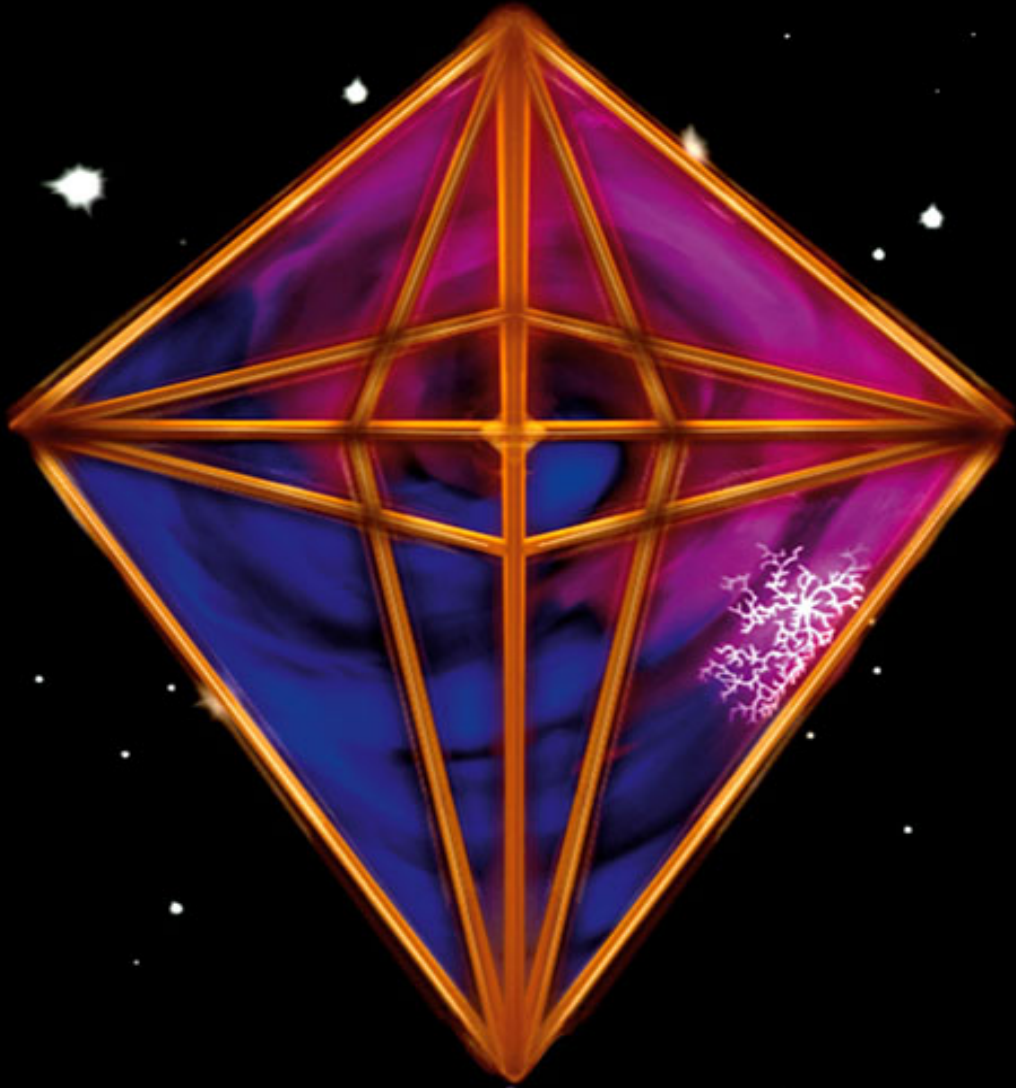
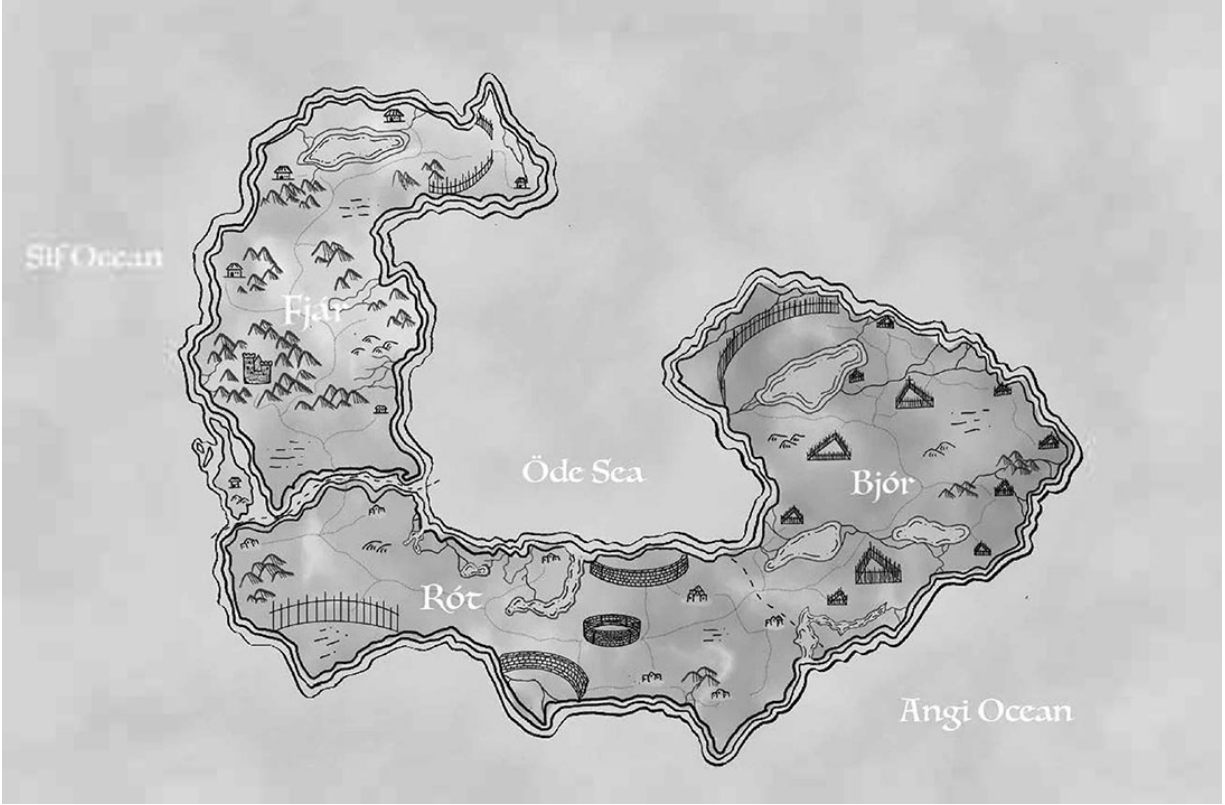


I.L Scythe

The saga of Crystal and Silver



Purpleminds and Blueblood



Special thanks to

Amanda Hagman, for helping and designing the map with me.

My supporting family, eagerly awaiting the story to hit home somewhere.

Friends with genuine smiles and thoughts, allowing me the time to speak.

And all my gratitude and glory to the Three, for placing this story within me.



I.L.Scythe
Purpleminds and Blueblood
The saga of Crystal and Silver

Table of Contents

- Chapter 1: Loyalties family
- Chapter 2: Gaining choice
- Chapter 3: Snap our bond
- Chapter 4: I have longed
- Chapter 5: Bjór's welcome
- Chapter 6: Unpleasant deed
- Chapter 7: Why say yes?
- Chapter 8: Cruelty of the calm
- Chapter 9: Difficulties with the kind
- Chapter 10: Grin or smile
- Chapter 11: Two siblings mischief
- Chapter 12: Watch as they turn.
- Chapter 13: Three was a pattern
- Chapter 14: Do not get tangled
- Chapter 15: A wish in the dark
- Chapter 16: Breath of cold
- Chapter 17: Lost in fear
- Chapter 18: Danger of farm people
- Chapter 19: A tiger's cage
- Chapter 20: Not everyone lacks humour
- Chapter 21: A new title
- Chapter 22: The ugly in beauty
- Chapter 23: Unknown mistake
- Chapter 24: Contract-less
- Chapter 25: Alvskog

Chapter 26: Unwilling

Chapter 27: Salt in an open wound

Chapter 28: Frost comes first



Loyalties family

Behind the protective ribs hides life's most precious rhythm and Nifferia stops it with a palm to the man's chest. Ice slowly turns it into a cold crystal, ending his life. Blood dripped from her shoulder, where the guard had used one of those Potesta stones on her, and it was now moving past her elbow. He had turned a Potesta stone, which could manipulate rocks, into a whip-like weapon and swung it like a madman. Nifferia huffs as she gives one last glance at the pathetic man and grabs the 'letter of challenge', addressed to the Pyto master of Zoren's kingdom. Feeling the deal successfully snap into place on her end and thus binding the writer of the letter to her, Nifferia puts the letter into her trusted bag, nicely resting beside the Deal Binder contract. A heavy thud from behind her makes Nifferia shoot an unimpressed look over her shoulder at the familiar faces of Sino and Dex. Gloves were clean on their hands, but the twin grins they displayed were all other than clean. The dark Manixien hair was short on Dex, a single painted stripe of pink behind his ear, showing loyalty to Queen Mavis. Sino's hair was long and lay ruffled on his head where the wind must have messed it up, a green stripe to show his loyalty to the diseased duke Helgo. They were her brothers, without the blood of course, and even *if* their twin faces made it hard for people to separate them, she can not only feel their

unique tune every living thing had, but they differed greatly from each other in personality.

Under their feet was another person who undeniably is dead, a person resembling someone much higher ranked than the lousy guard she had the misfortune of fighting. Their assassination assignment, from Zoren himself, required them to take something from the person in order to prove they were the ones who had done it. Letter secure in her bag, Nifferia smirks and moves to get out of the room. She trips slightly and her two boys' smiles make Nifferia roll her eyes.

"Slippery." She mutters and Dex opens his mouth to give some sort of remark, but shouts from within the mansion walls cause them to flinch slightly. It is time to bolt while they still can.

Slipping at a small grove, Nifferia drops to the ground with a long sigh and stares up at the two breathless boys, chests rising and falling in rapid phases, rhythms most excited. In the dark night, smoke from the chimneys adding to the void causes the hair on her brother's head to disappear within it. If they listen carefully, they can hear the sound from the flying ships just outside the Iudicatus forest, where one of her many cottages stays hidden. Nifferia laughs at their exhaustion as she had little trouble standing up and running once again, doubting they would. Having the upper hand of being forced to run and train every night together with Ule left her less breathless, so she lay calmly, staring up at the starry sky. Collecting themselves, the brothers share a look before glancing at Nifferia in glee and underlying seriousness. She, on the other hand, massages the wet summer grass between her fingers. Dex wears more excitement while Sino carries seriousness, but their identical faces made it hard for her to not mend the two expressions together. Green eyes match the leaves, blending perfectly with the forest ecstatic and their olive skin given from line's of Mavis, the people who would roll their R's and hold a

heavy dialect from languages of old. Their closeness and sibling-like relationship allowed her to read their expressions much clearer than other people. Faces and body language was an obstacle for her and made it difficult to understand underlying meanings.

“Now, what's on your deadly minds and missing hearts?” She asks, earning herself a smile from Dex and a typical Sino scoff. He glances at his smiling brother and makes a ‘go ahead’ motion with his hand as Dex stands a bit more forward, his rhythm like the feeling of dancing drums. “We got a proposal.” He starts and the rhythm she not only feels but sees is almost combusting from him, and Nifferia nods with a smirk.

“Proposal? You are not here to coat me into your labour?” She asks, and their unamused looks could not fool her, not when their equal mirth shone in their deceiving eyes. “Rising in the royal information circle does not interest me.” She carries on, which is quite true. Assassins, as the two were, gained information as payment by the royals. It was to keep them loyal and on a leash, and in return the assassins could use it for blackmail against less fortunate people the royals did not like. One who knows will always be on thin ice, which is also why the royals provide these payments, as it will show them those with a strong will to serve. Sino loudly clears his throat and sits down beside her on the grass.

“Tali wants to travel away from this land.” Sino says and Dex, joining their gathering on the heavenly smelling ground, continues by saying.

“We have enough travelling expertise to actually survive, and we-”

“- wanted you to come with us.” Sino finishes and they both look at her with sheepish smiles and, dumbfounded, she stares at them. Rising to half sitting position, her abs working for her, she peeks around the grove for any suspicious herbs which have made them lose some of their

intellect. Observably, she finds nothing of the sort and analyses their wear, but she cannot find any Potesta Stone on them. Sitting fully, she looks from one to another in confusion.

“Have you met Ule? He would rather crush my knees before I left. Besides, we are so close to a fair number of allies, I would not act too surprised if he's going to keep an extra short chain on me.” Nifferia explains and crosses her arms almost tiredly. She did not mention her own attempt at Ule and the loss. Again, the brothers shared a look, communicated through their small expressions, or with mind reading. It was impossible to tell. Looking back at her, both come off uncomfortable and Nifferia cannot blame them. Ule is not a pleasant topic.

“You’ll be nothing but an over-sitter, using you for your Deal Binder contract and abilities.” Dex stresses and Sino nods in agreement. Nifferia takes a deep breath and releases it in a long draw and stares at her brothers. The temptation to leave and make her own Deal Binder bids is almost overwhelming though, how the world would fall. Images dance, chanting her to bring peace to the blood filled grounds of Manix, if so be the world's people's death the payment. Unfortunately, her place had always been with Ule, and she was loyal to him as long as he paid the same. She had already put too much effort into Ule’s plan, and it would harm her gradually to go back now.

“I cannot betray him.” She says, and somehow it tastes sour, a lie and how she hated to lie. They look at her grimly and Sino even shakes his head, about to speak, when something causes a twig to break. Hearing it worked as a reminder of the searching guards. “I cannot let the shifter wait too long.” She winks and dashes away before they can utter anything more.

Navigating through the woods in darkness was no problem for Nifferia with her abilities of touch and ice, being able to cast the ice around her and tell her where things are. It

lessened her clumsy feet, however, still tripping slightly over things. Getting to the cottage, well hidden inside a thicker tree part, she touches the rune, keeping any other than her and Ule from entering. The quiet atmosphere and none rhythmic present told her Ule was not yet back.

Leather dressed books fell onto the floor when Nifferia accidentally hit the desk with her hip, and sheets of paper scattered around. Observing the mess on the wooden floor, she debates letting them lie there until Ule commands her to fix it. She sighs. Nifferia would rather not have his snout right in her face and smell his rotten breath. A second and far deeper sigh leaves her lips as she bends down to pick them up. The books were simple in their design and only had the word *Skuld* written on them. He just finished them the other night. Which is why she was placing them back at their new resting space on the bookshelf. All leather books are Ule's own. There he writes all those who are in debt to him, or to Nifferia. Collections of names, their deal with her and where their payment will be useful, something she did not need to write to remember. However, their individual ways to be contacted after Nifferia did the deal were quite useful when she wanted to collect her payment. Taking a lighter, a newer one, only needing a quick roll of the thumb, and it would light the little wick, she lit the letter. Her deal was simple: dispose of the challenge letter and receive a free passage in and out of Sprialen, Manix's most secure land and deadliest. To walk freely was all but impossible unless you were a high ranked priest, or a person who had received the pardon from one of those priests, which she now could claim either to herself or to someone else.

Walking out to their small kitchen, she catches her reflection in the broken window glass and the small light of the moon outside. White wavy hair, she should braid it, always getting in her face. It shimmers lightly in the red-like moon, and Nifferia glares at it and all maintenance it demands. Light green eyes, almost grey, glare back at

herself and the air slowly turns cooler. More than once did people believe she was a ghost or some sort of omen. An evil one. They liked to stare and point, never to approach. Nifferia smirks at the thought. She enjoyed having control in such a way, making them fear her with just her looks. Conveniently, they stayed out of her way as well, and she did not need to feel any unnecessary rhythm of common people.

“Something amusing you?” Ule’s deep voice rumbles and with the smirk still firmly in place, she turns to him. The light from the windows makes his shadow much bigger than his already massive and furry body was. His grey and ash black strings reject the moon’s glimmer, and instead of a silvery glance, his shag matted itself. A beast in all its depth.

“Just people’s idiocy.” She says, and he snorts, taking one of their potted cherries on the broken shelf, barely attached to the wall. With his shifted claw, he rips the lid off. It flies somewhere on the floor and, swallowing its content in one go, he licks his wolfish teeth. The animals attribute clearer as newly laid ice. She had learnt in her many years with both Ule’s company and those of drifters. All Shifters seemed to have the same sweet tooth.

“We need more of those.” He tells her and throws the empty jar on the wall, breaking it in the process. She rolls her eyes at his childish actions.

“Quite unnecessary,” she drawls, “feeling a bit grouchy, are we?” Crossing her arms and leaning on the counter. She feels more than sees his tension, and then she has his sticky paw around her neck. It is unfortunate how she will never learn not to taunt him, and the undoubtedly tone of Ule goes through her senses. The foul breath ghosting her face like a wind carrying death and the too old duck meat is quite profound. As a piano clinking, she can feel his twisted rhythm change from anger to determination. He puts some pressure on her neck, causing her to flinch before he speaks.

“Get more of those.” He grouses out and despite the unmoving hand, she nods her head, not wanting to push more than she can handle. Retracting his paw, he is sure to scrape her skin with his claws, letting some blood tickle down and stain her dark grey blouse. A game of power inflicted since older child legs and going strongly to her adult ones. As a young child, she and Ule had not practised the traditional hierarchy of shifters, meaning there had been no ranking. This rapidly changed when Ule returned from one of his own quests, one which left his mane bloody and rough and his eyes forever changing colour. His return brought the new ranking system and the implication. Pure control was a need he possessed after, and it left her wondering what had happened. Being what she was, it was easy for him to make her into a tool, almost like a weapon to be used as he pleases. She was aware of this, but she rather stands in the jaws of the wolf, keeping him from doing certain things, then to allow the beast free-range. Making sure not to anger him any further, she complies with his demand and takes her bag and money, clicking inside. Laying herself on the bed, she feels the rhythm of Ule lull her to sleep, an annoyingly calming rhythm, one she knew from child legs.

Wearing her high boots, she walked through the forest without having to worry of damaging her legs too much would she trip. Her blouse allowed cool wind to pass inside, and it was something well needed in the Manixien summer heat, a time she never found enjoyable. Often Nifferia long for the cold world which existed once every *Time Shift*. Frost draped leaves, snow heavy hills and icy stones. A calm world, with no one to stand above her and no more torture from the songs of war. No claws of Ule, scrapping her skin, and no constant demands from the shallow people. These dreams coated her to lose herself in the ice and allow Ule’s own dreams to grow. Any resistance would fall to her wonderful and destructive ice, the power of the white fate. It

was a heady dream until she finally remembered the many obstacles of her desire. Thanks to the Potesta Stone and the growing rune knowledge, there were too many weapons which could be used against her. Pistols and cannons were still just being made and tested, and their black powders could easily be dealt with. It was a few of the reasons she stayed with Ule and his hierarchy behaviour. He had a tactic which might work and he had selected the right people to fulfil those plans. There was also his loyalty to her, demanding the same courtesy. Shaking her head at her roaming thoughts and untuned emotions, she continues her stride.

Walking into the market, Nifferia notice the people stare a bit more intensely than usual. Deep in her backbone, instincts call out to potential danger, and soon her ice too tingles under her skin. Blowing a slipped strand of hair from her face and huffing, she turns back, without the cherries. Instantly she discovers some are following her and, with Nifferia's experience in her own lurking individuals, she understands more than well. They are more defensive than curious. The city's existing Manibus have sent them there. Already she is planning different routes to take, or which place to lead them without risking discovery. Unfortunately for her and Ule's travelling habit, she had not learnt the forest's ways yet and therefore lacked options. While glancing at the different ways she could walk, an idea forms as she sees a big tree closing in.

Following another path in the woods, she loses them by climbing a leaf rich tree. Her young and curious years have been much helpful in her climbing skills, and she easily gets high up. Disguised by the green summer leaves, she waits until they walk past, taking her time observing them. There are three of them, all wearing mantles and a good portion of Potesta Stones on their hips. Their colours glowing like crystals in the sun. To her misfortune, she recognises the mantles of the city guard, who must have been called by

the Manibus. She disliked the Manibus a great deal, always wanting to have a hand in everything, and they always thought out to find traitors. Especially when it comes to shifters or other minority creatures. Nifferia dread ever going into their Temple of Pove, especially the one in Spiralen. The town folks must have taken notice of Ule's forest raids and left the world to the Manibus. There was little other reasoning to why those types of guards were scouting the forest grounds and following her. Sometimes she wanted to smack her head against something hard for his lack of secretiveness under full moons and his obsessive need to howl for it. Bloody animals and their territorial behaviour. Internally groaning at the new inconvenience, she decides not to waste more time and effortlessly jumps down from the tree and starts running. A few heartbeats and she tumbles on a rot and falls flat on her face down on the forest ground. Standing up, she dusts herself off and continues sprinting to their cottage.

Careful not to slam the door, she tumbles in with her now less quick legs and hits the wall with her shoulder. The cottage has four rooms if they did not count the toiletry in, which is a distant part and has its own little house. Both Nifferia and Ule had each their own room, then there was the kitchen and last, the living area that was connected to the entrance door. Conveniently, Ule sits by his desk, most likely looking over more potential deals or planning people's payment. The twitch in his left ear is all which tells her his awareness of her presence. Marching in with as much confidence as he would allow her to have, she moves for the bookshelf and huffs at the number of books.

"We have people searching for us." She says and picks books down, placing them in the only empty space on the desk. The books are Ule's most prized possession and would always be treated as such. His voice is almost lazy when he tells her.

“Stop.” And Nifferia does just that, glancing towards him and internally curses.

His eyes glow yellow and knowing eye contact only sets him off. She bows her head down, keeping her eyes on the floor. The old wooden chair creaks as he moves in it, creating a bit more tension in the empty air around them. As he rises, it makes soft noises for the weight's departure and the floor groans instead.

Nifferia tenses when Ule's hands rest on her head, slowly petting it, and she is being swallowed inside his rhythm. “Up” he tells her and with great effort she complies, continuing her staring contest to the floor and focusing on a crack in one plank. It goes against her very being to act in such manners, but it was like a sickening routine, needed to be followed. Knowing that he is waiting for her to speak, she forces her mouth open, not realising that she lets out a ramble.

“We cannot stay, we can never stay! Why? Why don't we go to Drake and plan there? Why must we move and move every time someone gets a sniff of your existence.” She is no longer staring at the floor, but into the now glow free eyes of her guardian. The hit on the back of her head is expected and still she flinches. It is not a light hit either, even though she knows he is holding a great deal back not to give her suffering head damage. Hitting her made Nifferia once again stare at the floor. His words are more hiss than actual speaking when he grouses out.

“I have not said that you can speak, and enough of the island. I will not travel on a ship.” It was his favourite response, and she just knew there was something else stopping him. Despite Nifferia knowing Ule will never budge on that subject, she still tried. She planned a time before Ule changed, thanks to a deal made with one of the high inhabitants of the Drake Paws. There were some near to Manix and to the area they now found themselves in, it was bound to give Nifferia ideas of a sanctuary. Not only would

they not be hunted for Ule's shapeshifting, but they could make do with their army planning. There would be little chance of discovery of those ideas, and everyone owing a debt could easily travel and have a safe meeting. Thanks to her connection on the Paw lands, it can easily be fixed. Ule's unknown fear made it hard, and hiding it only added to the difficulty of success.

"I have a deal that needs to be done here, in the capital. Until you have done that, I will just occupy the people." His words dribble with brutality, and Nifferia knows how the people will suffer. She does not mind it much when it is quickly done. They always make her angry with their staring, so when she glances up at him carrying his wolfish grin, she meets it with a smirk.

"What kind of deal?" She will wander with a quirk eyebrow and Ule gives her some space, taking one of his newly made books.

"King Zoren stole a highly regarded witch's necklace as *tax*. She wants it back at all costs." He says, unbothered by the obvious appeal of the task.

"Must be pretty." She says while taking the book from his paw to look at the description of the necklace. Ule just nods and sits down again, worrying the chair under his mass.

"Heavy enchanted." He tells her, and Nifferia sighs in understanding, imprinting the nicely drawn necklaces into her memory. From what she can tell, crafted well and a supersaturated amount of Potesta Stones were thoughtfully placed. She had written them to all be of the black stones. Even the runes stones used are scribbled into the sketch. She is about to joke to Ule they would fit perfectly with his grey stormy fur, most likely earning another hit on the head, but footsteps halt her. Ule holds something in his partly fisted paw and looks at it with a hint of glow to his eyes, a transfixion to whatever lays in there. Unclenching his fingers, she can see the purple stone engraved into a matching bracelet on the one she already wore. Ule, now

showing signs of awareness, looks up from his silent reading. With two light steps, he walks up to her and takes her wrist in a firm grip, placing it next to the other. They are perfect replicas of each other, both carrying the purple stone, but with no rune. Then he speaks with a sure voice, emphasising the importance of his words.

“Tomorrow, you will break into the castle and bring me the necklace.” He tells her, looking into her eyes as he waits for Nifferia’s confirmation and it comes stiffly. He hands her back the contract now with the witch sign, written in red ink with a black dot at the end, funny wired in a staff like shape. She gives another nod before going to her own room to prepare her bag. The contract could not separate from her too long before it winds up in her hand. Nifferia had been chosen to be a Deal Binder from a young age, one of the few to receive one of the four Binders contracts. A Deal Binder, the holder of the contract, can ask to make a deal with a person. Either the Deal Binder tells the contract what is agreed on or the person looking for a deal does, and the contract by its own scribbles down whatever has been agreed on. The deal and its payment fade into the contract. Two lines will be left where they both sign. All individuals looking for a deal will know to what extent the deal will be reached. The Deal Binder can ask the person to give, steal, kill or swear loyalty according to the chosen person. If the individual does not feel like it cannot reach the request, it is free to decline.

If a Deal Binder feels it owes a person something, without having made a Deal, it can give the opportunity to ask one without the payment if it is in the range the Deal Binders sees fit for the payback. Deal Binders can decline a deal *if* it feels it goes against its protocol under passing time. However, this is not done lightly. If the person requesting the deal breaks part of the bargain or has lied about the ability of payment, the Deal Binder has every right to claim revenge for the broken contract. Be it the Deal Binder

breaking the deal, it needs to have a valid reason, trickery, or decisiveness. If a Deal Binder breaks a deal which was not right to break, the binder contract will wither and end up at its next Deal Binder. Binders are given an ability. One which will make it easier to fulfil deals, and a heightened sense, and in Nifferia's case it is the winter's cloak and rhythm. Manipulation of ice and snow, and perception of the world's almost musical tones. The origin of Binder contracts is unknown and there is not any literature which can fully explain their purpose, where the contracts are from or why one gets to choose to become a Deal Binder. They are mentioned briefly in some books where deeds have been done throughout the history of *nutid*, but usually because the author has noticed their existence. What is somehow known is the ability for a Deal Binder to gain another title or another path, either to live for a people or thing and become Protector or die for the possibility of gaining the Reaper's task. Nifferia had no interest in any of those things.

Ule used Nifferia's Binder bond to its full extent, finding powerful people in the knowledge of Deal Binders laws and trusted the legitimists of those contracts. Even if she knows she is doing the most groundwork, it is a payment for both. Because she needs to be the one receiving the payment, and if she were to be gone, he would lose all unpaid deals. Most of them are just because Ule is waiting until he has enough manpower and a good enough plan before demanding their allegiance.

Ule would look for beneficial people and borrow Nifferia's contract to prove its existence and connection to him, or more specifically, to her. Typical words he told them were mostly what payment could consist of and they, trusting him, would always sign first before the payment would be written. This made Ule powerful in the deal's aspect because Nifferia could ask for any payment she wanted the moment they signed and agreed. The problem for Nifferia is similar to those who are in debt to her, forcefully bound to

comply with the contract and thus the deal itself. Many times she had got captured and sometimes tortured for the deals she needed to pay. If she did not escape herself, she would only need to hold on for a maximum a week and then Ule would come for her. His monstrous form he could force forward often haunted her nightmares, along with the purple eyes with a dash of yellow. However, the more she saw it and what he did when in it, her fear for him slipped, for she knew he would never feel the need to kill her. In his bloody savings she would catch herself joining his wolfish grin often, only it was as if she switched from someone else's eyes back to her own. The ice in her body would take charge and her emotions cease to exist until she felt the last heart stop. Nifferia hated when it happens because it could take a week before she regains her emotions, and it would only be if Ule did something he used to do before he got all growly. Everything around her would trigger her need to make it freeze and fall to her will, and it was again as she walked into someone else's body. Being a Deal Binder could cause it memories or acts from former holders. Now she would have to get into a castle of people who hated anything magical, which was not their precious Potesta Ignis. First, she needs to get Ule his potted sweets, or he will have her neck, again.

In old garments and face hidden, she returns to the streets of Roxenen, King Zoren's dearest city, the Capital. Stench and filth littered most of the streets except the 'King's roads', which stretch all around the city, ending by all six gate openings. These roads were not meant for the commoners to walk on, only to be admired on the side. They painted yellow on the rocks that they built it with, and it was always clean, as were the side roads for the commoners. King Zoren would never think twice about executing a person who willingly or unintentionally littered it. Manixen kings were known to be overly dramatic. However, never once had they lost a war against an outside land, only among themselves. Walking among the less fortunate

people of the city, she gets reminded of their struggles and her easy dealing. A weak man is a desperate man and one that holds desperation desires a way out, which she gladly gives. For the right price.



Gaining choice

Guards of the castle easily get lazy when they are too cocky for their own good, much to Nifferia's delight. Surrounding the capital was house high walls, tall enough to keep foot marching armies at bay. The walls protecting the castle itself grew higher and, with little effort, could keep well-equipped armies out. And, of course, the people of the capital. Not only were holes hiding weapons of the black powder, canons of old, though unused as the Potesta Stones reign, the weaponry of the countries. Shaped like hexagons, all connected to the Manix lands puzzle, placed randomly around the land. The castles are slightly twisted, dislocating the lines towards the capital's wall, and it gives them good sight around if any threats were to occur. Nifferia quickly understands she will need to move along with the castle staff in order to get inside, unless she wants to risk getting spotted climbing the high walls. Her odd appearance was huge to her disadvantage, for not only did folks spot her, but they remembered her. Servants and their passage were her best option, disloyalty and borderline hatred toward their master was in the servant's backbone. It created an opportunity for a deal if they would give her their absolute silence. Was she successful.

Nifferia walks with purpose when she enters the servant's quarters, inside castle walls, and she feels a slight warmth spread unsettlingly. Compared to the gold and red amber

decorations covering the perfect square shaped stones on the castle wall, the servants' living was worse than the horses' stables. Hidden were the small and crowded houses from the front yard's view and the stones held no symmetric, big, and small. Despite having lived in many environments, Nifferia knew when to pity someone's home. Inside, it was as tidy as it possibly could be. They covered windows with wooden planks to keep the wind away. Still, it was cold as any dungeon she has been in, the summer night giving little warmth other than the spirit-like heat following her around ever since she entered.

“Can I help you, miss?” Questions a woman standing in front of two younger children by a beat up and broken madras. A boy and a girl and despite the many blankets around them, their faces held sickness and fear. King Zoren fed his servants just enough. It was known, she however knew he had little care if anyone got sick. He just needed them to reproduce for the yearly sacrifices. Seeing the opportunity, she walks up to the woman with a smirk and gleaming eyes. She can feel the fear in the rhythm beating away from the woman. As motherly instinct goes when a predator is near, the woman stands more protectively in front of her children. Nifferia would scoff- was she not in need of the servant.

“I've come to ask *if* you would want to make a deal.” Nifferia says, and from her side bag picks up a small sack of money, shaking it so the coins clearly sound. “In here is enough money for medicine and a bit extra.” Nifferia breathes in the stench of dirt and filth, pushing her shoulders back. “And as a Deal Binder, it is foolproof.” As the last words leave Nifferia's mouth, the Binder contract comes out of her bag and reveals itself. The only words written on the contract are *Deal between 'blank' and Nifferia Binder*. Realisation becomes clear on the woman's face as she stares at it, hand on her chest, and the small casting glance

towards her children is enough to tell Nifferia the woman will give in.

“How do I do it?” She asks and Nifferia shrugs.

“All you have to do is to tell me your deal.” She explains, and the woman stares intensely at her for a few seconds, Nifferia turning the coin sack in her hand, before giving a brief nod.

“My deal is to get those coins in your bag.” She whispers and Nifferia grins.

“If it is to be, you must give me whatever I need.” As they say their part, words are written on the contract and a space for a sign. Nifferia picks up her ink filled pen in silver and hands it to the woman who stares at the contract.

“Whatever you need?” She asks with a slight shake at her voice and Nifferia wonders if it is fear or concern. The rhythm has not changed since before, just a slight increase, so Nifferia was at a loss. From former experience, people are concerned about owning some stranger anything it demands. Still, she truly does not care, because they will always sign in the end.

“I only have an interest in loyalty-” she flickers with the pen nothing more-” flick “-nothing less,” and then she holds it out for the woman to take. Nifferia was not good with people, their minds filled with so many lines she could not follow, their rhythms not moving with the words they speak or the acts they do. But there were few deals she had not managed to acquire.

“Nothing more?” She asks and takes a long look at her quivering children.

“No.” And easily enough, the woman takes the contract in her grip and scribbles down her name. Once it is done, the contract wires itself up and goes back to the now open bag, resting for its next bargain. Her children look with their glassy eyes in awe, whispering to each other. Nifferia throws the bag to the woman, or May as the signature told her and she clumsily catches it. She is quick to make sure that it

really is money in it and Nifferia gives her a moment to count the coins.

“Now, I want you to tell me the safest way to get in and out of the castle unseen.” She says, and the woman does not hesitate to tell her.

Nifferia is smirking when she leaves the sad sight of a house, walking to the small staircase by the house at the far end. Apparently, the crown prince’s betrothed and family were on a visit and the king, so in love with showing off his wealth, was holding a feast for them. Almost all servants are going too occupied with either making food or pouring more wine into the guest’s cups. May had also told her the guards would be very few, for many were invited to show his loyal force, leaving some paths unsupervised. Nifferia was close to grinning walking the steps, her hair illuminating from the moon's powerful light. Sketches of the castle layout given to her by Dex were close to identical with its actual structure. Some rooms even had the interior from the map in place. The hexagon shape manifested from the city walls to the core walls and the castle itself; it was a symmetric cobweb of rooms and corridors. Manix carried an obsession with symmetry, every big city built in some perfectly formed shape. Her task was becoming more and more simple when she realised no door was locked, empty of people as well. The king was a known fool, but she never would have thought he was an imbecile, too. It did not help that the man married a woman from the Fool's land itself, one looking just like the Pyto’s from Gigantes.

She walks around the rooms, looking for anything resembling the jewellery stolen. Not only was there more jewellery than she had ever seen in almost every chamber with an immense bed, but she also believes the men had more than the women. After some close calls with the guards, Nifferia was thinking of going back and just to tell him it was not there. As luck would be given by Einn himself, she spots one chamber door, which is locked. Intrigued by

why just one room was so secure, she touches the metal on the lock and freezes the mechanism. Even as the world was moving faster to new techniques in weaponry, flying ships or wheel tuning mechanisms, locks remained the same. Feeling how it builds, she moves her ice and the metal inside comes to the unlock position. Hearing the click, she carefully opens the door to make sure no one is inside. Satisfied, she steps in and begins looking around and, to her luck, the necklace is among other jewellery. It did not matter to Ule how much she despised the witches; a deal was good when they had something extra. Tucking it safely inside her bag, she finally heads out when something falls over in the other room. Cursing herself for not being more aware of her surroundings, she quickly tries to bypass the other room's door. Walking past it, she sees a glint of two people tussling on the floor, a woman and a man. The woman makes eye contact with Nifferia, who gives herself whiplash in her haste to turn away. She still hears the muffled cry for help and Nifferia's throat tense at the rhythm she can feel from the room. If the woman is of any importance, she might get a good deal, but *if* the woman is just a servant, then she jeopardises everything. If Nifferia gets caught, she and Ule would have to leave to get away from the royals, which would not be too bad in her opinion. Groaning, she goes with her gut.

With a little too much force, she kicks the man's face, and he stumbles from the woman who he clearly had been choking. She coughs and takes a shallow breath as she rolls away from the man. Grunts and curses come from the man who holds his chin, and she sees the blood dribble from his mouth. It gives her an odd satisfaction and her ice disagrees as the rhythm of the woman's fear is still very overpowering, a similar tone Nifferia has carried in her body once.

“Call...call for the guards.” The woman chokes out and Nifferia cringes, both at the woman's small voice and the

thought of being in a room full of half-drunk guards. Mr Grunts, as Nifferia dubbed him, must have heard her as he makes some vulgar wording and she takes one of the curtain cords and kicks the man again in the face, successfully causing him to go unconscious. With the cord she binds his hands, doing a subtle search of his things, and he holds fine weapons for such a bad assassin. He could not be from Sino and Dex division. From the looks of it, he must have been someone's servant who has been paid, his bearing belongings much more expensive than any commoner, and his awful skill to eliminate a target discounts him from being any form of trained professional. Unless he was here as a thief, maybe after what she was looking for. A witch's jewellery is often wanted. At the very least, he cannot be someone placed high among the Knowing.

“Catline!” Nifferia closes her eyes and slowly counts five rabbits jumping over a log before she turns around to stand face to face with a heavenly crown bearing man. He looks like he swallowed a lemon as he momentarily stares at the still laying woman. Behind him stands what Nifferia assumes is the king’s guard with a shameful expression and she puzzles the pieces together. The king crunches down to what now Nifferia understands is his daughter or wife. One could never be sure when kings chose spouses with half their age. Biting the insides of her chin, she observes the best way to get out.

“Father!” Nifferia feels proud of her analysis skills when the girl confirms her thought.

“What happened?!” He burst and looked from Catline to Nifferia and then to the man laying behind her. Concisely, she nudges one of the man's legs and shrugs before slightly flinching when the daughter bursts out with a painful voice.

“That, that woman saved my life!” Catline coughs out, and the king stares more intensely at her and Nifferia feels a lot of rhymes coming from everyone inside the room,

overbearing her with the drunkenness some have. She could push her ice from the ground and take many of them down if she needed to, but it would also mean she had only a few moments before King Zoren sent out his creatures to hunt her down.

“Is this true? Did you save my dear daughter's life?” He asks and Nifferia tries to smile slowly, but it comes out more like a cringe.

“Of course, how could I not help such a helpless dove?” She says, a wording Tali usually uses when coaxing someone. Inside her head she just wants to leave the situation, Dex and Sino would have enjoyed this though.

“Present an award! Whatever you wish that is within my power will be yours.” He says and Nifferia blinks at him. As a Deal Binder, it is a perfect gift to give Ule, to let him choose and decide. For Nifferia, it is an opportunity to finally get something she wants. The king helps his daughter up and his guards collect the man, who murmurs in another language as he regains consciousness.

“How about a ship?” She says before mentally kicking herself and references, “I've always dreamed of owning a ship.” Catline looks at her father sternly.

“Give this heroine a ship, father! We have some smaller ones, perfect for a woman's taste!” Her voice is still rusty, and she gets another cough fit, but the authority is very much visible. Nodding, the king calls over the guard that was close to his right. Small words are exchanged and then he turns to Nifferia.

“Captain Rafhes will show you to your ship, and he will speak with the captain on the ship and all paperwork will be done there.” He says and Nifferia hides her smirk behind her hand. Within a few minutes, she achieved something she has been craving for. The royals did have it easy. The king carries out the girl and Nifferia moves around the guards, hastening out of the halls. Accidentally, she bumps into

someone and pink glowing eyes stare back at her for a few moments before they both move away from each other.

Together she walks with Captain Rafhes in silence out the castle walls and Nifferia reflects on her luck that it was not King Zorens who came but King Felich. He would have demanded why she was in his castle. There will be little time to get away with the ship before the word starts spreading and King Zorens starts a search for an intruder.

“Quite the fight. You must have been scared.” Nifferia does not show her flinch at his sudden voicing, nodding in hope he will be content. To her annoyance, he counted her act as to continue. “Few women show such violence.” He says, and she cuts him off.

“Where do you want to come with this?” He looks a bit stunned at her outburst before he chuckles and nibbles at her clothing.

“Such spirit, you must really make a man work for it.” Nifferia tries her hardest to get a grip on his intention and, of course, why Einn lets her be around such an idiot. Taking a step away from him and his hand falls a little as the fingers lose their grip, he looks at her grimly.

“You make little sense.” She says as they pass the capital walls, heading for the docks.

“My apologise, I'm just assumed you must have many suitors working for your favour.” He explains and Nifferia looks at him in confusion.

“Why would I have suitors?” Rafhes mimics her confused expression and makes an up and down motion with his hand's sign to her body. “You are like a walking statue! A beautiful one, and with the ability to defend your family's blood.” He tells her and his rhythm holds just the same chord as the disgusting people who buy bodies for sickling acts. Nifferia feels a headache coming from it all and shakes her head and some sort of ‘light’ comes across Rafhes' face.

“So, you don't have any suitors?” He questions and again she shakes her head in a no. “No own interest either?” And

Nifferia thinks her head might come up from all her shaking when she is repeating the motion.

Luck would have it as the docks finally came into view. Zorens kingdom was in the Nordic region of the country and had a bigger fleet and a smaller land army. King Felice's kingdom was further south, and he possessed ships, only those which held magnetic spears which allowed them to fly on the magnetic waves. Not remarkably high, but enough to pass any wall they wanted. The people of Manix did not dare enter the realm of the skies too high as it could disturb the Crystal Dominus. Or worse, Stella Reprobi. To avoid travelling through Spiralen, king Felich had taken the ocean way, using ships on water. The visible difference in the ship's decorations was more pronounced than their sizes. King Zorens' ships were decorated with Siren-like women on their front. Some were even real, dead, to keep the beasts from attacking the ship, and King Felich had terrible looking trolls. Captain Rafhes sees the ships and snakes his arm up her shoulders and points at a smaller ship with a small troll seeming to sleep at the front.

"Behold your ship!" He says and Nifferia feels his hand coming closer to her skin, still laying on the protective fabric of her clothes. Swiftly taking a hold of her right hand on his wrist, she drops it like a glove from her.

"No touching." She says, and Rafhes pouts and nods with a smile, which tells Nifferia not to trust him. They walk down to the pointed ship and Nifferia notice there is a great absent of workers by it, only two presents. Both men, one quite short and with ruffled hair and one much taller and slick combed hair. As a pair, they stand out and Nifferia's smile is a little more genuine as they approach. They are dressed in the fancy clothing of Felice's symbolism. Their proud Aurantiaca Potesta from the Crystal Dominus, Raes, was designed into the clothing golden details of the deep orange and black fabric.