreat. "Skaros victory!" shouted Bargsten to the air raising his arms triumphantly.

All around him Kileon saw as rebel soldiers chased the empire out of Harveston. Their banner waved in the morning wind displaying a large bear roaring at the sky. Through the gate Korven and the remaining imperial forces ran as fast as they could trying to escape the wrath of the people of Skaros.

The villagers and the rebels cheered together and soon there was no more trace of the empire within the walls of the village. The imperial banners where all ripped down and burned in the center of town and executioners stage was torn down.

"This is not over, Yanthrel," Kileon could remembered Korven shouting out, as he rode away with blood pouring down his arm. "No," Kileon thought. "It's not over."