

# **A Tale in Alagaësia**

cloud9stories

# A Tale in Alagaësia

by *cloud9stories*

SI-OC in Alagaësia. Massive AU. An SI who managed to achieve a good approximation of godhood in the HP-verse finds himself stranded in Alagaësia without having planned for it. His magic doesn't quite work, and he has only hazy memories of the book 'Eragon'. PS: I swear I'll work hard on his characterization!

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# 1. MAD WORLD

The following fic is a sequel of *The Bigger Picture* (my first ff), mostly born because I was unsatisfied with how things ended in there, and I realize that there was 0 characterization and proper plot-building in there, so I'll strive to do better here.

In any case, knowledge of my other works is not needed to enjoy this story, I foresee very little references that can't be explained with a small AN at the end of the chapter.

To sum it up, an SI that worked his way through the Potterverse and managed to ascend to a good approximation of godhood world-jumped without his consent.

I own nothing

## MAD WORLD

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The wind blew, causing the trees on the hills to shuffle. The tall oaks cast long shadows in the snow under the moonlight, reminding the old hermit of his home. He paced around in the tower, thinking, wondering, searching for the answer of yet another question. On the back of his mind, he was aware he had gone mad. He had known that the search for knowledge had long since had its way with his mind, causing his thoughts to fall in spiralling patterns that he had absolutely no control over, making his memories feel like dreams and his accomplishments look like badly drawn squares when he wanted to build a stone house instead.

The hermit wasn't that much opposed to forgetting things, after all, no only they were clearly unimportant (or he wouldn't have forgotten them), but having a mind always fresh and not clogged up with the strands of his previous researches was a boon that allowed him a

more free approach to his endless questioning, searching, hoping, crafting.

Of course, with everything was so new, so different, other questions arose, and he looked for an answer to those too. Question after question after question, until he forgot what exactly he was looking for. He was happy, too, and often enough he came to wonder about the nature of the questions he looked to find an answer for. His memory, fluid and not shackled by the heavy constrictions that limited and shaped countless before him, allowed him just what was needed to resolve the impossible questions that he found roaming in his mind.

It was just another day on the decayed tower, or outpost, as he reminded himself in a sudden and clear spark of unadulterated genius. He had liked the place the moment he laid his eyes upon it: broken, ripped and moldy. Clearly, no one had lived there for ages, and given the immortal and eternal nature of his research, he found that it suited him just fine. So he moved in, cleaning up and preparing the insides of the tower along with the improvised garden that occupied a green patch of grass that was covered by the tower's shadow in the afternoons.

Without realizing it, over the years he collected knowledge in the shape of multiple compendiums and books, and slowly but surely, he finally settled down in the once-abandoned tower. He never mended and repaired the outside layers of the tower, not that much because of avoiding snoopers that would have distracted him from his research, but more because he... felt that, something about the tower reminded him of his own mind.

Oh, Tenga son of Ingvar knew that he was mad, the few people with whom he had interacted with in the years had confirmed it in countless little ways, and that was fine too, he also liked the ruin-ish feel of the place because he liked the scattered and apparently meaningless building that was his mind. It just felt right that way.

One night, the hermit woke up as his sleeping body was busy tending to some ones that needed recalibrating in order to better resonate with the phases of the moon when he woke up, his heart racing, his breath irregular. And, more importantly, his mind had found an answer, if not *the* answer, to a question that he remembered finding in his own mind decades before. With wide eyes and a rictus grin, he twisted the stone just so that the moon casted shadow would form a triangular shape that united his feet with the base of the tower before barking out a laugh.

The instant after he solved that answer, his focus was already on the question that he had almost lost with his laugh. It was a Question among questions, even for him, and the answer, obvious enough once he let himself feel it.

He chuckled merrily as he walked a couple of times around the ruins of his tower, not minding the fact that he was stark naked and that he could have scared off the moonlight itself.

Suddenly Tenga just turned back, his curiosity temporally satiated, and went off to look for another answer. That was not the only time he felt he should remember something. Once, he heard about elves in the woods to the north. He knew elves, didn't he? He was positive he had seen them before.

Now, in this brief moment of sanity caused by the random conflux of events both within and beyond his control, Tenga not only remembered his Question and its answer, but he thought about a way to prove that answer true. He found ironic that, through questioning everything, he had never focused his mind for a long time upon what could o could not be in other lands. No, no other lands, other *worlds*.

The hermit focused his thoughts and emotions to fuel his will. It was not an easy task, especially considering the particular magic that he was going to accomplish: logic dictated that there were countless living beings over countless worlds, several for each star, different

and likely beyond whatever any human or elf or dwarf on Alagaësia could hope to dream of.

And so, his plan took shape, hammered in position by his unrelenting mind and kept lashed by his strangely focused will. Forcing his mind to recall memories that were already beginning to vanish, he fell into a meditative trance. Like countless times before, he accessed the well of energy inside of himself, linking it to the countless charged or half-charged gems scattered across the ruins of his tower, and willed a change.

He could no use words, since there were none to express what nobody had ever even dreamed of, since that even if there were, they would limit what his razor sharp will was capable of.

The first part of his Magic rolled across himself. Searching, forging, opening and declaring.

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*With a last spasm of consciousness, my heart lurched, and as the tether that tied me to the reality I had so deeply affected broke, I was no more.*

---

He had opened a door linked to Alagaësia itself, now, he only had to make it so that a living being from another world that could live in his one would be selected by his magic.

The emptiness grew to the point of almost madness, and Tenga knew he had to be quick.

His will turned and expanded itself, twisting beyond what could be perceived in a net crossing galaxy after galaxy, time and distances so vast that they were no longer expressed with numbers that Tenga could recognize. Distances that were both a single step away and behind a veil that couldn't be torn.

The second part of his magic bloomed with every point of contact that his net made, testing the ties that the beings that he felt had with their worlds.

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*Like it happened to me before I was open to another grade of awareness and understanding, my Sight of what was and what could-be once more brightening and singing across my soul. My consciousness of everything rippled, turning from a vast tapestry that extended beyond me and with mechanics and colours and twists and nooks and whys into an ever-shifting desert. Yet the dunes that moved as waves without following any rhythm I could discern were composed by grains of multicoloured sand, each shining as the only Truth possible amongst the falsehoods, which were perhaps even more convincing as reality folded itself around knots I could somehow see as I was far away despite being one of such grains myself.*

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The third part of his magic thundered with finality, imposing an hard limit on those who could come across, and then erasing all but the closest. So the net that had travelled beyond the stars was cut apart, knot after knot, until there were only a few dozens ropes crossing through realities.

Then, the ropes tightened, few of them were snapped with an enraged flash of outrage as the ones that touched refused to comply to Tenga's will, while others simply unravelled, the chosen Beings not meeting the conditions set by Tenga's magic.

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*As I died, I didn't expect to keep my consciousness for long in the Evershifting Desert that was Everything.*

*I had surrendered willingly my link with the World-Soul, renouncing to my ability to channel it, I had lost my anchor, and it had been whimsical wishing on my part that had me pack away my stuff on my person, nothing more.*

*An existential pain, vaster than what mere words could express washed over me, all-encompassing, sharp and gargantuan, oceanic and searing. The grain of sand that I was/had-been/never-will-be shattered into a lower level of existence, and I found my self torn amongst the flowing threads, each an idea, each a river intersecting countless others.*

*And I was a falling leaf, I was the vibrant green that stole a smile with its brightness, I was a resounding echo, I was a memory, I was shade and rock, wood and wind, chalk and sadness, moon and rage. I was greed and shattered, tall and aflame, swinging and steam.*

*Again, pain.*

*And something that I couldn't see pulled.*

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The song was so loud now he couldn't hear anything else. The worlds spun without purpose, and when the what was and was-not clashed together without control: there was no fear, no tiredness, no lack of enthusiasm, because Tenga, son of Ingvar, was, at the end of the day, completely crazy.

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*I felt as if falling in every direction.*

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The ground-breaking emptiness took over Tenga and, for a moment, everything went black. When he opened his eyes, they laid upon a leaf – its delicate webbings were the first thing Tenga saw. They were so exquisite, so beautiful, it made him wonder what made them such. He noticed a weird feeling in his chest – a heartache of sorts.

Frowning, he touched the area, looking for a wound, but found nothing.

A voice screamed in the back of his mind, and he almost remembered something. Almost. But then his attention was diverted

back to the leaf and its webbings. He wondered yet again why they were that way. Smiling, he took the leaf and went off to look for an answer to his newest question.

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Slowly, ever so slowly, I rose to a sitting position and opened my eyes. It took a few seconds before my one eye could pick up anything from the surroundings, since it appeared to be night and the moon had chosen exactly that moment to hide behind a small cluster of clouds.

Rubbing my palms over my face I rose to my feet, and my hands on the ground more than my other senses informed me that I was in a vast grassland. Here or there, I could see a few trees, mostly oaks, on top of many short hills.

*What the fuck?* I thought with a heavy frown.

Of all the things to happen when completing a ritual suicide, I had never expected to end up again on solid ground. *Following my theories, My soul should have unravelled and be torn asunder in the greater soul of the World.*

Whatever had happened to me, sure as hell I didn't expect nor conceived the possibility of... remaining alive. I frowned some more. *Why in the nine hells did I think that dying was a nice idea? Or an acceptable price to pay?*

I felt as if my last years, especially since shortly after Fleur's last clash against Voldemort, were nothing more than a particularly vivid dream, one in which my emotions and hopes were muted, almost sluggish, no it wasn't the right word... everything that made me truly human, especially regarding the natural emotive reactions to the happenings in my life, had been... off colour, paler, almost as if, while I could recognize them, they didn't truly affect me.

I shook my head, trying to free it from its ringing before returning my eyes toward the vast grass planes around me. There was truly

nothing in sight, so finding a reasonably tall hill in order to figure out where I was sounded... wise.

I turned on my heel and... stumbled.

*What?* I tried again.

And again.

Each attempt at Apparition was met with failure.

*This is a problem.* Was the thought sounding in the calmest part of my mind, while the rest of me was busy freaking out.

I opened my palm suddenly, willing a small fire orb to blossom over it, feeling the fire as a part of me, understanding it, feeling it... nothing.

I was stranded somewhere, the god-like connection to the planet's soul that I had grown used to was gone, and apparently, I couldn't even make use of magic in any way that I knew.

"I seem to have fucked up." I summarized my situation.

## 2. A Fox's Guile I

### A FOX'S GUILLE I

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As I slowly came to terms with the fact that I had apparently lost even the most basic application of magic I had grown up with while the Potterverse, my thoughts clashed and roamed without me being able to calm the *fuck down*.

It just... It didn't make sense! My being still alive, which admittedly was something I was grateful for, was something that I couldn't reconcile with my memories of my last seconds of consciousness before the *falling in every direction* trip that had apparently landed me from low orbit onto a random ass grass plane. Even more disorienting of the conspicuous absence of True Knowledge, the trumped-up magical staff slash spear that I had crafted and then sacrificed, was the utter and absolute *quiet* that was hammering my senses.

"Fucking hell!" I cursed and kicked a lump of wet grass, the front of my foot swinging wildly over the greenery without finding purpose and causing me to stumble. Just as I stopped hearing the faint echo of my voice, the quiet came back.

It wasn't a quiet that swallowed sounds, oh no, I could hear perfectly the breeze caressing the grass and the rustle that my own clothes produced. It was something that ran deeper, something that I had grown accustomed to, an awareness, a feeling of being-a-part-of that I couldn't shake. I blinked with my lone eye and tried to figure out where I was, but sure as hell the constellations I had spent long hours studying back when I was a student at Hogwarts seemed to be missing, replaced instead with very different ones.

Even then, that simply meant that I was no longer in Europe, and I was simply staring into a different part of the celestial tapestry surely

there had been enough random magical backlash during my last conscious instants to throw me somewhere in China. And given that at the time I was in low orbit over Italy, I could even rationalize how I got skipped all the way across Asia. *Or...*

The thought rose without my input, making me freeze as I kept staring at the sky and at the moon, the half-moon that looked incredibly close. *Closer, I think, that it has ever been...* I blinked a couple more times before taking another stock at seeing the stars in some sort of recognizable pattern, to no avail.

"Or..." I repeated out loud. Feeling myself falling on my ass on the grass as my gaze never wavered from the starlit sky. "Or I could have taken the wrong turn at the dimensional crossroad..." I tried to inject some humor in my statement, only for it to be greeted by the uncaring breeze that kept blowing over the grassy planes.

Truly, what was more realistic? That I had gotten shot across the universe to a planet remarkably similar to the Earth, even if this one had a far closer moon than the one I was used to, that somehow I was still on my original planet and that I had mistakenly pulled the moon a bit closer, or that I dropped myself across the multiverse?

*Oh, sure as hell I hope this isn't the beginning of a Lovecraftian nightmare.* I banished the thought from my mind faster than it came. *First rule when dealing with the insane shit Lovecraft wrote about: don't.*

My hands went to my face, trying to make sure that I was still myself. Being slotted into somebody else's body seemed like another improbable but still far too possible thing to happen for my tastes. *It would be easier if I could conjure a fucking mirror.* I grimaced a bit as my lone eye once more took in my form as my hands kept running over my brown leather overcoat.

I had stopped wearing Basilisk and Dragonskin made armour after Voldemort's fall, truly there had been no longer a need for me to gallivant around in open fights. The dragonhide boots in which I had

stuffed the end of my pants were gone along with the several feathers from this or that magical bird that I could feel missing from my untamed heir. I blinked: *I am an idiot.*

Making stock of what I had was the smartest thing I could do once I had exhausted my other options of travel. So my hands quickly patted myself down, feeling the utter lack of anything related to a magic creature or plant. From the random strands of a Wampus cat's fur to the crushed fangs from venomous tentacula, I felt many of my hidden pockets empty, even if thankfully they seemed to retain their bottomless quality.

A sharp spike of pain made me tear my hand out from an inside pocket, a white mass of feathers and outrage flapping out: "Fuck you!" Raven croaked, "Fuck you!"

"Oh, I'm so *lucky* to still have you on my side, Raven." I drawled as I eyed her. She lacked a couple or more feathers from her tail, and her beak looked heavily scratched on one side, but if one ignored those two details, she looked none the worse for wear.

It was strange, I didn't expect to feel reassured by the presence of my familiar of all things, it wasn't like she could offer anything of particular value given my situation. Yet, there was some sort of quiet acceptance in Raven, something that part of me recognized as true and important. As I examined my own feeling, I blinked in surprise. Of all things I expected to feel, gratitude for her presence wasn't amongst them.

*I guess that loneliness strikes everyone.* I mused, before stopping again, frowning at the unusual thought and feelings. Of the many things I was and had been, wistful I had never been. What I felt wasn't an illusion of any kind, could feel the warmth of my affection for Raven as she finished flying circles around me and landed on my left shoulder: "Do I feel less of an asshole to you, Raven?" I asked, not really expecting an actual answer.

"Still dumb!" she croaked out a laugh, and I snorted in turn, shaking my head as my hands patted me down again, and surprisingly enough, I found a familiar jar in another pocket. It was cylindrical, made of clear glass and had a single wooden like handle that made it look like a diminutive bucket. In the barely twenty centimeters tall jar, a white and bluish flame churned and flailed freely, almost eager to climb out from her containment.

A warmth of another kind found its way in my mind, it wasn't quiet and reassuring as the one that I shared with Raven, nor it was something that I could honestly dub as 'love'. More than anything, the warmth that hit me as I looked over the flame that had once been Fleur felt... heavy, almost punching me at the mouth of my stomach. *I have honestly no idea about why... no.* I stopped, simply running over my memories.

I set the glass jar on the ground in front of me, before sitting cross-legged in front of it, seeing the flames burning a tiny bit brighter when my fingers brushed the open top of the glass jar.

*That*, more than anything. gave me pause. So, slowly, almost scared that I had finally finished going mad, I let one finger surpass the edge of the glass jar, only to witness once more the flame brightening.

Fleur had attempted a big ass Self-Transmutation, turning her whole being into pure Fire in order to survive a fight against Voldemort. Sadly, between her own inexperience and the impossibility of the task, she had never managed to reform a proper body, and even worse, while the small flame in the jar had always burned with Fleur's colours, feeling quite similar to her, it had never truly answered to any external input. I had tried several times to make contact with her consciousness, even searching for her directly across the World-Soul, to no avail.

Now, more decades than I cared to count later, and only after my reasonable attempt at ritual suicide, Fleur managed to... *No way.* An intuition, that perhaps would have taken me several weeks to properly focus on, and months to confirm, seared through my mind.

Fleur had been lost in the greater Soul that represented Fire, my Norwegian Ridgeback Dragon's leather boots had vanished from my feet, along with the several elements on my person that had once belonged to a magical animal.

I looked for a connection, carefully sidestepping the most obvious explanation that already was jumping around in my head, returning to the flames in the glass jar, which burned almost... *hesitantly?* from one side to another, causing another small tightening at the mouth of my stomach.

I hadn't been fair towards Fleur. In more way than one, I had used her. I knew that much. She wanted to shine, even brighter than the common part-veela, she had the skill and the drive for it, being chosen for her school back at the Triwizard had all but guaranteed that much. Then I had used that thirst for knowledge to... collect her. Nothing more, nothing less. Oh, she had been a reasonably bright mind, and a fierce witch, but not something that I could honestly ever see as an equal. Not considering my own extra-verse origins. But I hadn't really been invested in the relationship, and the worst part was that I really wasn't sure I had been capable to.

Slowly, I rotated the glass jar on the ground in front of me, passing a hand over it and witnessing over and over the flames brightening a bit: "Fleur," I spoke, and the fire almost jumped taller than the edge of the jar, rebuked by a set of runes that had been etched on the glass to contain her. "Fleur, when you tried to turn yourself into Fire against Voldemort, you kind of got stuck. Now you're into a glass jar as a lump of white flames. The jar supplies you constantly with oxygen and breaks apart the CO<sub>2</sub>, again giving you back a steady supply of oxygen."

The flames burned dimmer for a few seconds, before sliding over the vertical side of the jar, as if she was testing the limits of her confinement.

*Can't say the I blame her.* I thought with a downward tilt of my lips, once more feeling a slight twisting at the mouth of my stomach,

grimacing a bit when I was reminded once more that I had never truly considered her *indispensable*, or *unique*, or a part of my life.

*True, to find an equal considering my massive advantage regarding what can or cannot be done with magic has never quite been on the table...* I half admitted to myself. Still, I realized that despite having somewhat 'conquered' her, even if in hindsight our relationship had been much more similar to a transaction of some sort: her companionship in exchange for me to share the (frankly absurd) kind of magic that I could wield. I felt as if I had been less than honest, less than worthy of said company.

I blinked, perplexed as I watched the fire churning in the glass jar. "I don't really feel myself..." I muttered, between the frankly excessive enthusiasm born out of having Raven still with me, and this assault of ... *feelings*... and self-doubt related to Fleur I felt like I was only wearing my skin. Like I shouldn't have...

*Why in the nine hells I stopped trying to help Fleur?* I frowned heavily as my eyes lost themselves into the "In the universe where I lived until yesterday," I started carefully seeing the white flame with bluish shades splatter itself against the glass closer to me and managing to convey a feeling of 'attention/curiosity', "Everything existed on the base of an amalgamation of much bigger souls, since everything at the end of the day was a part of the World-Soul." I frowned, almost fearing what I was about to say: "Here, wherever we are, I lost everything on me that belonged to a magical plant or creature, while you Fleur, who had become a small flame without self-awareness a long ass time ago, are suddenly receptive to the sense of hearing, at the very least."

*And isn't that a nightmare and half.* I immediately thought: *Sound is vibrations in the air picked up by the ear, she has no such organ, how can her false-state be aware of what I say?*

The fire in the jar was pulsating wildly now, rolling from one side of the glass to the other, burning with a brightness that I had long since forgotten about. "My first thought is that my ritual suicide went

sideways, and that we are now in a world where animism isn't quite as present among the... living."

Since Raven had stopped ruffling her feathers and even Fleur's flame had stilled, looking like they were made of glass, I specified: "My last ritual could have gone... a couple of dimensions sideways..."

Ever helpful, Raven croaked from my shoulder: "Fuck up! Fuck up!" causing me to flick her off from her unwilling perch.

"Yeah, I gathered that much!" I growled at the bird, my eyes landing once more on the jar holding Fleur, which had apparently managed to hear the exchange, given that she was rolling with a hiccuping pattern that I could associate with her laughing her ass off.

"And Fleur seems okay with the fact that I have no idea about how to go back, nor that..." I stopped, knowing that I *had* to convey my next words, even if I really, *really* didn't want to deal with the consequences: "Fleur..." I tried again, only to quiet down and swallowing a lump that I didn't realize had formed in my throat.

"Since you 'lost yourself in the Fire'... " from there on, I gave an extremely short summary of what she had lost since losing her awareness, glossing over the fact that I hadn't even thought about talking with her family regarding her condition, and implying without saying out loud that had passed more than one hundred and fifty years since the death of Lord Voldemort. The 'Your family aged and died in the meantime' was the part that I hoped she wouldn't quite grasp.

Sadly, Fleur had been the brightest french witch of her age: the fire, that had rolled across several 'burning patterns' her flames describing a different dance depending on what I had been talking about, burned so bright that I might have had the Sun a meter from my fucking face and not notice the difference.

I didn't think, I turned, scampering on all four as I heard the glass crack open behind me, and when the heatwave reached me I didn't

even feel that I was going faster on all four than I could have with my human legs, I didn't feel my cheeks sinking and my mouth stretched into a pointy end, I didn't even realize that I had a tail.

Until the fire sizzled against my fox-form's fur, I hadn't even realized that I had turned into my animagus form.

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## **AN**

**So, I have thought about making David Taylor capable only of the inheritance-verse brand of magic, but at that point I would have simply opted for writing a completely new SI, and since there is already Stronghammer, which covers pretty much everything I'd wish a brand new SI would do in Alagaësia, I'm leaving the MC capable of some of the minor stuff that he had back in the Potter-verse.**

**The reasoning behind the magics and instruments that I have let him keep is that some of them were deeply tied only to his soul, or tied to elements that are shared between the Potterverse and Alagaësia, like his animagus transformation, as you've seen in this chapter.**

**Elder Futark runes will keep working for the MC (very differently than they did in the Potter-verse, as the new ones he applies will need to be imbued with energy from his own body to work in Alagaësia) because his several soul-gutting forays in magic have imprinted them on his very soul. And with the same reasoning, he can speak and be heeded by canines and snakes, even if this ability will become somewhat less useful given the presence of the Ancient Tongue.**

**A basilisk hide coat would have fallen apart because basilisks do not exist in Alagaësia (kill with gaze magic is still on the WE-NEED-TO-NERF-THIS-SHIT list).**

**Fleur and Raven travelled with him, as well as his extremely cool trunk. However, not all of the stuff in his trunk will be able to survive: namely, everything that doesn't also exist in Alagaësia. Why? Because following the logic I have set in The Bigger Picture, stuff exist branching off an original World-Soul. So magical plants won't be able to survive the cross over, Fire exists in Alagaësia, so Fleur manages to retain her current form (she wouldn't have been able to if she had been into a Veela's body), Raven too, mostly because her magic is tied to the MC's soul, and not a Greater Concept of a future-seeing raven.**

**The trunk has remained undamaged because it is as a self-sustaining and isolated system, built-in a multilayered gravitational well, and gravity is a constant across the multiverse. The House Elf that tended to the first layer of the trunk is gone too because of the same reasons of the other magical plants and animals lacking in Alagaësia. (You'll see in the next chapter!)**

## 3. A Fox's Guile II

### A Fox's Guile II

Since the dawn of time, and more recently since after the first appearance of dragons in Alagaësia, the land had witnessed many marvels and events that defied, in a way or another, what was commonly known as 'possible'. Beyond the mere application of magic words that expressed the strength of the caster in this or that way, there had been coincidences of such a magnitude that all those aware of the possibilities surrounding a particular chain of events would have screamed at the sky and accused the gods of sticking their nose among mortals' affairs.

Magic, or more correctly life itself, which permeated the land and the air (even if significantly less than what it used to), often had reverberated in a way or another to echo said extraordinary events throughout history. From when the elf Eragon found a dragon egg and chose to keep it instead of destroying it, to when the Pact between elves and dragons had been struck, from the first spark of madness in Galbatorix's mind, to when the Riders had started to fall, from when Brom had succeeded in securing an egg from the only three left, to when the only princess of the elves had chosen a life of sacrifice and battle against the usurper.

Those selected few that knew how to listen had always managed, throughout history, to 'feel' when something had changed. It was a given that said selected few were capable of doing so either because of a great deal of isolation, which allowed them to sharpen their sensibility so much that they could feel the events that changed the world in such fundamental ways, or broken minds that had historically been discarded as 'crazy'.

The last monumental change to echo across the land had been different from any before. It had been sudden, swift and utterly unpredictable, even if Tenga, son of Ingvar would have never

remembered being the main cause for said change, it had been there nonetheless.

Deep into the Du Weldenvarden, an elf stirred in his sleep, a shift of the world he was into reverberated across his being, and a minute frown that had been present for many years lessened minutely.

Across the land, hidden beneath countless tons of rocks and minerals, the dwarven king took a deeper breath from his pipe, letting the smoke fill his lungs with a feeling of satisfaction that he couldn't reconstitute to any particular event he had been made aware of.

On an abandoned island, beneath layers of rocks, some of the ones that had been in fact tangentially responsible of some of the 'impossible coincidences' that one would have called 'an act of god' stilled thoughtfully and withdrew their presence from the land, cautious about the sudden flare that none could explain.

Into Urû'baen, a human mind dedicated to shatter and overcome each of his secret weapons, didn't react. The vast mass of black leather and scales, capable of flattening buildings with a swing of the tail and erase forests with a single deep breath of fire, felt his scales lift imperceptibly around his long neck, as if he was preparing for battling. Given the insanity which dominated his mind, however, and his inability to form complex thoughts, a low rumble that expressed anticipation was his only reaction.

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Once he had reached the top of the nearest hill, David Taylor, mage extraordinaire, world hopper and fox, stopped running and turned his head back, witnessing at the bright light that was Fleur's flames the now scorched ground that had formed the small valley among hills in which he had landed a few hours before.

A burnt orange coloured ear twitched without any conscious input, as his lone eye witnessed the devastating effects that Fleur's temper had inflicted on the previously lush grass. The fox bit the empty air,

making its teeth clack soundly together to free his ears from the ringing caused by the veritable firestorm. *I guess that I should be grateful that I haven't been immolated.* Was the main thought running back and forth in the fox's mind as he observed the flames wildly swing in a column that he knew was begging to be noticed by whatever was about to fall on them like a ton of bricks in this unknown world.

The fire flayed wildly for a solid minute before the brightness started to fade, and only then the fox started to move towards the epicentre of the manifestation. *I need to figure out a way to make Fleur communicate in a better way, I can always keep an eye on her to figure out what's about to happen.*

David assumed his human form once more only when he was close enough to see that the raging firestorm had dwindled to barely a handful of flames that flared and dimmed without any apparent pattern: "We need to move, Fleur." he said soothingly, grimacing when the flames spiked in his direction aggressively, but immediately lost whatever was driving them against the man and returned to the... *is she crying?* David's intuition came to his aid, for once not pointing out how things were about to get worse.

"We need a way to move you, I can't apparate, portkeys are out, running as a fox is our best bet, but I'm out of... wait a minute." David topped passing his hands across his untamed mane of dirt blonde hair and examined his necklace.

"Yes!" he hissed, whatever had caused the disappearance of several of his best resources had been unable to remove the heavily engraved iron parallelepiped that hung from his neck.

His hands stumbled briefly in finding the latch before they were able to remove the apparently meaningless trinket from his neck, but were quick to place it on the ground a few steps away from the sentient fire. As his hands left the necklace, it grew, revealing itself to be a tall iron trunk. Without hesitating, David opened the lid and scampered down the staircase.

He ran down, ignoring the floor that looked like an orchard in full summer as the suffused light mimicked the dawn for the plants benefit, and he didn't spare a glance even for the chickens roaming over an enclosure on one side of the 'room' and a rooster that got ready to sing. David kept going down the spiral staircase, reaching soon enough what could have been mistaken for an apartment. There was a library with the aisles' depth that wasn't something that could be picked up with a mere glance, a brazier that warmed the whole room, a kitchen, a bedroom, and a proper living room, in which was present a couch, and comfy armchairs. There were bottles hanging from the ceiling: they had once contained light in various forms, either fireflies, bluebell flames, glowing mist... David ignored the grimace that he felt rising as he saw that many of his previous attempts at creating an eternal source of light hadn't survived the trip across worlds.

Still, the one-eyed man reached one of the blackboards that hadn't seen much use in several months and lifted it off from the wall, revealing a cabinet holding several glass jar characterized by a single wooden handle that created a sinuous curve over the open end.

*At least I always believed in having a Plan B.* He snorted quietly to himself before climbing out from his trunk once more. He quickly closed the lid and tugged briefly on the delicate-looking chain that hung from one side of it. Answering to a command that had been inscribed into it many years before, the trunk shrunk itself, resuming its innocuous appearance of a necklace, which David wasted no time with securing around his neck.

He turned once more towards the desolate-looking handful of white flames on the burnt ground and quickly approached. "I don't know why you regained your senses only now Fleur," he started, feeling like there had to be something more than he could do than simply talking to her, "But it means that now there is hope for you to regain your body, or a new one... I can't make promises about results, but I

can promise that I will keep trying, if only so that you can slap me with your own hands if I take too long."

Having said that, David scooped up the fire with his hands, before delicately and almost wistfully letting it into the glass jar.

Turned into a fox once more, the one-eyed canine heard the familiar flapping sound of Raven covering his blind spot as he closed his maw around the wooden handle over the top of the glass jar containing Fleur.

Without further waste of time, the fox turned and started to throttle north, in the direction where his enhanced senses informed him of the presence of a course of water. Hiding their arrival, given Fleur's actions would be difficult, but hiding their tracks? That was something the one-eyed fox could easily accomplish.

---

They found a river a few hours later, just as the dawn started to break through the thin mist that covered the grass planes that they were crossing. The sun broke through cleanly, erasing the deep dark of the night into lighter and lighter shades of blue, until David could actually see as far as his eye could reach.

Beyond the random crop of trees here and there, and the pat of the landscape hidden behind the hills, he couldn't see anything worthy of particular interest in sight, so, after having drunk from the calm and relatively small river (marvelling at the cleanliness of the water), David returned into his human form, picking up the jar containing Fleur from where he had left it: "I'm about to cross a river, I don't think that ordinary water can do something to you, but I'd prefer to not risk it."

The fire, which had kept its dim behaviour for all the time that David had spent running around as a fox, didn't react in any way to his words, causing a grimace to mar his features for a few seconds, before e surrendered and put the jar back inside one of the inner pockets of his leather overcoat.

His head then turned towards the white-feathered raven, noticing that she was busy trying to peck away her reflection from the clear water. "Sometimes, I don't know why I bother considering you smarter than you actually are."

Raven croaked outraged and flapped off the ground: "What do you hold,

but never keep?

If you take your last,

make it deep."

David's eye narrowed: "I'm not keeping my breath to cross this river underwater." he answered correctly interpreting the riddle as the suggestion *and* challenge that it was. Considering his previous mocking statement, it even made sense that his familiar would suggest him to keep his head underwater for a while. Under the cold, clear water.

David shivered as he prepared himself to his next challenge. On one side, the river was barely thirty meters large, and it didn't look like there were any impossible predators waiting to spring an ambush on him, and he could swim better as a human than as a fox. But then he would have to remain wet until the sun managed to dry him, since resting in his trunk wasn't an option until he figured out a safe place where he wasn't going to be picked up randomly while he couldn't keep watch.

With a deep breath to steel himself, David opened once more his enchanted trunk, folding his clothes and leaving them on the first steps of the spiral staircase before closing the trunk and securing it back around his neck. *At least I'll have dry clothes once I pop out of the water.*

He shivered a bit in the cool air that suddenly bit him, and, knowing that staying still wouldn't help him, he ran into the water.

It wasn't a pleasurable experience. The water would have been so cold to hurt his teeth when he drunk it if not for the lingering effects of the decades spent with a philosopher stone constantly boosting his vitality, but it was still cold enough to make his limbs feel like they were been prodded by countless needles, and Davd soon began to lose sensibility in his fingers as he crawled across the placid river.

He had never been a 'sportive' man. In a world of magic, exercising the body when you know that it doesn't influence your power had always sounded like a waste of time, while the philosopher stone took care of maintaining him at his peak condition without need for him to do a single pushup. Despite never intending for it to be so, David had a body fit to compete in the olympiads back in the Potterverse, albeit completely lacking any kind of skill in every discipline in which he could have competed.

From beginning to end, it took him fifteen minutes to cross the river, the current, placid and almost invisible, dragging him along the course of water for a couple of hundred meters before his insensible fingers managed to scap against the rocky bottom, granting him the possibility of walking out of the water. His teeth clattering David's hands stumbled to free once more his necklace from his neck, and he almost fell down the spiral staircase in order to reach his clothes, breathing heavily as the meteorological enchantments of always-summer of the first floor of his truck washed warmly over him.

The fit of hunger that came along with his exhaustion was enough to push him to walk into his orchard, plucking peaches and whatever looked ready to be eaten. *Surviving with your personal garden and house hanging from your neck is incredibly useful.* He shivered once more as he filled his mouth with the mature fruits, feeling the exhaustion from the unwilling world-hopping, the night of running and his last stunt in the river finally crash over him.

*I'll sit near the brazier just for a couple of minutes.* He reassured himself as he stumbled down the spiral staircase. Soon enough, he had fallen into the armchair closest to the brazier, warming himself

as his eyelids grew heavier and heavier. Without knowing it, he was already asleep.

---

Hours later, even if to David it felt like less than a single minute had passed, he was risen from his slumber by a metallic ringing. More a clattering of blows being hammered over... *Shit*. He surmised lamely as he dressed with clean clothes that this time included a pair of sturdy boots made of leather as he climbed upstairs.

His trunk had survived the world-travelling without particular difficulties, even if he had to look over the storage to see if any magical creature or plant was shared between this new world and his old one. He thusly knew that whatever noise wasn't caused by his enchantments failing, but by something outside, more likely than not trying to hammer open the trunk.

David took another deep breath, realizing that Raven had remained outside, and sat on the last step of the spiral staircase, waiting for the lightning he had inscribed into the lid of the trunk to charbroil whatever was trying to pry his home-laboratory-garden-study open.

As the minutes went on however, and the more or less constant slamming echoed across the sealed environment, the one-eyed man realized that all the features that he had added after forging the trunk itself, like the enhanced defensive protocols that acted upon his understanding of the souls that created the world in the Potter-verse, were more likely than not... gone. *Fucking hell this is a problem*. He grimaced a bit, opting to sit quietly and trying to hear the unfamiliar words that were exchanged above his head.

The sounds weren't even remotely similar to the tongues that he knew from his previous world, but that was to be expected, really, so he remained calm, listening in, feeling the cluster of small runes etched on the back of his left ear collect sounds and associating them to the very human-like tones with which they were uttered.

It wasn't enough for him to get an actual understanding of the tongue he had never heard before, but it would help once he managed to land his gaze upon the... *definitely human-like beings* ...and observe how their microexpression and body language would pair up with the sounds that he was striving to memorize.

*I knew that figuring out the Allspeak would become useful at some point.* He briefly chuckled in self-congratulation as he picked up Fleur from the inside pocket where he had placed her and started to relay what was happening beyond the reach of her limited senses.

*I wonder if I can exercise a wandless legilimens here, it sure could be useful to extract some info.*

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*A month later*

Running away from the human caravan that had picked up David's trunk hoping to sell it along with its contents had been easy enough. Given the impressive weight of the Iron trunk, the merchant that was in charge of the family-itinerant merchant convoy had deemed it worth a pretty penny, and so had got it hauled up on a wagon. When the sounds of the moving group of people, along with the occasional \*twang\* that echoed across the Iron trunk had faded, David had slipped out of the lid, quickly tying it back on his own neck and turning into a fox, disappearing in the underbrush of the small outcrop of trees where the humans had decided to rest for the night.

Raven hadn't been very far away, wisely knowing that following a group of unknown people without David around could easily enough spell her doom. That was why as soon as the fox had spotted the white-feathered raven he had opened the trunk, letting her free to relax in the first floor of it.

And they *were* humans, given the technological development that David had been able to discretely observe, he was in a world that sat comfortably in the middle of a medieval setting. From the way they lighted fires, to the weaponry. They ate their provisions without

sending out hunters or whatever, signalling either that they were rich enough to be able to afford it, or that they didn't quite feel safe with roaming the grass-planes after dark.

David had no reason to believe that they followed empty suspicions, given his own experience, which had included a world where lethifolds and dementors existed, he was wary of not following their advice. For all he knew, he had been lucky on his first night to not be eaten alive by the grass-god of unjustified bloodshed.

So, he had followed them, at a distance, for the better part of a week, letting the Allspeak cluster pick up their tongue, and coming to isolate terms from their context, slowly understanding more and more. Sure, his vocabulary was limited to the common words spoken among the itinerant merchants, and they weren't enough for him to figure out anything of extraordinary importance. Apparently, there was a king, the roads weren't safe, the imperial soldiers tended to abuse their power more often than not, and the stories they told each other around the fire were more something born out of irrational fears than anything else.

Given the distance he had to keep in order to not being discovered, since a one-eyed fox with a silver patch over his missing eye would attract too much attention, David had been unable to try and delve into those people's minds through eye-contact. The one-eyed fox wrinkled his nose in distaste witnessing that they weren't used to wash their hands with soap after taking a shit. *Ignorance and bacteria, this is not the most civilized world I could have landed myself in.* He thought bitterly as he saw the gestures to shoo away the bad luck or the obscure presages that they could see in the dark.

A guttural sounding word came up more often than not in the whispered worries that the adults were careful to keep from the children, and from the context, David assumed that it indicated either a band of bandits, or something along the lines of a warrior nomad tribe that stole from the caravans. Every day, David remained back once the humans moved away, heading back into his trunk to keep

Fleur up to speed with what was happening and to eat something, finding reassurance in the unchanged behaviour of Raven.

"I guess that we could stop at the first city they cross and figure a way to blend in." David spoke soothingly to the white flames, looking for any indication that Fleur was either approving or not for his plan.

"I have no idea if there are wizards around, if they're hidden like we were with the Statute, but given the technological prowess of the caravan I've been following, it wouldn't make much sense." he kept talking, looking at Fleur, trying and not really succeeding in figuring out her thoughts. *The silent treatment continues then.*

He couldn't have known, nor expected, to see a pillar of black smoke rising further along the road once he left his trunk. As a fox, he carefully ran towards the merchant caravan that he had learned to know in the past weeks in which the humans had unknowingly instructed him in their tongue and showcased a plethora of uses and costumes that he knew he would be hard-pressed to remember, and once David reached the caravan, an hour or so later, he had to bit back the instinct to puke.

Upturned wagons, bodies on the ground, splatters of blood.

His lone eyes studied the responsible ones from a distance, his fox nose picking up many smells that he could have done without while his ears twitched and picked up sounds too low for him to hear as a human.

Then the guttural sounding word that he had heard so many times spoken with badly controlled fear and terror finally latched upon those that it defined. They were roughly humanoid in appearance, but not humans, oh no. They had greyish skin, bowed legs and thick arms, yellow, piggish eyes, claws on their hands in place of nails and a pair of long, twisted horns protruding from above their ears. The smallest among them was six feet tall, and spoke in a guttural sequence of simple terms that my Allspeak had no difficulties in picking up.

Kill.

Burn.

Tear.

Most of their vocabulary, or at least the part that they were unknowingly letting David overhear, wasn't something that one would adopt for a polite conversation.

They were Urgals, and the one-eyed, world-misplaced wizard remembered of an unimpressive book he had read once, along with roughly half of the sequel, even before landing in the Potter-verse. Eragon and Eldest.

Knowing that he could do nothing to fight back, given the lack of cooperation from his usual way of doing magic, David fled the area.

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**AN**

**I've come to realize that the first-person narrative is great only if you care only for the character you're writing about, and is effective only if you spend an unordinate amount of attention to details that said character could pick up upon. Since I'm just beginning with this fic, and I'm also trying to learn how to better my writing, I'm going for a third person Pov in this chapter, I hope it works well enough.**

**The point of this chapter, besides setting the MC up in the new world, is to see if even when I write exclusively about him with another pov the narration doesn't get ugly hiccups.**

**For now, in my opinion, it seems to be working.**

**This is the last 'filler' chapter, from the next, the story starts in earnest.**

## 4. First Encounter

### FIRST ENCOUNTER

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Inside his magically enlarged trunk, David paced in his apartment's floor, Fleur burning calmly as her jar was hanging from the ceiling, doing a good enough job to light the blackboards over which the one-eyed wizards was busy writing.

"The good news are that I know in which world we are, the bad are that we are, frankly, ridiculously incapable of defending ourselves." he spoke loud enough to be heard by both his flaming companion and his white-feathered familiar.

Fleur churned a bit inside of her jar, while raven hopped off the armchair in order to fly and land over David's shoulder, croaking: "Learn!" with insistence.

"That's the thing, magic here doesn't really make sense. From what I remember, there are magic words that are 'True Names' of everything, but knowing them and understanding them isn't remotely enough, whatever changes one applies comes at the price of 'energy'." he spoke quickly, chalking on the blackboard his hazy memories. Occlumency had as a side effect an increased memory, but he had started with the discipline only in the Potter-verse, and his memories of his first life had never been a great focus while he could learn how to manipulate reality itself. So, the memories that could have very well given him a leg up now that he was stranded in Alagaësia were less useful than he hoped.

From the way the fire flickered, he believed that Fleur was burning with questions. He snorted at the private pun, before trying to imagine what questions she could be posing. "Fleur, I know that you're likely a bit overwhelmed by the situation, but... I kind of am too, so I'll try to figure out a way for us to communicate, but for now

pay attention, maybe you'll gleam something that can solve your situation."

"I am reticent in calling it so but..." he took a deep breath, "apparently magic works off 'life energy'." he grimaced as he spoke, ignoring the croaking laugh of what could appear to be disbelief in Raven's behaviour and the furious brightening of Fleur's fire.

"Yeah I know, life energy doesn't make a lick of sense, is it bioelectricity? Thermal energy? The amount of Joules one can exercise to move something? I have no idea, like I said, I don't know everything about this place." he went ahead: "So," he started to make out points on the blackboard: "Life energy and magic words are the first point that needs to be figured out. Second: who can or cannot help. Since I remember that here everyone is either a telepath or capable of becoming one, we're not going around until I'm sure that occlumency works out against mental intrusions here. That means kidnapping someone and trying to enter his mind before and after having thought him occlumency, to see if it works."

David took a step back and drank a full glass of water that he had left on the nearest workbench: "Third, the most powerful things that we could eventually encounter, but only if we are unlucky, are Shades, which are strange spectres capable of magic and that are basically a walking legilimens battering ram, elves, which are faster and stronger than they should be, all capable of this... nonsensical way of doing magic, and, unless I'm greatly mistaken on the kind of timeline we're working with, Riders, in particular, this Black King that the people of the caravan spoke in hushed tones about. Which are either humans or elves bonded with a sapient fire breathing lizard which instead is capable of magic that actually breaks the previous rules of magic that I've stated."

"Fucked up!" croaked Raven: "You fucked up!"

David sighed, ignoring the particularly witty familiar in order to walk towards the second blackboard, which had been cleaned up from the

abandoned projects that had remained there: "What do we have to work with:" he started preparing another point.

"Well, this trunk is the best kind of mobile base that could be dreamed about, and not something this world would ever think possible. So we have food and shelter wherever we go. Our second resource is... well, you Fleur." he spoke confidently, making a surrendering like gesture when the fire threatened to jump over the edge of the glass jar: "Meaning that somehow you're a self-sustaining flame that gives off heat, if we can figure out that 'life energy' thing, you are practically an infinite amount of it, even if with limited output. Third, if the trunk hasn't collapsed yet, it's because Runes still work, and the enchantments that I built back home are apparently self-sustaining, so, while I don't think that I can replicate my previous works, if I figure out this life energy thing I can set up traps powered by my 'life force', I have no idea if the Philosopher Stone that I kept in a constant working cycle inside my empty orbit has changed my 'life force' or not, but it would make some sort of sense." *If I squint at look at it with the corner of my eye at least.*

The one-eyed wizard took another step back from the blackboard, scratching his own head pensively: "Another advantage is that there shouldn't be an apocalypse-like scenario incoming, so we can take our time once we find a sufficiently secluded place."

Raven flapped her wings, sticking her feathers briefly in David's hear: "I can sizzle like bacon,

I am made with an egg,

I have plenty of backbone,

but lack a good leg,

I peel layers like onions,

but still remain whole,

I can be long, like a flagpole,  
yet fit in a hole. What am I?"

That made the one-eyed wizard stop for a couple of seconds: "A snake?... Why would..?" then the spark of intuition that had allowed the man to rise from muggleborn to the most terrifying magic-user of his world entered the fray: "Parseltongue! And Caninetongue too!" he turned on himself, grabbing Raven despite her squawking protests and squeezing delicately with his hands, before letting his fingers trail along her feathers: "I swear, if you weren't so damn annoying you would be the perfect familiar!"

He then added quickly the points to the blackboard: "In theory, the True Tongue can be used to communicate with the animals too, but the advantages of our brand of animal-talking are that I can impart a measure of intelligence upon the beasts that I talk to, and also that they obey my orders."

After having said that, he took a deep breath, steeling himself now that he had stated what was necessary to make known, he moved towards the brazier, eyeing briefly the ever-burning embers that kept the room at a comfortable temperature. "I don't remember the exact mechanics, nor if I'll be one of the people capable of actually using magic," David stated somberly, "Since one either can or cannot turn his own life-force into the energy necessary for actually make magic work. The same goes for you too Fleur, to be completely honest, even if given your heritage and that you're... well, living fire for now, once we figure out a way to return you to a body you'll hopefully be able to."

The one-eyed wizard sighed, dragging his hands among his unruly hair, he was working on assumptions and blurry memories, and he didn't really know how to be sure without actually trying out a spell. "I'm guessing that enough meditation upon an object could make me discover its True Name, or at least I hope so..."

Raven flapped briefly her wings in a careless manner, she had already given her more than useful input to the situation, the rest was up to the actual wizard.

"The problem is that, if by some miracle I'm capable of the local kind of magic, I'm pretty sure that been the simplest spell could consume all of my 'life force and kill me, since I have no idea of how to actually control it.'" he murmured, grimacing as he remembered that he still didn't remember a single magic word of the True Tongue, no... there had been one, the movie had somewhat butchered it along with everything else, effectively condemning the whole series to never be heard of.

*What was it? What was it?* He thought with a frown as he left the room and walked upstairs, not stopping to check either the chickens the orchard or the vegetable garden, knowing that the runic clusters he had placed in proximity of each plant kept the environment in its optimal condition, he kept walking upwards, out of the already open lid and into the fox den he had taken over when he met another vulpine mammal, a week or two after his realization over the world that he was living in. "The word for fire... Brush? Burn? Something with a lot of bite to it, Eragon basically used only that spell to fight..."

But maybe he was working on it backwards, what better occasion to figure out if understanding was enough to figure out if a Name could be learned through simple understanding? Besides, given how long the True Tongue had been around, or was it the Ancient Tongue? Yeah, that sounded more familiar. David closed the lid of the Iron Trunk and secured it to his neck while he was belly down on the dirt floor of the den, quickly turning into a fox in order to have some more space to move around in.

He sniffed the air thoughtfully as he moved towards one of the two entrances of the den, not perceiving anything foul in the air, and with his ears picking out the usual sounds of the small forest he had been living in. He settled down in his den, meditation came easily to him, after an unholy amount of years of either straight occlumency or this

and that magic experiment that required him to be in 'tune' with the world around him.

Falling into himself, he started by visualizing a tiny ember. He went with his mind to the unstoppable heat of the deserts: the heavy heat of a sun that didn't now mercy. The sheer dryness of the air, the scorching heat of a fireball tearing through the air in his past duels with Fleur, the reassuring warmth of a campfire. The stones turned cherry red into the fire that he had once dropped in a pot of water to make stew during one of his badly gone attempts at cooking for myself something not 'microwaveable'. The hunger he had felt when he had fallen into a trance lasting more than a week. The *need* to grow. The *rage* at the sheer violence that he had been forced to use magic for, the warmth of an honest smile.

In his mind's eye, he saw fyendfire, remembering its almost uncontrollable thundering fury, he remembered the Eternal Flame, he visualized Fleur's fire melting rock as it passed near to her, with such clarity that he could have reached out and touched it. He remembered the fire in Fleur's eyes, and with a gut-wrenching effort he forced himself to think about Fire, and Fire only, refusing to lose himself among regrets and feelings that he wasn't sure Fleur still had for him.

Keeping in mind the feel of fire, wich was an amalgamation of all the thoughts that still surrounded and kept circulating in his mind, he knew, with some sort of detached certainty, that he was close, and kept coming closer with the image of flames growing clearer and clearer in his head...

Still lost in his trance, he changed his form, with his eye closed, in the dark of a moonless night, he breathed in, and as the air rushed out of his lungs he opened his mouth, *feeling* Fire roll off his tongue with the cracking of wood bark exploding under the assault of heat, with the whooshing of air being consumed: "*Brisingr.*"

As David spoke, he could see Fire clearly withing his mind, and his muscles relaxed minimally under an imagined ripple of warm air

wishing around him. His own startled laugh brought him outside of his meditation: "Words can be discovered with enough understanding." he summarized, "Now I need to figure out this life-force turned into spell mechanism and I'm set."

With a content smile and a deep satisfaction rumbling in his bones, he dropped on all fours, reddish fur covering him as his face lengthened and a fluffy-looking tail sprouted from his tailbone as he started running in the night.

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***a month later***

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Three white horses with riders cantered through the woods, their heads held high and proud, their coats rippling in the moonlight like liquid silver.

On the first horse was an elf with pointed ears and elegantly slanted eyebrows. His build was slim but strong, like a rapier. A powerful bow was slung on his back. A sword pressed against his side opposite a quiver of arrows fletched with swan feathers.

The last rider had the same fair face and angled features as the other. He carried a long spear in his right hand and a white dagger at his belt. A helm of extraordinary craftsmanship, wrought with amber and gold, rested on his head.

Between these two rode a raven-haired elven lady, who surveyed her surroundings with poise. Framed by long black locks, her deep eyes shone with a driving force. Her clothes were unadorned, yet her beauty was undiminished. At her side was a sword, and on her back a longbow with a quiver. She carried in her lap a pouch that she frequently looked at as if to reassure herself that it was still there.

Suddenly, the first elf raised an open hand, causing the other two to leave the trail and direct the horses in two wide arches around it. They proceeded pulling lightly on the bridles, guiding their horses

more with their knees than with their arms, after few hundreds of meters, the two male elves switched places, leaving the one armed with a spear to lead the vanguard on the trail, and making it possible for the second to embrace his powerful bow, his eyes scanning the undergrowth, almost completely ignoring the darkness.

Having at least two members of the party constantly off the trail forced the group to slow down significantly, the dull sounds caused by the steps of the horses against the dirt almost completely drowning in the inky blackness that made hairs stand up un warning on each of the three elves' arms.

Half an hour later, the song of a nightingale caused the two male elves to stop their horses, their eyes leaving the undergrowth to look toward the direction their third companion had sung from.

In the nightly silence, the two directed their horses toward the shelf, raised eyebrows on both of their faces a clear picture of surprise and curiosity.

Before they could utter questions, their eyes quickly found the reason of her call. Almost a three hundred of meters off one of the less known trails of one of the thickest forests outside of their home country, there was an oval-shaped clearing where almost ten tree stumps marked the ground, barely large enough to allow the canopy to form a hole through which they could spy the sky. The real object of their curiosity, however, was undoubtedly the trio of foxes which kept yapping in her direction with glee, going as far as running circles around her mount before returning towards one end of the clearing.

*"What happened?"* whispered one of the elves. And when his word left his lips, they resounded with a sharpness that transcended mere sound, they travelled with the certainty of the mountains and the thrill of the first leaves sprouting after the winter.

*"We passed here less than three years ago, and there are no settlements in the area, we would have spotted the signs. Is it*

*prudent to stay around when we know they've been used by someone around here?"* The other male answered in the same musical, heavenly tongue.

*"We are tired and have been travelling for days, the foxes are free from any influence, and only after I spoke to them they seemed to be willing me to follow them."* the female elf answered.

*"Maybe they've been raised to lure us in a trap?"* but even as he spoke, the spear-wielding elf seemed to be unbelieving of what he was witnessing.

*"You think a mage asked the foxes to look for help? Or someone who knows the Ancient Tongue?"* the other male speculated, even if curiosity was clear in his eyes.

After a brief back and forth, the elves directed their horses to follow the three foxes, which looked overjoyed by their choice and fell one over another in order to show to the elves a way through the undergrowth that would have been easy to miss even during the day. Soon enough, the three elves reached the mouth of a big hole in the ground that looked like a fox's den, only an order of magnitude bigger.

It seemed almost a natural curve of the ground, which followed the shape of the oak tree' roots under which it was hidden. Even so, the tilt of the ground towards said hole was almost gentle, and unless one knew where to look, the undergrowth and the fallen branches both managed, with a startling demonstration of cunning and wariness, to mask the den.

Several steps to the side, where the conspicuously absent trail would have led, there was a section of a trunk cut in half with the central section dug out and filled with clear water that a few words of choice in the ancient tongue confirmed that was as fresh and pure as it looked. Taking the hint, and looking once more in the minds of the unsettlingly intelligent foxes just to be sure, the elf holding the spear

dismounted in order to take a look and make sure this wasn't an extremely elaborated and improbable ambush.

The tallest of the elves had to duck a bit in order to enter the fox's den and so he stopped briefly in order to question once more the wisdom of their choice.

*"Even if it's filled to the brim with Urugali, which I doubt, since their smell and tracks are completely missing, we could easily overcome such a small number, especially in the closed spaces where they lack mobility."* the raven-haired she-elf answered, gracefully descending from her mount, her green eyes taking returning to the dark forest around them, ready to bold at the first sign of a problem.

*"And if they're Imperial soldiers we'll have an easy time removing their outpost."* concluded the first elf, finding wisdom in their superior's choice.

*"I'm the only one absolutely perplexed by this situation?"* asked the first, with a corked eyebrow, only to witness a small curling up of the female' lips.

*"Whatever is happening, is not malicious in nature."* she replied with a face that managed to convey that she felt more at ease than she had since a long time past. *"These foxes are as smart as our own horses, and they hold the same purity."*

The animals in question chose that moment to trot inside of their den, yipping joyfully as they nuzzled each other. The three elves exchanged glances that went from amused by the jumpy reaction of their companion, to fascinated by the turn of the events, to enthralled by the sheer absurdity of the situation.

The elf with the spear dismounted silently and walked forward, his eyes scanning the part of the ground that he could glimpse from the outside before walking in with the control and cautious attitude of a veteran.

His two companions exchanged a glance when they didn't receive an answer for a handful of seconds. Really, how long could it take to take stock of a safe den that a group of foxes had apparently offered to rest in?

The spear-wielding elf shook his head lightly, once he followed the curve of the burrowed 'cave' his eyes boggling out when he witnessed a minute amount of sunlight coming out from a rectangular section of the floor where a wooden staircase spiralled downward. His discipline was the only thing that allowed him to replicate the chirping song of a nightingale in answer to his concerned companions before his eyes returned to what was quickly growing up to be one of the strangest moment he had ever lived since he left his home.

He looked over at the trio of foxes, that seemed unconcerned with his reluctance and scampered down the stairs with reckless abandon before his eyes fixed themselves on the hatch that led somewhere where artificial light kept the day from dying and waited until his companions reached him.

Once more opening the way, he walked in first, and if not for his discipline, he would have stopped dead as soon as his head was completely under the hatch, his acute eyes taking in something impossible.

As far as his eyes could go, there were trees ripe with fruits over a carpet of lush green grass. His ears picked up immediately over the chuckling of chickens in a henhouse he immediately spotted before cataloguing also the light breeze that ran through the branches and the gentle trickle of a course of water.

As he kept walking down the spiral staircase, he noticed that it kept going beyond the impossible pocket of summer that he had just walked past.

Wrenching himself away from the dozens of questions that wanted him to understand how so much impossible magic could exist, he

poked his head in the following floor, and if possible, he was even more mindblown.

The room was twelve meters wide and roughly ten long, with a ceiling that sat comfortably at three meters of height. There was a single armchair in front of a fireplace that clearly spoke of human presence. It was made of simple wood and wicker, with cushions randomly covering it. There was a table in a sturdy looking, light brown wood that ran almost all the way from a wall to the next. Confirming that it was indeed the home of a powerful mage there were several aisles of books that hurt his eyes when he tried to see what there was at the end of them. On the other side of the room, next to another door that the elf assumed led to yet another floor, there was a metallic looking tube from which water fell quietly into a wooden bucket encased in a marble-like shelf.

After having confirmed that there was nobody in the room, he returned to the even more impossible forest-floor, where he was quickly joined by his two wide-eyed companions.

They walked towards what looked like the centre of the orchard, their senses immediately picking up on a human talking, not longer before, while remaining hidden among the trees and ready to either attack or run away, their eyes picked up on the owner of said voice.

The man didn't seem to have noticed them, and was missing an eye, a silvery patch covering his empty orbit. He had a wild-looking mane of dirty blond hair that didn't reach his shoulders, while the rest of his face was clean of either beard or moustache. He had thin lips and a straight, if slightly longer than usual, nose. He wore a strange form-fitting black shirt that covered his arms only to half of his bicep, while his linen trousers reached only halfway through his calves. His build was... lean, and he had something different from other humans that they managed to observe in the several years they spent travelling across the land. It was subtle, but it was there. The people of the desert would have called him 'a child grown with too much water' while the villagers near the spine would have pointed out his absolute cluelessness to the environment surrounding him.

He reminded the elves the son of a rich noble, only one that had managed to keep his body in its peak working condition. It was in the fluid and effortless way in which he paced in front of the black wood-like board where he was muttering, in the way the muscles of his forearm twitched along with the movement of his fingers, intent on tapping rhythmically against his leg.

His words, however, carried the accent topical of the itinerant caravans that crossed the land, which inflexions that he couldn't have picked up anywhere else.

The elves' eyes fell on the firepit, where white flames seemed to be ready to jump around openly ignoring every rule human-made fires were usually subjected to. More mindblowing that the appearances of the man, which coupled with the surrounding environment set the bar quite high, were the words and the logical speech that he seemed to be keeping.

"A name can be discovered with enough understanding, but it grants no advantage over a name learned when told by someone else." David's voice sounded clearly in the clearing of the orchard he had on the first floor of his Iron Trunk, while his hand cleaned up a blackboard he had set up against a tree where he was going to write down the small vocabulary he had been slowly building leveraging his previous experience with the True Nature of All Things.

Since he had abandoned the assaulted human caravan, David had forced himself to use as much as he could the human-tongue he had picked up thanks to his Allspeak cluster, falling back to English when his vocabulary fell short.

Fleur, who had been moved inside a big and newly dug firepit in order to give her some more breathing room to express herself, rolled back and forth, which was her equivalent of a dismissive shrug coupled with an invitation to go ahead with the explanation.

"Yes, Fleur, I'm going on, don't be pushy." he shot a scathing glare at the firepit that was completely ignored by the flames before returning

to his reasoning: "The fact that there is a hard-set vocabulary for all that exists, apparently, even if I'm suspecting that the Words that describe the Four Fundamental Forces are not expressible with this True Tongue, means that an object *is* its Word and the Word *is* the object it describes, knowing one means knowing the other." as he spoke, his hand quickly wrote 'Brisingr' with chalk: "I don't know if here they have magic characters too to write Truth, but I'd think so, don't you agree?"

Once more, the white flames in the wide fireplace moved in a pattern they had previously agreed upon, and David went on: "The real question is if this tongue has always existed, and so it's one aspect of the Fundamental Force of Magic as well, or if it has been crafted at some point."

"Latter!" croaked the white raven from her perch on a branch of a peach tree: "The Latter!"

The three elves snapped their eyes towards the bird that they had previously dismissed as inconsequential, only then noticing the silvery and unnatural glint of one of his eyes.

The one-eyed man nodded thoughtfully as the second word found its way over the blackboard: "I'd tend to agree, but that opens other two questions. One: who are the ones responsible? Two: is it a complete language? With prepositions and adverbs? Or only one built with nouns?" he finished writing 'Kveykva' which meant lightning.

"*Guliä*" he said out loud as he wrote it down, his experiences with the Felix Felicis being enough for him to figure out the word for 'Luck'. As the white flames in the firepit rose of a couple of meters for a second before returning to their usual behaviour, David shook himself out of his reverie in order to return to his self-imposed task: "I'd guess that the amount of things that someone can actually 'do' with a magic word depends instead on the understanding that one has of said Word."

The three elves where stumped. What they were witnessing went beyond even their most outlandish idea: a one-eyed human in a hidden forest where it was day while outside it wasn't, apparently busy discussing the merits of the Ancient Tongue with a strange imitation of Bladgen, their Queen's companion, and a... semi-sentient lump of white fire named Fleur.

David shook his head as 'Hugr' was added to the growing list, meaning 'mind'. Again, his decades of experience with dealing with the World-Soul back in the Potterverse granted him a way to find Names regarding elements he had interacted with pretty quickly: "When we actually figure out the magic here, the stuff that I'll be able to do with Brisingr will likely be nothing compared to what you will be capable of." he said looking into the firepit, where Fleur churned on herself in a pleased manner.

*I guess it's rare enough for her to outclass me in something that she feels extremely good about it. David sighed to himself. She's even almost stopping giving me the cold shoulder when we try to figure out this place's magic.*

"I'd exclude a bunch of gods from the list of possible creators of the True Tongue." David turned to a piece of paper where he had jotted down some words he hadn't expect to find again, much less in the context he was into: "*Hügin* and *Manin*, Thought and Memory. Which were the odds that Odin's crows kept their names and memories in this world? Or does this push us towards the Norse Pantheon to look for our answers?" he considered while the chalk snapped and rapped against the blackboard. *The real question that I can't make out loud is if the Author of Eragon is also its Creator, or if all the authors of my first life were simply able to catch a glimpse of these places and mistook their intuition for imagination.*

Before he could return to writing down Names and use Fleur as a bouncing board for his speculation, Raven croaked out: "I move all the time,

I'm worth more than a dime,

I have both face and hands,  
and I move before your eyes.  
Yet when I go, my body stands,  
and if I stand still, I lie."

David frowned at that, and not only because it was a bitchy one (he could tell from the way she had ruffled her breast feathers and the extremely annoying glint in her normal eye), but because of her apparent delusion that her riddles were somehow helping with figuring out the Names of the things around them: "For the last Time Raven, your riddles aren't helping me with guessing the Names!".

He tossed the piece of chalk at his familiar while the white flames in the firepit climbed a meter or so in the air before falling back in a staggering pattern, translating Fleur's laughter, and only with his movement his eyes fell upon an elf that was staring him down holding a powerful-looking bow with an arrow ready to fly, thankfully not pointed at him just yet.

"When I planned to meet someone, I imagined that a random hunter would have followed the foxes, and I made sure they understood to trust their noses, but..." the one-eyed man stopped talking and gestured a small circle with his hand, as to say that whatever he had planned no longer mattered: "I sure as hell didn't expect an elf."

The three foxes that had led the three immortals there came tipping inside of the clearing, attracting briefly the eyes of everyone, which became even more wide in surprise when the one-eyed mage actually *barked* something back, which caused the foxes to quiet down and go huddle near the firepit, trying to jump in the air and bite on the white raven' tail feathers, who made sure to fly well out of their range.

"Sorry, the one-eyed man turned back towards the elf: "Three elves."

At that point, the other two elves left the cover of the woods eyeing him with guarded curiosity and concern. David only hoped that his first interaction with the mages of Alagaësia wouldn't be his last.

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**AN**

**I'm still deciding on what's going to happen in the next chapter, and by extension, the rest of the story, one one hand, having Saphira hatch for David would be some author omnipotence thrown inside of the game pretty heavily, since she hatched for Earong in the books, I'm working on the idea that she can get a 'feel' of the one touching the egg.**

**And let's be honest, no matter how much the MC has changed after finding himself mortal again, a Ravenclaw at heart isn't exact the kind of character that works well as a straight-up hero.**

**The mentality of Eragon, when he found the Egg at least, was something along the lines of take-care-of-the-family become-a-farmer-one-day (being humble = not becoming corrupt with power) curiosity-recklessness (a normal kid grown in the ass-end of nowhere in the equivalent of magic-middle-ages would run the fuck away from a shining blue stone appearing out of thin air). But...**

**David instead is more a curiosity let's-try-to-not-be-assholes (not experimenting on innocents, and since I'm walking around, might as well lend a hand) If-I-begin-something-I-end-it need-for-freedom Not-caring-about-commanding-others (power over people and wealth is useless to him)**

**Fleur is more of a person actively seeking spotlight out of her own merits in canon Potterverse (hence why I guess she signed up for the Triwizard), that 'look-at-me' part of her personality was pretty much stomped out by David in The Bigger Picture, leaving her with the ambition of being the best because she**

simply knew that she could, which is the main point of connection between her and the MC. She is prideful and doesn't shy away from a fight, while the MC prefers to work around one if he can, or simply overwhelm the opponent.

Having Saphira hatch for either of them would be a stretch, but only if the blue dragon's personality is already there since the beginning. Which is something that doesn't work well with the Lore of the Inheritance Cycle, since True Names can change, either they start doing so like for normal humans, with the building of experience (that is which forges us) only after the proper hatching, or they would be always the same.

In the Inheritance Cycle, dragons are dynamic characters too, so I'm guessing that Saphira chose Eragon because he had no thoughts whatsoever reserved to power or glory, and that he would be amenable to fight against Galbatorix (Paolini wrote (or said in an interview) that Saphira knew that she was a prisoner in her egg, and that she waited for years before hatching only because she feared everything was a trick of the king). After being teleported, she figured out that she was actually out of the clutches of the king, and actually started considering a Rider. (That she landed in front of Eragon is plot building at its finest) So she needs some kind of buildup of magic to realize she's no longer in the hands of Galbatorix.

If I leave Eragon as a Rider, I would still need a way to make David invested in the fight against Galbatorix, and I'd need him capable of the local kind of magic, because otherwise he would resort to sheer science, and given enough time, he could pretty easily synthesize dynamite (it's actually relatively simple). How would I be able to make this story engaging if I put a rail gun in his hands (magic shields are powered through magic, and given that the noble with the eldunari in his armour was overwhelmed in Inheritance by catapults and whatnot, I can estimate that enough modern-age weaponry would be able to erase even Galbatorix (he survived the equivalent of an atomic bomb on

**Vroengard because he likely had magic protection placed against heat-radiation, which I'm guessing is more effective than the protection against blunt force)).**

**Making him a Techno-Mage would make him able to erase everyone but Galbatorix right off the bat, and it would make for an extremely boring story.**

**It all comes down to some contained nerfing. In societies that share their existence with magic users, sheer science doesn't cut it. If only because in the middle ages, a particularly smart person is lucky if he grows up while learning how to read.**

**One can be the greatest genius ever, but without a solid 'knowledge' as a starting block, there won't be gunpowder anytime soon. Also, given the fact that oil is the result of fossilized stuff, I'm going out a limb and say that there is very little of it in a world where giant flying immortal lizards eat everything that moves.**

**So... I need legitimate reasons to make sure the MC is actually invested in the plot, that he doesn't resort to overwhelming scientific knowledge (nerve gas and chemical warfare), and that he's not overpowered in regards to magic.**

**The parts of Eragon's personality that Saphira found acceptable after realizing that she actually wasn't ensnared in one of Galbatorix' tricks are curiosity lack-of-attraction-for-power-and-glory protectiveness-of-his-family and eventually some sort of goodwill (let's be honest, a 15 y.o. kid living in the middle ages as a farmer-hunter is far less complex than any adult grown up in modern times). All those characteristics and more are found in the MC now that his madness and detachment caused by his soul falling further and further away from reality and into the World-Soul are gone.**

**ps**

**the Names I used in this chapter are actually present in the Inheritance Cycle, but given that Hugin and Manin are taken from the Norse Mythology, coupled with the generally Tolkien-elven-tongue characteristics of the Ancient Language, I'll figure out a way to approximate Paolini' magic words for when the MC starts going all out with magic.**

**pps**

**This chapter originally was to be a copy-paste of the oneshot that inspired this story, but it didn't quite fit with how I've built up this story, so I had to start from scratch.**

**Review and let me know if this chapter works!**

**ppps**

**since it's starting to get complicated, a brief summary of the format:**

"Normal Speaking."

"English Speaking."

*Thoughts*

*"Parseltongue or Caninetongue"*

*"Ancient Language"*

**pppps**

**is the POV working?**

## 5. A Battle Of Wit

### A BATTLE OF WIT

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They looked like two pack of wolves evaluating their opponent: one side, there was a one-eyed human that clearly was far more dangerous than his cheerful attitude suggested, given the fact that he was likely tied to the impossibility that the whole forest they were in was; on the other side, the three elves were naturally cautious and wary of traps, but they couldn't deny the sheer *life* around them. From the lush green grass to the smells of plants at the peak of their lives.

The staredown lasted for four minutes, during which nobody really knew how to approach the other. Surprisingly, it wasn't the human to break the silence first: "Who are you?" asked the elf with the spear, who made no mystery of his distrust towards the one-eyed man, pointing his weapon at him in a ready stance.

"I get that these are dangerous times, but surely going around and threatening peaceful scholars in their homes isn't quite warranted yet, is it? Especially since my foxes are the ones that invited you here." the answer came a bit clipped as the one-eyed man frowned openly at the archer of the trio of elves.

"The fact that you got three foxes to invite us here does, in fact, warrant a measure of caution." the spear-wielder pointed out with what could have been an amused tilt of his voice.

"I'll ask only once more: who are you?" the archer of the group repeated, and the blank expressions of the trio of elves made David think that perhaps he had miscalculated quite heavily.

As David rose his hands in the air with open palms and started to answer, Raven showed that not only she had given the slip to the trio of troublesome foxes her master had previously sicced on her, but

that she had also returned in time to witness the last part of the staredown, and apparently, that she had enough of being ignored, choosing to land lightly on the shaft of the spear, she croaked out loud: "Old Tom Bombadil is a merry fellow,

Bright blue his jacket is, and his boots are yellow.

None has ever caught him yet, for Tom, he is the Master:

His songs are stronger songs, and his feet are faster.

Oh! Tom Bombadil, Tom Bombadillo!

By water, wood and hill, by reed and willow,

Thor 'em down, or eat 'em,

Light 'em up or sing 'em,

But answer them, and fast,

your guests, finally, they're here at last!"

The one-eyed man sharply hissed at the white-feathered bird, startling her away and forcing her to fly to the edge of the fire pit, where the white flames seemed to... coo at her in a display of closeness.

"Raven, you crippled even Tolkien, I'm sure that he's turning in his grave, well done." the man's answer was so dry that it would have desiccated even the great Menoa Tree, and only then the one eyed-man turned towards the three elves: "My name, despite what that blasted bird would wish you to hear, is David, not Tom. And really, weapons are unnecessary."

Following the procedure that the group of else had established when meeting a potentially dangerous unknown, the two males shot their consciousness forward in an attempt to gauge the intent of this stranger, while the female unsheathed her sword and took a step

back, ready to either charge ahead or bolt away, her leather duffle bag held securely in the crook of her arm.

"My head really isn't the place for the reckless," the admonishment came softly from the one-eyed man, but clear and without any undercurrent of fear: "But there is no reason to harm one another here."

The exchange developed itself at the speed of thought: the consciousness of the two male elves immediately zeroed in on the stranger in front of them, but if they expected to need to fight their way through a set of barriers, of thoughts so focused as to hide everything else, they remained disappointed. They entered his mind without a whisper of token resistance, and their sight of the magic, hidden forest in which their bodies were faded from their senses:

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*...and their world was a white napkin fluttering over the expanse of the world, history and events that depicted scenes apparently normal flowed like rivers or landslides downhill or in rushes that rose to cover a sky made of thoughts built with tongues the elves didn't know, while colours lost meaning and the experiences that flew across and beyond them assumed the consistency of sand, each grain a single instant in a disorganized selection of concepts that expressed more and less than what could be understood...*

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...one of the elves focused all of himself on a single grain of sand of the sea of dunes swarming around him and...

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*...And I was leaf and hurricane, while my body slowly but surely stopped breathing, I was steel and luck and fluff and drowsiness, I was and thought and believed and became...*

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The spear-wielding elf wrenched himself away from the feeling of falling in every direction at once while his inner ear howled in agony,

his balance utterly broken from the brief dip inside that *madman's* head, while his archer companion had avoided narrowing his focus too much, and was still...

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*...the sky billowed and was a sea of glass, reflections mismatched one from another as images of dragons without forelegs roared in defiance while a single hand gesture called forth lightning itself from clouds that suddenly were a flower field where a strange brownish being with floppy, pointed ears tended to vegetables and eyed distrustfully a bunch of bees that seemed eager to crunch away from a leaf that suddenly became a strange cobbled road where all the buildings whee tilted diagonally towards a white marble structure with scratches that were clearly letters in a tongue he had never seen before morphed and rearranged themselves in something the elf could read:*

*Enter, stranger, but take heed*

*Of what awaits the sin of greed*

*For those who take, but do not earn*

*Must pay most dearly in their turn*

*So if you seek beneath our floors*

*A treasure that was never yours*

*Thief, you have been warned, beware*

*Of finding more than treasure there.*

*The words jumped from the surface they had been etched on and flew together picturing a vast snake as the surroundings lost cohesiveness and turned in tall mountains inside a cavern that held within a portion of the world, and shadow coalesced in a vast snake with a single plume over his head that...*

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With a shudder that almost caused him to let loose the arrow he had at the ready, the second elf found himself on his knees, forcing himself to keep down his last meal while the white fire rose calmly from the ground, drawing a two meters tall spiral that exuded more heat than it should have been able to, its behaviour clearly threatening, only to be stopped by the strange human the elves had stumbled upon: "Fleur, can we try to get along with those that actually have half an idea of how magic works here?"

Returning once more to the elves, that had quickly managed to right themselves and maintained a facade of indifference that David *knew* was faked, because really, his mobile home was the fucking best, and dipping into the head of someone of his skill with occlumency was plain stupid, "Can I offer you some tea? I grow the plants myself, they're quite decent."

The spear-wielding elf frowned lightly and started speaking in the True Tongue, glancing over at the female of the group and letting her know that while they hadn't been able to glean anything of relevance from the man, there wasn't malicious intent or thirst for violence in what they had been able to witness.

David grimaced a bit while the musical sounding words went completely over his head: "Sorry, I can't speak your magic tongue yet." he waved his right hand towards the blackboard: "As you can see and as you've likely overheard, I'm just starting with figuring it out. So you'll have to make do with whatever humans are speaking these days, I apologize for the inconvenience."

*Ok, the first thing I have to do is confirming that they aren't the 'evil guys' of this universe. David reasoned in the safe confines of his mind. If they're not child-murdering assholes, then they're my best bet to figure out magic here, and helpfully gave Fleur her body back...*

*But what can I offer them in order to make them want to help me?*  
David, aware of his position in the scheme of things in the Eragon-

verse, wouldn't have put it beyond the elven queen to keep help for Fleur hostage in exchange of his dedication to their war. And that was a risk he didn't want to take, since he had always kept a hands-off policy regarding the canon events of a place. Granted, it hadn't served him that well against Voldemort, but in his defence, he speculated that after his first immersions in Soul Magic, he had started to become more and more inhuman.

The white fire returned to stir calmly in the firepit, causing the one-eyed man to nod thankfully to it: "So, I've told you my name?" he started with half-confused expression, "But I arrived here less than a couple of months ago and I'm still finding my feet, if there are rituals of welcome for your people, I fear that I don't know them."

The elves frowned at the never-heard-before expression, before exchanging another glance among themselves. With a curt nod, the archer among them turned his back on the encounter and climbed up from along the staircase, following orders that had been communicated with movements of the fingers so fast that the human couldn't pick up on them.

"You don't look like an itinerant merchant, but have their accent and cadence." The male that had just removed his helm spoke, his voice managing to keep his musical quality even as words that David knew belonged to the Common tongue fell out of his mouth.

That caused the one-eyed man to smile almost sheepishly as he lifted a glass jar with a wooden handle from behind a tree: "I feared that I would end up picking up their accent and cadence, but there's nothing I can do about it now." his Allspeakcluster started working overtime, reading to pick up any new word that the elves would be unknowingly teaching him.

To the delicate and quite perceptive ears of the elves, the difference between how he spoke the first part of his answer and how he had pronounced 'accent and cadence' was stark and obvious, and it brought a deepening on the frown on the male's face: "Are you mocking me?"

That brought the man to a brief stop as his hand *cupped the flames* out of the firepit and slid them in the glass jar: "That would be because I've just learned those words from you." he said as he rose with the semi-sentient fire churning on itself inside of the new container: "I told you that I've arrived less than a couple of months ago, what I've learned about the tongues here I've copied from an itinerant caravan that I've stumbled upon in the grass planes."

As the elves, bewildered, started to cautiously walk behind him, the three foxes from before once more reached the small group, running excited circles around them before a sharp barking from the one-eyed man sent them scampering upstairs. At the inquisitive looks that he felt against his back, David simply tossed over his back: "I've had them keep a lookout during the nights in exchange for food and shelter, but they're less than three years old, so they'll be overexcited for a while still."

The implications of his previous statement, especially when taken into consideration along with his latest answer, only rose more questions, and he took a guilty pleasure out of it. "I hadn't known that humans had developed such methods to tame... foxes." the female of the duo finally spoke, and her voice, to the careful ears of David, sounded like one that expected to be heeded.

*Too bad.* He snorted: "And I haven't heard your names yet. What a coincidence."

As he started to walk downstairs, he shot a glance over his shoulder, making it clear that he expected some sort of exchange to go on, if only to sate their respective curiosity. *Please take the bait, please take the bait.*

By then, they had reached the second-floor room, and while the make had already his moment of confusion when he first saw it, the breath of the female elf got stuck in her throat at yet another collection of impossibilities. She remained still on the staircase for a couple of seconds, giving David enough time to tie the jar of whit fire

to a cable in the centre of the room, from where it shone upon everything clearly.

"My name," she started when it appeared clear that the man was more than comfortable with keeping silent, "is Arya."

Almost laconically, the second followed suit: "And I'm Fäolin."

"Feel free to take a seat or roam around, there is nothing dangerous in this room." once again, the implication that there could be something dangerous in the other rooms sounded loudly in the silence.

Arya took a seat on an armchair, while Fäolin wasted no time in setting himself at the ready on the other side of the room, his stance deceptively relaxed even if he was ready to strike at a moment notice. The female elf frowned at how the man had spoken, she wasn't a stranger to the game of what was said and what was implied, and while she could appreciate wit like everyone else, she disliked it when it was used against her.

"So, how did humans start taming foxes without the Ancient Tongue?" she repeated her previous question, not bothering with cloaking it in a distracted observation to fish out answers.

David returned only then towards the centre of the room, depositing a tray holding tea, honey cups and what appeared to be biscuits in the stylized form of wither a fox or a raven on the wooden table, only then conceding himself a vulpine grin of delight: "I couldn't speak for the other humans, but, my method is... quite unique." with a movement too fast even for the eye of the elves to follow, he dropped back on an empty armchair, and by the time his ass had touched it, there was no longer a man seated in front of Arya, but a one-eyed fox with the same silvery patch on its missing eye.

Fäolin immediately pointed his spear back at the clearly smug fox, who barked out a squeaky laugh at both of the freaked out elves before returning to his previous shape and picking up a cup of tea

from the tray, generously dunking in it three spoons of honey before stirring. Everything happened while a self-satisfied grin that managed to point out how much his face could resemble the one of his alternative, furry form was fixed on his face.

"So, my turn for questions now?" he asked innocently as he sipped his far too sweet tea and pretended to not notice the magic that was being used to check for poisons in the drink he had offered.

"It was," the green-eyed elf managed to regain her composure exploiting the fact that unknown mage had asked an open question: "Why is that a mage as clearly accomplished as you are, does not know the Ancient Tongue?" she asked.

David sighed exasperatedly as an answer, rolling his own eye in what he hoped managed to convey his annoyance, even if privately he recognized that he had willingly acted to confuse them more than they had already been: "Back home, magic worked differently. There was no... how did you call it? Ancient Tongue... yes, I can see how it's more accurate than True Tongue as a name to refer to it. Anyway," he caught himself from rambling away his theories, "back home, everything was either alive or a projection of something... *more*. I feel that an explanation regarding how I do things would take years, and you still wouldn't believe me."

The elven beauty took a sip from his tea, finding it unlike any other that she had ever tasted, and she took the numerous clues that the one-eyed man had left around for her to see, putting them together in a sentence that would have been unbelievable if not for the historical origins of the elves themselves: "You're not from Alagaësia." she accused him.

He shrugged as an answer: "My turn. Is the Ancient Tongue a complete language?"

Arya rose an eyebrow, remembering clearly the logic and hammer-like approach of the reasoning she and hers had eavesdropped back in the... *hidden forest where is day when outside is night...* and she

forced herself to ignore the implications of what his kind of magic was capable of in order to nod, carefully looking for another question to make that would solve more questions than the ones it rose, for once. He had implied heavily enough that he wasn't from Alagaësia, and frankly, given the number of inconsistencies that she could observe between his uncommon politeness that ignored any form of bowing, the otherworldly magic that characterized... well, everything that seemed to surround the one-eyed man, she found herself already believing that he indeed came from beyond the sea.

While indeed it was an absurd idea, she couldn't help but think that if someone looked for a lie to cover their origins, they would have chosen something more credible.

Selecting the first question from her mental list, she spoke: "How did you learn the local human tongue in less than a couple of months?" she hoped that her question would shed some light over his kind of magic, or at least make him stumble as he tried to figure out a way to keep his knowledge of the Ancient Tongue hidden.

The man twisted his wrist, pointing randomly at their surroundings: "A complete answer would mean teaching you several branches of magic that I'm pretty sure can't be replicated here, but my method could be framed along the lines of 'Because periods that convey an intent have reflections in the micro alterations of someone's face and body-language, which is instinctive and natural for most humanoid races'."

The implications of his answer were, once again, difficult to properly understand, and she took the time he spent looking for his own question to elaborate her own understanding of exactly *who* this uncommon human was and what he could represent.

"And yes," he added as a sign of goodwill: "That means that I have to figure out the Names on my own, or learn the Ancient Tongue through study. Words so deeply tied to this existence are not something I can learn simply listening to them. If you were to name something in the ancient tongue while I'm thinking about it, I could

guess it more likely than not. But only for Names of Things I have more than a passing familiarity with."

"Why did you come to Alagaësia?" she asked, dreading the possible answers. Arya couldn't avoid thinking that if an explorer, if he truly was one, wanted to learn about another continent, the faster and more effective way would be by staying in its cities, not by hiding oneself in a secret location, no matter how comfortable. Besides, if the man in front of her was an emissary of sorts, he would have to make contact with a representative, again, something that he couldn't do secluded and alone. If he gallivanted across the world for the kick of it however, it would explain his generally relaxed despite having been held at spearpoint, as well as his curiosity.

"By mistake." was the laconic answer, and it came so quick and in such an earnest grimace from the one-eyed wizard, that once more the main thought of the else was that if he had wanted to lie, he could have found a better story to feed them. In that moment, the curious white-feathered bird that had proved itself remarkably similar to Bladgen flew in the room, settling calmly on a perch over the mantle of a small fireplace realized in a glossy, black stone. The flapping of wings and her mocking laugh did nothing to reduce the confusion and disbelief that David's answer had risen.

'By mistake' the words were repeated in the thoughts of the two elves, flooring them once more. And Arya was slowly coming to the realization that the man in front of her behaved more like a werecat than a human. He was clearly curious and interested, so he showed just enough to elicit interest in turn, setting up the whole conversation as an exchange of information. However, while he had time to prepare himself for the opportunity of asking what he hadn't been able to determine on his own during his months alone in his home, he left his interlocutor, in this case Arya, wondering about everything, and his answers, which came without a context, were far less useful than she liked.

Abandoning the pretence of playing around his scheme, and hoping to throw him on his backfoot, she needled him: "If you're curious

about Alagaësia, why not roam the land? Wouldn't you find your answers faster that way?" she was clearly not getting out anything from the why or how he landed in Alagaësia, so she might as well make her questions count.

Once more, the one-eyed man seemed to force himself to hold back a vulpine grin: "I could have, yeah, I started with following around a human caravan, I started picking up the local tongue from them. and then..."

He seemed to sober up a bit, his expression losing his cheerfulness for a few instants: "To know what's going on on a large scale, one is better served by observing the lowest social class. And the itinerant merchants suited me just fine, I guessed the level of technology available to the common men from how they lived, and I read between the lines enough to understand that I would be better served by staying away from this Glabatorix that apparently has been ruling for several human generations."

The topic had become immediately something that one wouldn't bring up for a polite conversation, but perhaps his reaction and how he was talking about it were revealing more about this fox-human-mage than anything else had up to that point.

"I had to deal with another megalomaniac back home, it has been... troublesome." David eyed the white fire suspended above their ears, which was uncaringly roaming inside of its glass jar.

With a sigh, the human rose from his seated position and unlatched the jar from the ceiling, walking towards a fireplace made out of a glossy, black stone that could have been obsidian, where he poured the white flames, which looked a bit more lively: "I haven't introduced you, I'm sorry."

"This," David said indicating the uncountable amount of flames dancing merrily over a chunk of oak wood in the fireplace, "is Fleur, my ... I guess you could say wife?"

The fire blazed out of the confines of the fireplace then, as if in defiance of his statement: "I would have asked you eventually!" the one-eyed wizard was quick to take a step back and keep his appendages away from the enraged fire, making both Arya and Fäolin' jaws drop slightly. The man turned towards the two elves with a sheepish expression on his face: "Let's just say it's complicated."

He dropped the glass jar and walked towards the opposite end of the room, where his kitchen was located: "The magic that I was capable of there wasn't enough to either let Fleur regain her consciousness or regain her body. I was hoping that we would be able to with the magic of this land."

"Fleur..." Arya repeated the name, founding it just as outlandish and uncommon as the one of the one-eyed man, before turning her head towards the man that was busy moving around in what she could guess was the section of the house reserved to cooking: "She was like you, then, before?"

Again, Ary found herself surprised at the sheer amount of questions that this man raised with his mere presence. And it wasn't that he wasn't forthcoming with his answers, but even as he did his best to explain his circumstances and the parts of his past that he felt comfortable sharing, there was just so much *new* in everything that she was hearing, that she couldn't help but smile a bit at the wonders of the world that Galbatorix hadn't managed to taint.

David opened the refrigerator and started taking out stuff, missing the faint smile of wonder on the she-elf's lips as he answered: "It's my turn to make a question. How long would I have to wait before being able to walk around without risk of being kidnapped by Galbatorix? He doesn't sound like a merry and jolly fellow, and I'd like to avoid him if I can." the elves both had to withhold a sigh, this encounter was starting to lose its veneer of strangeness and growing up to be mentally challenging even if they had several decades of experience with dealing with that kind of back and forth.

Arya narrowed her eyes at David's ignoring her question in order to make one of his own. The man started to look obsessed with keeping up the order in which they were exchanging information: "A complete answer would mean teaching you several centuries of hour history that I'm pretty sure can't be retold quickly," she said mimicking his previous answer when she inquired about his way of doing magic, " but a general answer would be..." and there she lost whatever enjoyment she had found in the occasion of throwing his words back in his face, "...we don't know."

David hummed thoughtfully as he picked out a couple of onions and started cutting them into little cubes, lighting up a cooker and placing a pan over it, pouring some olive oil in it before getting started with the tomatoes. Slowly, almost careful to not expose their exact role in the conflict, the two elves started to give him a rundown of the history of their land, for the most part confirming to the one-eyed man that he was in the series of fantasy novels that he remembered.

David poured the boiling water into a large pot, switching it with the boiler over the still lit cooker, before throwing in it a handful of salt and pouring in a good kilogram of pasta (all the gods bless the runes that kept stasis charms active over the pantry). While he was busy cooking, he spoke: "There have been a lot of Urgals and imperial soldiers roaming just outside of my territory in the last weeks, in exchange for a few days of reprieve in my home, would you be amenable to tell me the important parts of this land's history?"

And before Arya could stop dead his offer, David tossed the diced tomatoes in the full pan along with the onions, using their sizzling as an excuse to ignore her: "It would throw off your pursuer, if you have one, and avoid you the trouble of the series of ambushes that they're setting up." he tried to sweeten the deal.

At that, Arya made a grimace that didn't manage to mar her fair features: "We can stop for the night, but more time would give those ambush a better occasion to prepare."

"Not if I was the one to move you." the mage retorted as he poured the now cooked pasta into a colander he had placed over the sink, shaking it a little bit before tossing it all in the pan with the onions and tomatoes. the one-eyed man lowered the flame under it to the bare minimum and mixed the pasta with the vegetables.

While he finished organizing the bowls in which he was offering a late snack to the elves he clarified: "The orchard and this room are where I am, those looking for you wouldn't risk wasting their covers on a fox running in the underbrush. But even then, my senses are refined enough during that I can take a large way around if you give me a direction, being an animal comes with a splendid sense of direction."

Once more forcing himself to ignore the implications of the *impossible* magic the one-eyed man was talking about, Fäolin made his scepticism known walking forward with a frown on his fair features: "So you'd help us?" Just like that?"

David left the kitchen then, holding a trio of cups in his left hand filled with silverware and a bowl of pasta in his right. At the questioning looks he got he shrugged, putting the food on the table: "You people looked angry, and from the merchants, I know that dwarves and elves actually work against the king."

"You're not answering my question." the male elf said, not making a move towards the mouth-watering looking food.

"I'm getting the idea that Galbatorix would enjoy more poking around Fleur and torture me for information than help us," the answer came with a light tinge of irony: "and I'm hoping that helping you out now will bring me enough goodwill that you'll help me learn this land's magic, so that I can help Fleur by myself."

Arya eyed his back thoughtfully as he retreated towards the kitchen: "Elves don't eat meat." she warned as an afterthought, her mind busy considering the options that having this mage's help would open for her task.

"There is only flour, water, salt, vegetables and spices." the one-eyed man tossed back: "Since the first time I've turned into a fox, I found out that I tend to prefer white meats, and those I prefer to eat off from the animals I hunt."

Arya maintained her calm expression, but David could hear disapproval rolling off both elves from the minute way their shoulders had stiffened: "I'm guessing that it's against your religion eating meat?"

"Our culture," the she-elf corrected, "would be a more appropriate term."

"What is your people relationship with humans? Or dwarfs, or Urgals, for what it's worth." the curious man asked as he settled down and started filling up bowls. There was more than enough food for himself and the three elves, even if the third was keeping vigil outside.

"Why do you ask?" Arya asked as she started to eat, letting herself express her surprise with raised eyebrows because of the tastiness of the food ( only after having checked again for poisons).

"Because of your surprise and general disbelief caused by having me, a human, as the reason behind magic that you can't even begin to explain." David explained calmly as he handed over a full bowl to Fäolin, who accepted it with a nod.

Seeing as the elves were still trying to figure out what he was meaning, and wanting to avoid a diplomatic incident so soon in his unwilling adventure in Alagaësia, he decided to toss them a piece of information in order to appease them and make them think about something else: "Regarding my diet... you have to understand that I am a fox just as much I am a man. The two things are not in conflict, because as I change shape I retain my mind, even if the instinct is never completely gone. That is true even as I stay in a human shape, I will always prefer burrows in the ground to fortified towers."

The conversation lulled for a few seconds as Arya mulled over David's words, with everyone eating their food and trying to figure out what was actually going on. Frankly, David had been caught a bit on the backfoot from the meeting with one of the main characters so soon from his appearance in Alagaësia, and he had bulshitted as much as he could in order to establish himself as a potential ally into the elves' eyes, knowing beforehand that the actual mechanics of magic weren't going to fall in his lap without outside help.

David, considering the not indifferent risk of turning into a Shade by mistake if he tried to play with spirits, and knowing to stay the fuck away from Galbatorix, had been left with either smoke out Brom, the paranoid one-hundred years old capable of killing him with a word, or place himself in one of the forests where it made sense for the elves to eventually pass through.

That said, with the appearance of a trio of elves led by a green-eyed, black-haired female had made sure that not only knew that he had arrived before canon, but he now strongly suspected that there was some higher game afoot. Seriously, which were the odds that of all the places he could land, he would find himself away from the big players, but just in line to be picked up by the Carriers of the Egg? He had chosen a direction at random at first!

Chance was that there was some form of higher-order or 'fate' afoot. *Maybe important events behave like in the potterverse?* he kept wondering throughout the whole exchange he had carried on with the elves.

The conversation started again, and went ahead well into the night (even if it was daytime at the upper level of the trunk), far enough that Fäolin left the trunk when his companion came to exchange himself with him. He was of the silent tipe, answering to the name Gwenlin, and the archer had quickly determined, even if only thanks to a suggestion from Arya, that they were safe enough in David's care that she didn't need to be watched constantly.

The male elf had since then quickly fallen asleep on one of the chairs present in the room, refusing the offer of an actual bed since it would have forced him to leave the room.

The shift from the verbal duel between Arya and David had been subtle but constant, and as they talked, the natural standoffish attitude of the elf had slowly bled out, as well as the insistence with which the one-eyed man had clung to extracting information.

With Gwenlin armed with a powerful bow resting not far, and Fleur's quiescent state casting the room in warm and soothing light, David had deemed appropriate bringing out a small selection of spirits from one of the cabinets where Fleur had forced to keep them back when they had first started travelling across the world. After a few quiet sniffs of the possibilities, and a small litany of spells to check against poisons, Arya had opted for a glass of myrtle liqueur, while David had opted for some limoncello, which reminded him of his travels across Italy in the first world he had found himself stranded in.

"So... how's the war going isn't exactly a nice subject, eh?" the one-eyed man wondered as he sat down with his glass half full, his eye never leaving the enigmatic figure of his interlocutor. When she simply raised an eyebrow at him, as to challenge his mind to say something even dumber, he simply shrugged.

"You told me some of this land's history, but I'm actually concerned regarding my future. What is being done to remove this Galbatorix from power?" he asked quietly, not really waiting for an answer, "You elves seem to be faster and stronger than your ordinary human, I'll grant you that, but a group dedicated to warfare behind enemy lines isn't as light as yours. Unless I'm greatly mistaken about what the powers in this land are, but given your own recounting, I'm doubting it."

"Do you also know war perhaps?" Arya's reply came just as quietly as his reasoning had left his lips, but it carried a genuine curiosity. Once more, the man that couldn't have seen more than thirty winters

talked with a depth of understanding that was uncommon at best and unsettling at worst.

David grimaced a bit in front of her surprise: "I now how mortal races tend to behave, and war is... a dramatically common event."

The green-eyed elf tilted her head almost as she was a hawk: "You talk like you are not mortal." she observed sharply.

The one-eyed mage tapped his nose twice with his index finger: "Ah! I'll have you know that I've managed to keep off the assault of time for a couple of centuries, or maybe some more, I'm not really sure, back home, and in particular, near some places that I enchanted, time tended to be... wobbly."

That was the umpteenth statement that would have given Arya a serious headache had she tried to figure out how it worked. If it was even true. She couldn't quite shake off from her mind that the wizard wasn't being as forthcoming as he appeared, or that he was being deliberately misleading. If what he was saying was true, not only he had almost twice her years, but he was capable of magic that bore a stark resemblance, in its effects if in nothing else, to the elixirs of Angela, of which little was known beyond what she let others glimpse.

Before Arya could bring forth the similarity and question the one-eyed man about a possible relation with the Venerable, David opened his mouth once more: "So you're not applying guerrilla warfare. Why?"

She left most of her concentration to work on figuring out this strange man, while her mouth struggled to repeat the unfamiliar sounds: "Guh-ri-luh?"

He blinked for an instant, before launching himself in a concise explanation: "Guerrilla warfare is a form of irregular warfare in which small groups of combatants, such as paramilitary personnel, armed civilians, or irregulars, use ambushes, sabotage, raids, petty warfare,

hit-and-run tactics, and mobility, to fight a larger and less-mobile traditional military. It's extremely effective if applied by the population against the oppressors, because in a city, every door can hide a cell of freedom-fighters."

She nodded at the explanation, finding that it matched the behaviour that common sense would lead to apply to a desperate group... and Arya had to hid a grimace when she linked why he wondered about that kind of warfare in relationship with the situation in Alagaësia: "Most of the enemy's army is made up of conscripts, and what the army would come to lack in terms of resources would be taken from the mouth of civilians."

That brought forward another question: "Magic users are pretty rare, are they not? Why not organizing striking teams to erase them? Letting a mage bude his time is a bad idea, it was true even back home. And you can't deny that the less experienced the enemy's magic users are, the more opportunities open up for your side."

A faint smile tugged at Arya' lips then: "You don't have a great opinion of warriors, do you?"

"Swinging around a piece of steel instead of foreseeing and planning around one's enemy sounds like a stupid tactic in my book." David shrugged before taking another sip from his glass.

As an offer to change topic, the she-elf offered a free piece of information: "Many magic protections can be cast beforehand, and can be broken by bleeding off their energy through physical violence."

"That still doesn't explain why there aren't swarms of mage-assassins trained by your people, who I understand are the most versed in magic, roaming the land." the rebuke came naturally from David, even as if he wondered how to bring up the topic that most interested him.

At her silence, the one-eyed man kept up his questioning of what on his book was simple poor plot development: "It seems to me that this is a cold war between the triad composed by Varden, Elves and Dwarfs under the cover of Surda"

"How do you know about Surda?" she asked with a steely glint in her voice and a knife already out of its sheathe

David dropped his mostly empty glass on the table and rose his hands in a peaceful gesture, speaking quickly to not get killed: "I supposed that a megalomaniac, unbeatable, immortal mage would have erased every clear opponent that he could clearly see, leaving alone dwarves and elves because they're just too much trouble to lure out from their homes. Besides, no state appreciate being the small neighbour of the Great Big Bad, Surda's best bet is that somehow he can ride the wave of revolution that the Triad will actually bring forward at some point."

And when her eyes didn't leave his, he amended: "And I threw the idea out to see how you would react, I'm sorry."

Displeased, Arya let the knife unsheathed but ready to be used, the mood having quickly soured as she once more had failed to not think about the grave reality of her circumstances. "You're not incorrect in deeming the current state of the conflict as 'cold'. Mostly, Galbatorix stays in the capital, occasionally moving out to cower an upstart Lordling that would destabilize a region or another. And as for... the 'Triad', as you called it, we... we're biding our time."

David tilted his head curiously: "When the opponent doesn't weaken with age, 'biding your time' doesn't quite sound like a winning strategy."

The green eyes that did nothing to hid the sharp intellect of their owner once more found his only full orbit, studying him, trying to piece together everything that she had picked up on, ignoring nothing, trying to figure out exactly what she could or could not tell to him: "The Oath-Breaker is... powerful."

That was a terribly oblique way to state out what was the true reason behind the state of the war, in David's opinion, but he understood her reticence, really, it wasn't even fair that he had so much information regarding future events that it made any kind of verbal sparring quite hopeless for the green-eyed elf.

"I'm familiar with the cause behind the dragging on of war being a single unmatched wizard. It was the situation back home." the one-eyed man offered with a tone that he hoped offered understanding.

And with the story that followed, Arya got to learn about the plight of David's home country. That the separation between those capable of magic and those unable to grasp it was so stark as to require a Statute of Secrecy had confused her in some measure, the very idea that those capable of magic would *accept* to hide, or that they would be seen as alien by the rest of the populace, that would go as far as *burn* them alive, unsure if it was enough to deal with them...

Arya shook her head, slowly accepting that perhaps David hadn't been lying. The backstory he built had more details than those needed to be believable, no, not only that, but many of those details were so outlandish that one would naturally assume the one-eyed wizard to be simply mad. But then again... either his delirium was so vast and encompassing that it covered everything the wizard was capable of thinking, or, more simply, he was merely been truthful.

Sensing her disbelief, or perhaps simply because he wanted to steer the conversation away from the grim topic of war, at some point David has scampered behind one of his aisles of books, his steps against the ground making it sound like he had walked further than he would have been able to if Arya were to use her eyes to determine the dimensions of the room she was in, returning with a couple of tomes that had seen better days.

Despite being unable to read the characters within, which was only another clue to the truthfulness of David, or, if she were to listen to her more paranoid instincts, another proof that everything was an extremely complex and unreasonable set-up, Arya' eyes quickly

became fascinated with the moving drawings of beasts that she couldn't have imagined had she tried with all of herself.

She had been about to ask in regard of the mechanic that allowed the ink on the pages to move so naturally, before controlling herself and imagining that whatever explanation of that magic would require those 'several years of lessons' that David had mentioned before. They remained in companionable silence while Arya perused the tomes he had brought out from the shelves and the wizard thought about his next move.

He had confirmed that he was in the Eragon-verse, and had a clear picture of the situation, something that he couldn't claim his memories had retained. He was pretty sure now that his better bet to learn magic, in a manner that didn't require him to waste centuries he no longer had at his disposal into looking for Names, was to find a willing and reasonably competent teacher among the elves, which seemed by far the most competent at the art.

Hopefully, one of them would be able to 'unlock' his Life Force, or whatever they did to channel magic. And the ability to cast his mind around, like he remembered Eragon was capable of doing to take stock of his surroundings (he remembered the meditative session Oromis had his student perform), sounded just dead useful since his sensitivity towards the surrounding 'intents' had faded along with his connection with the world.

"This tome isn't a clever joke on your part is it?" Arya wondered after a while, not realizing that the words had left her mouth.

David quickly realized what she meant by eyeing the cover of the tome: Of Dragonlore. "No." he quickly answered, "I'm guessing that your dragon breeds are dissimilar from the ones drawn on those pages?" he asked knowing that she was unable to read the characters that explained the best ways to kill one of those giant lizards.

*I'm in no rush to explain that back there dragons were tons of firebreathing lizards with the brain the size of a raspberry.* The one-eyed wizard realized that there had been enough cultural shock for one night.

Baffled once more at the vast differences between this strange, curious man and all of the people in Alagaësia, Arya just commented: "Breeds... no, in Alagaësia there are no 'breeds'... dragons simply are, and as they've always been, a part of the land."

The one-eyed man nodded thoughtfully: "You did mention that there was a war between your people and dragons, I remember. I'm surprised that they were used only by the riders, I would have guessed that in a world without Statute, they would have been a much more marketable community."

Arya's upper lip lifted itself almost without her permission, and she caught herself an instant before actually growling: "Dragons are not cattle! They're sapient, noble beings! Alagaësia and all of her people are poorer without them!" her throne was a tad deeper than what David had gotten used to, but she kept her volume under control, taking care of not waking up

That caused a sigh to escape from David's lips, accompanied by another gesture of surrender: "I believe you," he stated, mentally crying about the umpteenth cultural chasm between them that he had to face, "Our kinds of dragons were lacking in the brain department, and so they got relegated as extremely valuable cattle... I'm guessing that when you say sapient you mean *actually* capable of thought?" he asked referring to her words regarding the dragons of Alagaësia.

At her seething and almost outraged expression, he chose to press on in order to divert her disappointment: "I apologize for whatever insult I caused to you. If you look in your other tome, you'll find many sapient creatures of my home, obviously we didn't harm them." *If you don't consider the devastation of their habitats for the masses' benefit.* He amended his words in his mind.

"How did *all* of the dragons here disappear if they were... oh," he stopped himself, remembering the opening of the horrid movie that had crippled the Inheritance Cycle: "Galbatorix is a Rider drunk on power, it makes sense with everything else you've been telling me."

Then, tilting his head towards the elf that he had appeased with his apology, he tried what he had been building up this conversation for: "You're waiting for another dragon, or Rider, to equal Galbatorix, that's what the Triad is amassing resources for."

Arya kept her expression perfectly blank, not giving away anything, she had learned to not harshly question his knowledge or deductions after he used her reaction to confirm Surda's involvement with the war, and she returned to study the curious images of beasts that she couldn't have ever dreamt about, not rising to the bait.

"If I could lead you to this next rider... would your people be willing to help me?" the offer came carefully, hesitantly, and David knew that, differently from the information about his home country. What he was offering, no, what he was barely hinting at, had implications that couldn't be ignored, and rose questions that couldn't be avoided. *Finding them the next Rider would bring me a lot of goodwill, perhaps enough gratitude to be granted all the help I need for Fleur, and if I can pull this off, they'll likely take my foreknowledge as something strange that I can or cannot have obtained from one of my 'readings'.*

Arya methodically rose to her feet, her hand hovering over the hilt of the sword she had at her side, while her green-eyes seemed to be able to cut cleanly across the dimly lit room: "What do you know?"

The question came out flatly, with a promise and threat of violence behind it that couldn't have been more clear had she shouted it. Gone was the relief of being able to rest away from the teeth of a sudden ambush, gone was the indulgence towards a possible ambassador to a continent that could have helped against Galbatorix. In Arya's voice and mind, remained only the sudden

hope that this stranger was offering, and the potential rage if he was lying to her.

"Raven hasn't made a riddle foretelling the future in years, but she's not the only one capable of scrying events yet to develop." he reassured the elven lady that was very much capable of killing him before he could blink.

The bird in question, which had remained asleep with her head hidden behind a wing, puffed out her chest as she croaked a laugh: "By my beak and bone,

I can more than see

The elder alone,

who can't dream to flee,

his blood hidden, and a brother,

change awakened, and to dream another,

to fly on the fly,

truth is your ally!"

She concluded the confusing and headache-inducing riddle with another of her squawking laughs as she flew upstairs, stealing a tired sigh from her master: "This will bring nothing but headaches."

"Does it mean something of particular relevance?" the she-elf asked, knowing well that half the time, Blandgen enjoyed sprouting nonsense only to make those that tried to figure out his meanings grow irrationally skittish about nothing.

David shrugged, honestly surprised that Raven had chosen that moment to try her hand in foreseeing. Sadly, lacking the precise knowledge of the canon events that he had enjoyed in the

potterverse, he could only make speculations: "Her prophecies tend to make sense after the events unfold by themselves."

"Returning to your question, I suspect that you're looking for this Rider, and from the history you told me, you'll find one only if a dragon egg hatches for him." his lone eye fell meaningfully on the leather bag that Arya never let out of her sight.

"With it, I can likely point you where you need to go." he maintained his expression blank, forcing his breath to remain calm and constant: he knew that Eragon and Carvahall were the only things that he needed to say in order to point the elves in the right direction.

Arya slowly unsheathed her sword, eyeing him with a flat expression while her free hand went into her leather bag, extracting with care a beautiful, blue stone that immediately captivated all of David's attention.

Licking his lips and gulping slowly, the one-eyed wizard could feel a cold sheen of sweat forming in over the back of his neck as he studied the egg: nature had never polished a stone as smooth as that one. Its flawless surface was dark blue, except for thin veins of white that spiderwebbed across it. As Arya carefully let his fingers run over it, David found that it was cool and frictionless under his fingers, like hardened silk. Oval and about a foot long, it was... mesmerizing.

As David looked over the stone, and like he had tried countless times before attempted to cast his mind out of his own body in order to perceive something beyond him, only to be met by yet another failure, another consciousness was growing closer and closer to realize that what she had been perceiving wasn't a lie.

The magic that she could feel permeating the ambient around her egg was distant from what she had grown accustomed to, unconsciously, a part of her being recognized as beautiful the careful balance of elements that danced just beyond her perception.

Even as unconscious and unaware as any unhatched dragon egg was, something inside of her stirred just so slightly in answer to the new hand touching the surface of her egg. Following an instinct that hadn't lied to her in the past century, obeying to that pulsion that she knew was a fundamental part of her, she was... confused, for the being she perceived just beyond her shelter was unlike any before.

The being brimmed with life, but not like the others that the unconscious part of her had long since grown accustomed to, no, it was... new.

There was much that resonated with what she did not know her subconscious and instinct had been looking for: curiosity, that echoed her own as her unconscious tried to map out this strange being, a form of purity too, of dedication towards satisfying that thirst that curiosity made the being ache for, an echo sounded between this new and curious being and other things in the surrounding ambient, and if hishe had been awake, she would have marvelled at seeing how his hand had shaped what she had never felt before.

The unconscious dragon in her egg, in her dreams of vast nothingness that came before the wake, had first stirred when her carrier had entered a place so thick with magic that it would have made her scales itch, had she known what scales or itches were, then, she had perceived her carrier calm down around this presence just outside her perception, signalling that it was either part of the trap, or that the trap wasn't one at all... there was no way to feign that kind of magic, her gut feeling confirmed it to her unconscious mind, and yet...

As David's hands trailed over the egg, actually hoping that some of its inherent magic would be enough to at least unlock the mental capabilities that everyone needed to be able to matter in the universe he was in, his eye never closed, and almost without his consent: "... beautiful..." escaped as a whisper from his mouth.

And as his word washed over the egg, the sound reverberating just loud enough for the dragon inside to hear, the soon to hatch magic

creature knew, that something new was exactly what she needed, her instinct, that never before had failed her, shook awake her mind, and a single, stark crack echoed across the room inside of David's trunk as the egg that had refused to hatch for decades suddenly choose that it was time.

From inside the egg, a squeak declared that everything had just changed.

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## **AN Part 0**

**How did it go with the mental curb stomp in David's head? For now, he is unable to do magic and to cast his mind around like the others do, but that doesn't mean that he stopped from practising Occlumency a single day in the two centuries and more that he spent in the potterverse.**

**In The Bigger Picture, I set up Occlumency to be a sort of zen awareness of one's own thoughts, coupled with parallel thinking: half of his focus keeps the consciousness a step back from the actual thoughts of the person, and in that step, there is a constant flow of basically endless inspiration, snippets, dreams, and half-remembered shit that acts as a frame for the actual thoughts behind it.**

**It's not subconscious, because that by definition cannot be expressed through images, not really, but it's a close second.**

**I have written the flow of what the elves see as extremely disorientating, that was kind of the result I was going for.**

**The question is, did it work?**

## **AN Part 1**

**I felt like I did some progress in my last chapter regarding the presentation of scenes in third person, and thank you all for the**

reviews that commented on that aspect.

Now, throughout all of my stories, usually, interactions are always between 2 characters. Or at least between two 'sides'. In 'The Path of Knowledge', even when my MC Ron talks to both Harry and Hermione, it's him talking vs them reacting. In Revolution, it's Shikamaru vs all the others of the council.

The banter and inane chit-chat works better for me, because I can make people cut each other off without blocking the flow of a single character and having to make him pick it up later on.

In this chapter, I originally planned of having a "round-table" meeting with the elves and David and exercise out a speech rolling around. I didn't want it to become fixed with MC vs Others. That said, I quickly realized that it didn't make sense. The elves would obviously stick together, while Raven plays comic relief and Fleur distract the eyes.

So once more a discussion one vs one. This time I'm trying to have both of the two 'act', instead of having Arya react to the MC. Obviously, given the kind of intelligence and foreknowledge David is armed with, in the end he manages to get out more from the conversation than Arya. But only because information regarding Alagaësia is immediately useful to him, since he needed to confirm how much of what he knew was true, while, however interesting, what Arya learns is ultimately meaningless.

All elves are fascinated by the world around them, is in their culture, even if Arya is married to her duty, she has been raised as a fucking princess, so she knows that knowledge is power, and if David comes from another continent, she plans to have him as an ambassador to ammass more resources for killing Glabatorix.

Still, I find this chapter a bit... still, for better or worse. I can't help but see the events while I write them, and everything

**happens without disconcerting events breaking up the flow of the events here. To spice it up, I could have had Durza trace the horses, but I think that he managed to land an ambush in canon only because of the Twins' treachery. And really, if the elves hadn't been able to cover their tracks, they would have gotten caught in the several years spent gallivanting around.**

**The only thing I could have done to make this chapter a bit more 'exciting' would have been breaking it in the middle and describing David as a fox sneaking around Urgals with the other three foxes acting as a distraction, maybe having one of them killed and eaten to add a touch of drama. And I'm short on time as it is, so adding pieces that are meaningless to the story doesn't really work for me: sadly, my stories tend to be essential, in the sense that if I can get away without talking about it, I'm gonna try.**

**It's not the best exercise to ignore the section of the story dedicated to 'build up' but I'll use those only when I feel that the story needs an injection of adrenaline, or to introduce elements that will justify a plot twist later on.**

**As to in which part of the empire this is happening: the MC has no idea, but I imagine that since the only places where the King has no power are the forest up north, and the Beors, I'm shooting in the dark and imagining that the elves run a circle around the map, occasionally using their super minds to use a fort or a village to get what they need, and make the kids there try out the egg.**

**It would tie nicely with Saphira's lack of hatching: if she somehow perceives that the child is being forced to touch the egg, she would believe it a lot of the King.**

## **AN Part 2**

**As to how the Potterverse Runic magic manages to work still in alagaesia, let's keep in mind that in Eragon people can store**

**their 'life force' into gemstones, which Paolini plays off not the RI as I had originally imagined, but with the Mohs scale of hardness, so in order the stones that one should choose are**

**Diamond 10**

**Corundum (Ruby-Sapphire) 9**

**Topaz 8**

**Emerald from 7.5 to 8**

**Quartz 7**

**Orthoclase 6**

**Anyway, Life Energy gets stored better in materials with a high value on the Mohs scale and an important Refraction Index, both characteristics make gemstones 'unique'.**

**Then why does the Iron Trunk work without gemstones? Because David has never used 'Life Energy' which is the nightmare for every scientist (which he is) who tries to build something that makes sense out of magic. He was an Alchemist, thusly he played around with Heat and Kinetick energy like it was nobody's business because in the Potterverse (at least in The Bigger Picture) magic worked out of symbols, out of souls, and out of intent. The Iron Trunk turned out to be a constant cycle of energy in transformation based on its core of fictional mass that nonetheless got enough Gravity to bend space.**

**To do anything remotely similar in the Inheritance verse is impossible because magic there works strictly off Life Energy.**

**At least for everyone but Dragons and whatever the fuck was that Guntera's manifestation at Orik's coronation.**

**Let's be real, spirits casually created a living plant made out of precious metals and gemstones, so, there is some bullshittery afoot.**

### **AN Part 3**

**And I know that it's somewhat obvious making him the next Rider, but it is in line with the mechanics of canon and gives me a stable situation upon which I can bruteforce David into feeling that everyone around him is real, finally finding a foolproof reason to make an SI skeptical of his circumstances actually involved with the plot.**

**Returning to the development of the story, I had considered having him gallivant around with Angela, which is a great character in my opinion. The problem is, that at this point in time, the MC couldn't do magic AT ALL. Animagus and speaking to snakes and foxes come naturally to him, but he lacks that 'door' that Eragon smashes through during the first book when he throws Brisingr to the urgals. For now, he can't even read minds, because it requires the ability of being able to cast his mind outside.**

**Basically, he's an extraordinary healthy human with a mind that could shame anyone in the world once he can organize himself around magic.**

**He lost his Philosopher stone in the epilogue of The Bigger Picture, and he can't make another. Despite his lack of magic right now, in alagaesia all magic works off Life Energy, and he can't directly manipulate heat and kinetic energy anymore. Angela manages that because she's likey prepared her own body throughout the years with elixirs and whatnot. To move around at those speeds one would need a lot of protection and strengthening for the body, the G force present in those movements would squish the brain inside the skull otherwise.**

**Despite the obvious nerfing reasons, imagine that David's magic just underwent a change of Operative System, his way of doing things is no longer compatible with the world he's on.**

**In the potterverse, he could write the code in C (playing directly with concepts and True Souls), in the Inheritance cycle, he has an old iPad, and all he can do is download new applications as he discovers New Names, moving them around on the screen and figuring out the various levels of each application through understanding. Basically, in the first setting he could reprogram a tree to make him coffee and become a rocket aimed t the moon, in the Inheritance cycle, he can change the desktop image and if he's clever place a password protecting it.**

**So I need something to give him magic, and having a dragon egg to hatch for him sounds a good method, albeit an obvious one, that works off for all the reasons that I explained in the AN of the previous chapter.**

**Deeptoughts42, I have no idea how you managed to spy through my drafts for this story, considering that they're on paper and I'm reasonably sure there is an ocean between us, but I had, in fact, considered the Shade angle. The problem there is, once more, that the MC as a Shade would not be invested in the future of the land, and that to be realistic, I'd need to write him as a Joker from DC. And he would still be OP from the very beginning, fearing only Galbatorix.**

**Seriously, if only a straight strike through the heart could kill the MC, he would abuse the shit out of it.**

**With the experience the MC has with dealing with souls, I can see him flushing together the invading spirits in an amalgam that has him at the top, and it would make for an original start, but a less interesting story overall.**

**ps**

did the conversation between David and Arya work? I tried to keep in mind that she's both smart and used to politics, while David, despite his dislike for posturing and all the nuances of the more polite forms of conversation, he's still a scary-smart Ravenclaw, and quite witty when he puts his mind to it.

Again, as far as the conversation goes, I had the MC bleed off nervous-energy by moving around (making tea, moving Fleur, cooking), while the elves remained more impassible throughout it, used as they are to keep their cards close to their chest.

In *Brisingr* there is a well-written dialogue Eragon-Arya that goes into the characterization without giving a sense of stillness. Paolini managed that by having them reminisce and by interrupting through the random-ass appearance of spirits (completely useless plot-wise), and telling out Eragon's emotive reactions.

I'm trying to go for a conversation in which the emotions easy enough to read for the reader, but not obvious for the characters, so I point out the 'tightening of shoulders', the 'stiffening' and whatnot.

The reason behind the quiet-drinking-time after dinner is to bleed out the insecurities and stiffness that was still around

pps

Does David suspect the existence of something manipulating the events? Well, casually meeting Arya was a dead giveaway, and the best part, as the author of a fic in this particular verse, is that I can play it exactly as Paolini did and declare that plot railroading is because of the Eldunari.

Did they somewhat help Tenga along his bat-shit crazy cross-multiverse fishing? I'd say so, if they had been willing to alter Arya's spell in order to make the egg land in front of Eragon, I'd say that they were growing pretty desperate.

**ppps**

**does anyone knows what are the 7 words of power that Broms whispers to Eragon when he dies? or when and if they ever become relevant? Because to me it appears like Paolini set up a plot but never went back to correct the root that he had placed there.**

**pppps**

**names for Saphira, anyone? I'd like to change it...**

## 6. The Tricky Fox

**AN**

***Just to let everyone know, I tend to ramble a bit about the story in the ANs at the end of the chapter, but they're there as personal notes written to keep myself on track about the development of the chapter and the story.***

***They are in no way necessary to understand or enjoy the story, if you want to 'take a peek behind the curtain' and see what's going on in my head as I plan the story, read them, otherwise, you'll be fine just with avoiding the bold parts.***

***In the ANs I tend to ask for feedback, so I know what feels 'off' to you readers and I can try to adjust it.***

---

*From inside the egg, a squeak declared that everything had just changed.*

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### **The Tricky Fox**

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As the sound reverberated across the bones of his hands, David's heart stopped.

His mind, usually never abandoning this or that train of thought, stilled.

His body, however, followed something that to him was completely alien: instinct.

Without his conscious input, his hands slid around the sides of the wobbling egg, ghosting over its surface until they cupped over Arya's hand. There was no hesitation, no questioning his actions: with his

lone eye wide and his breath still in his lungs, he retreated after having made sure that the egg was resting over his palms instead of the elf's one, which was retreated without a word.

Seated and holding his breath, David turned slightly towards the fireplace, letting the pure light flowing off Fleur wash over the hatching egg. His mind still seemed incapable of computing what was happening.

After a growing cascade of squeals more appropriate for a rusty spring mattress than the hatchling, and as David slowly placed the slightly wobbling egg in his lap, a crack appeared on the blue shell. Then another, and another. Still unable to realize what was happening, David leaned forward, eager to burn into his mind that moment. At the top of the stone, where all the cracks met, a small piece wobbled, as if it were balanced on something, then rose and toppled to the floor. After another series of squeaks, a small and dark serpentine head poked out of the hole, followed by a weirdly angled body as the egg fell apart in shards whose innards was covered by a sticky goo.

David did not dare breath as the newly hatched dragon broke through her shell, but his eye was roaming over the fascinating beast.

The dragon was no longer than his forearm, yet it was dignified and noble. Its scales were deep sapphire blue, the same colour as the egg, only that, at the light of the white fire, they looked almost like waves crossing areas of the ocean of different depths.

Without looking around, the dragon fanned its wings. they were several times longer than its body and ribbed with thin fingers of bone that extended from the wing's front edge, forming a line of widely spaced talons. The dragon's head was roughly triangular, serpentine, resemblance that was made stronger by the sharp-looking, diminutive white fangs that curved down out of its upper jaw.

As the dragon stumbled in order to gain its balance over the irregular surface provided by David's lap, its claws gleamed white in the light, like polished ivory, and slightly serrated on the inside curve. A line of small spikes ran down the creature's spine from the base of its head to the tip of its tail, continuous and regular if not for a hollow where its neck and shoulders joined that created a larger-than-normal gap between the spikes.

Finally without breath, David's exhaled a tad heavily as his lungs necessity made itself known, his face again less than twenty centimetres from the dragon.

The dragon's head snapped instantly towards the sound, her sapphire-coloured eyes hammering into his own as the frighteningly intelligent creature took a measure of him. The small creature wobbled a bit on his lap as she adjusted herself, bringing her front towards David's chest, her mouth was open pitifully, like a young bird's, displaying rows of pointed teeth as she squealed again, saying what, none could know.

After a couple of long sniffs, the dragon moved her snout towards David, who was still paralyzed by sheer shock. Lightly, as the man's mind was still trying to reboot in order to understand how grossly it had miscalculated, the dragon made contact.

A blast of icy energy surged into his skin and raced across his body, burning in his veins like liquid fire: unprepared, David fell back with a wild cry. A clattering filled his ears as his inner ear went for a walk along with his control over his limbs. His muscles seized up as air was forcefully expelled from his lungs, and every part of his body seared with pain. He struggled to move, but was unable to.

After what seemed like hours, warmth seeped back into his limbs, leaving them tingling. Shivering uncontrollably, David blinked repeatedly his lone eye until he managed to make out colours and shapes. Feeling himself resting on his back with his legs still lifted, he realized that, in his shock, he had fallen so hard against the backrest of his seat that he had tilted it so much as to fall against the

ground. With a shivering breath, he eyed the reptilian figure that had moved while he was without control of his body in order to sid over his chest while she cleaned herself from the goo of the egg, uncaring of the mess that she was causing.

He felt as if his whole face had been chucked into the snow and left there for weeks. Slowly working his mandible, and making strange expression to give some warmth back into his facial muscles, he rose a hand to check what he knew had happened, even if some part of him was still sceptical.

Just over his left brow, as if to crown his empty orbit, he felt an oval shape of sorts, not unlike a callus, but far more smooth under his fingers. His lone eye glued itself on his hand as he studied the strange feeling, noticing a faint glow shining upon his fingers. The skin over his brow itched and burned like a spider bite, not that he had many experiences with those.

David was still trying to come to terms with the most improbable event to ever happen in his life when something brushed against his consciousness, like a finger trailing over his skin. He felt it again, but this time it solidified into a tendril of thought through which he could feel a growing curiosity. It was as if an invisible wall surrounding his thoughts had fallen away, and he was now free to reach out with his mind. It was... freeing, and unique. It wasn't that his Occlumency had failed him, even if in the chaos of the moment he had lost that precious state of mind-fullness that had accompanied him for centuries, but... if his Occlumency had been a wall around his thoughts, that tendril of consciousness, that was definitely not-himself, was not unlike some sort of tunnel connecting him with...

As his consciousness shifted its focus, echoing the curiosity that reverberated along the... the... *bond*, the words came naturally to describe what he was feeling, he was made aware of the constant flux of *curiosity-intrigue-joy-elation-hunger* that left him reeling for a second or two.

Adjusting his perception of self and not-self with the smooth grace of someone extremely learned in the Mind Arts, David took a deep breath, finding again his usual state of mind, but this time, dedicating most of his focus to the dragon over his chest, which had returned with *-determination-will to shine-* to lick off what was left of the egg over her scales.

Letting his consciousness retreat from the *-new-joyful-curious-* feelings that constantly washed over his thoughts, tingling against them almost as with an invitation to share *something-anything-curiosity-shiny-light-*, David let his mind overflow from his body, falling into a meditative state in less than a second: it was like opening a new set of eyes.

Surprise-Discipline-Relief was tied to a scrap of Song echoing softly through the ether just beyond the solid walls of Arya and Gwenlin' consciousnesses, while David could feel the erratic thinking pattern of Raven somewhere in his trunk, apparently, she was busy trying to steal a single scale from one of the fishes in the river, and she felt the dozen chickens that went their way in the henhouse... He felt, with stark clarity, as if he was one of these birds, fluffy feathers and sharp beaks, the waving of their heads as they walked, and the only rooster protectiveness and over his 'harem'.

Far more interesting and captivating however, was a burning conscience that he had been trying to communicate with for months without success. In his mind's eye, Fleur roared with a concern of the same brightness of the sun, and even if her own occlumency kept him from actually witnessing her thoughts, a gut-twisting pang of affection echoed through the tendril that was his focus, shivering against the walls that she cautiously had kept up.

At the speed of thought, said barriers melted against his touch, and, as David forced himself to ignore the scoring pain that for a moment sizzled in his brain, he could, for the first time since her defeat against Voldemort, hear her:

*Que ce passe-t-il? Que t'es-t-il arrivé, David? Réponds-moi!*

Struggling with the new ability the dragon-bond had granted him, he thought of the first breath he used to take before beginning to meditate, using the image to project reassurance and calm. *I can hear you, Fleur.*

*David?* The thought didn't come with a single word, it contained hesitation to trust such an unexpected development, and fear that it wasn't real, it was a hitched breath of surprise when something priceless was offered with kindness, and a longing that brought tears to David's eye. After two months being able to communicate only by moving her body of flames, and only being able to hear words from David, incapable of actually focusing on his inflexion before her attention burned ahead with her flames.

*I'm here.*

Fleur's consciousness overflowed through the connection David had created, dragging up memories from his mind that he allowed her to witness: his landing in Aga, the first days, the end of the human caravan, and the conversation with Arya, that earned him a sharp pang of rebuttal, if only because she was a beautiful female, and the wonder at the information she picked up.

A few seconds later, the nature of her body made Fleur start to lose her focus, and gently, the one-eyed mage, no Rider, coaxed her consciousness back in the flames: *We'll work on it, this is a step on the right path.*

Returning to his body, David looked with wonder and amazement at the blue hatchling, who had flapped up from his chest to his legs, and was intent into staring Fleur, which had been moving wildly during their mental communication.

As his eye left the dragon for the first time, he saw the gobsmacked expressions over the two elves, expressions that quickly changed in a heartbreaking joy that brought a single tear to slide down Arya's cheek, a soft smile taking over her lips as her breath hitched in her throat.

"It hatched..." she whispered, and the sound immediately alerted the dragon of the presence of the two elves, which received a scrutinizing gaze until Arya murmured some soothing words in the Ancient Tongue, which seemed to reassure the hatchling.

"It's a *she*." David pointed out, letting his mind wander once more over its undeniable bond with the hatchling: "No male can be so graceful..."

Obviously, the dragon chose that exact moment to fall sideways, tripping over her tail and squeaking in outrage.

His lone eye returned briefly to the amused elves: "Give her time."

The following hour passed far quicker than David would have believed possible, and everything but the small dragon was removed from his thoughts.

From storage, David recovered a ham, from which he cut off a dozen or so of small pieces to satisfy the ravenous hunger that the dragon had expressed through their bond. When the newly christened Rider offered the first piece, the hatchling smelled it cautiously, then jabbed its head forward like a snake and snatched the meat from his fingers, swallowing it whole with a peculiar jerk. After some prodding, David fed it, careful to keep his fingers out of the way. By the time there was only one square left, the dragon's belly was bulging. He proffered the last piece; the dragon considered it for a moment, then lazily snapped it up. Done eating, it crawled onto his lap and curled against his chest. Then it snorted, a puff of dark smoke rising from its nostrils.

"So..." David eyed the two elves that had been forcing themselves to not smother in veneration the hatchling with drowsiness that wasn't entirely his: "What now?"

"Now Rider, you rest." came Arya gentle voice as his eyelid became heavier and heavier.

---

The next few days developed themselves in a sort of routine: the horses had been hidden and kept healthy even if they couldn't move by the elves' magic, and probably messages had been sent to higher-ups in order to hear what Arya & Co. were supposed to do now that they had found their Rider in the middle of enemy territory, surrounded as they were by random Urgal parties running amok.

While the elves busied themselves with plans for the future, and David pretended not to notice that he wasn't being included in said plans, the one-eyed Rider dedicated most of his time to talk to the hatchling, which was proving herself just as curious and thirsty for knowledge as her Rider.

Talking with Fleur had quickly shown itself to be quite taxing upon the veela-turned-into-living-fire, so David only had a few minutes of conversation each day before she fell back into her quiescent state.

For his continued sanity, David had strived to keep the hatchling separated from the living flames, least his new companion decided worth a try to jump into the white fire, placing the one-eyed man on the receiving end of a mental tongue-lashing that he wasn't eager to receive.

Raven and the hatchling... they didn't get along. Well, it would be more accurate to say that the newborn dragon only wanted to eat the bird, which was admittedly offended at the very idea.

Coaxed and followed by David at all times, she stopped in more than one occasion to observe the sky, which for some reason she distrusted. Praise and pride emanated in equal measure from the one-eyed man when her irritation made her growl (read 'squeak') threateningly to the fake clouds that drifted over her head. That she had been able to recognize it as something false promised a swift development of her mind, which in turn meant that she would soon enough be able to actually learn English, which was the tongue David had chosen to teach to her first.

"Well, you kind of need a name, it's important to form your identity around it, and I can't always call you hatchling, you'll grow soon." He spoke quietly as the young dragon climbed on and off his lap, following a butterfly that was strangely insistent in flapping around the newly christened Rider.

As he started to talk about Naming, the hatchling became suddenly attentive, her sapphire eyes zeroing in on his and *-expectation-*reverberating over their bond.

"You're are the first free dragon to hatch since the fall, you're beautiful," he stopped to scratch her along the underside of her neck, causing her to give a soft purr as an answer, "you're free, you'll be powerful beyond anything that this world has ever seen. You're curious and... a hunter." he concluded when her jaws snapped closed around the butterfly that had been pestering them.

"What about Ophelia?" the name was immediately discarded as the images relative to the Shakespearian play were shown to the hatchling.

"No, no, I understand, it's not appropriate for someone as fierce as you." he nodded when the dragon squeaked proudly.

"Helen... no, no, human names will not be able to capture you at all... there was a goddess once, Freyja, which in Old Norse means Lady, most renowned of the Norse goddesses, who was in charge of love, fertility, battle, and death. It was Freyja's privilege to choose one-half of the heroes slain in battle for her great hall in the Fólkvangar, " and as he spoke, David manifested through their bond images of great halls and fires, giving context to each word that left his lips.

"She possessed a famous necklace called *Brísinga men*, which is an Old Norse name. *Brísinga-men*, whose second element is *men*, meaning ornamental neck-ring of precious metal, or a torc. But the first name comes too from Old Norse, *Brísingr*, which meant Fire, or Amber. Brísingamen thusly was the "gleaming torc", "sunny torc", or "jewel of the race that brings fire"." David could tell that she was

interested in the story, and that the images he pictured were captivating for her.

"I'll take your reaction as a 'maybe'." he grinned and returned to run his fingers over the wings of the dragon, which seemed to never stop loving being appreciated, " Mardöll, Hörn, Gefn, and Syr were other names that she enjoyed."

"There are other mythologies that maybe we can take inspiration from: Artemis, in Greek religion, the goddess of wild animals, the hunt, and vegetation and of chastity and childbirth, which in hindsight, I realize rules the name out."

With a sigh David stretched back, hearing a satisfying pop along his spine: "Tiamat was a goddess-dragon and one of the two central protagonists of the *Enuma Elish* - the earliest recorded writing. In the story, Tiamat and her mate/brother Apsu/Abzu, embodied primordial nothingness. As they laid together they gave birth to gods, and from the gods, came creation. The gods started building the universe/reality. As a being of primordial nothing, the very concept of creation hurt Apsu and Tiamat, disturbing their slumber. Tiamat ignored the fighting at-first, trying to get back to her sleep of oblivion, but Apsu would not ignore the commotion caused by the creation and attacked the gods and earth. The Gods fought and killed Apsu. Tiamat, enraged, woke from her sleep and went to destroy the gods and creation as punishment for killing her beloved Apsu." at the lack of reaction from the hatchling, the newly christened Rider snorted: "Yeah, I'm guessing that's a bit limiting."

"There are several variations of a common theme: Dawn, Dawnbreak, Lucifer, which means Lightbringer, but then again, is a male name..." the choice was proving itself harder than David would have thought, it didn't help that he had never had to do something like that before, with his familiar had been easy: it was a raven, call her Raven and call it a day, the hatchling was proving herself to be... prickly.

He wasn't looking forward to having to show her what he knew of the world they were into, and that ruled out the name Saphira, lest it summoned images that the hatchling hadn't the maturity to understand just yet.

Then, looking for inspiration, David's mind fell over the series of videogames he had played lifetimes before, and with those came the reasonably vast memories of the best fantasy and sci-fi novels that humans had ever produced.

"Apsal'ara, which was a goddess of thieves... no. Ok, how about Duryl, which means Messenger of the Whirlwind." the scoff that brought into existence a small plume of dark smoke ruled it out: "Yes, I'm guessing that you're not a messenger for anyone..." the smug satisfaction that echoed from the bond made it clear that she agreed with his last opinion.

"What about Alia, Ghanima, Siona?" her eyes narrowed in displeasure, so the newly christened Rider hastened to go on with the roll of names.

"Andrastie, but it doesn't have enough bite... something more..." he sighed again, shifting once more over another realm from which he could steal inspiration.

Taking the hatchling in his arms and walking back into the room under the forest floor, he walked towards the shelves that held what little fiction he had kept with him, he still didn't know why he had found it worthy of a place in his private library, given what he could do with magic in the potterverse, it seemed almost pointless in hindsight, but there had always been something *more* to the writings of that particular author.

Past 1990, every idiot could pick up a PC and write out a fantasy novel, all the images of different environments were there to be described, all fantastical creatures ever drawn were ready to take inspiration from, but that one... John Ronald Reuel Tolkien had created a whole universe from scratch, with tongues, a headache-

inducing history, its own in-lore mythology... truly he had been among the Giants.

Flipping idly one book, David sat in one of the chairs near the fireplace, where Fleur was resting after the several minutes of conversation they had a few hours before, and started to read, taking the words from the pages and turning them into images for the Hatchling to learn and witness one of the greatest literary works of all time.

More important than the images that he was trying to convey, there were meanings behind the names, "There was Ondoya, the Ring of Stone, which granted clarity and certainty, of the self and of others, and made one hard and incorruptible as stone."

The image of a onyx and mithril band flashed in the hatchling mind, and while she was overall unimpressed with the whole concept of taking the name of a ring, she felt the respect that David had for the writer that created so much with only ink on paper. So, she kept quiet, accepting the knowledge that she was being shown and feeling thrilled that the Rider was sharing a passion of himself that he wasn't quite ready to admit even to himself.

"Then there was Mirilya, the Ring of Jewels, which made one's works and working as radiant and clear as cut gems." With those words, David projected an image of a gold and topaz Ring.

An image of a ring of opal and gold came next: "It came Araya, the Ring of Dawn. It made it so that honest intent would shine into the hearts and minds of all who beheld the holder."

Mithril and amethyst flashed later, accompanied by the words: "Histeya, the Ring of Dusk. And it was made so that all who saw the bearer would be in awe of his majesty, and be cowed by the scale he represented."

"There was then Laureya, the Ring of Gold, the Ring of the Sun. Which made the bearer as bright and as powerful as the fire itself:

incandescent and forceful, impossible to deny."

"There was also Silmaya, the Ring of Silver, the Ring of the Moon, which made the bearer as calm and as gentle as moonlight, and made him, or her, worthy of being the confidante and trustee of all those the bearer cared for."

With a breath of awe at the images the words summoned, David spoke of Cenya, the Ring of Earth, the Green Ring, the Emerald Ring, greatest of the Seven. It granted to the bearer dominion over all that lingers in darkness, both outside and inside yourself. It allowed the bearer to rule over the deepest, darkest pits, both the caverns that delve into the deep places of the world, and the shadowy crevices within the bearer's own heart where he did not dare to tread."

David's lone eye moved away from the page and returned to the hatchling, which was looking at him with a slow purr reverberating through her chest: "You want me to talk about the Three?" he asked.

She didn't care, not really, names were names, and she would now when the right one came, but she cared that he had shown her something that he loved, something that he didn't keep hidden behind other thoughts, something that wasn't revealed in order to manipulate a conversation, and her appreciation for that moment revealed itself along the bond, showing without words, relying only on the instinct that led her to communicate through images, that she was enjoying his *trust* more than anything else until then.

"Narya, NENYA, and Vilya. Fire, Water, and Air." David spoke slowly, letting each word sound clearly off his tongue, and as he kept rambling about this or that fantasy element, the hatchling rumbled contently from her chest, enjoying what was maybe the first genuine moment that she had shared with her to be Rider.

David was just getting around the images that he remembered from the movies (the hatchling was freaked out by the strange two-legged Smaug), when Arya descended from the stairs: "We need to move."

The tone in her voice was one of alarm, while her body language spoke of a controlled tension ready to turn into violence.

"What happened?" David asked as he closed the book and joined Arya in the first floor of the trunk.

"One fox has returned carrying the smell of Urgals on her, sadly, that brought a whole party upon us, Fäolin and Gwenlin already headed out to lead them away from here, but this burrow is no longer safe."

David's eye went to the blackboards where he had been analyzing the Ancient Tongue, licking his lips in trepidation: "I can..."

"No!" he was swiftly interrupted: "The important thing is keeping you alive! Our mission was to see the egg hatch, and then protect the Rider until he reached his teachers, if you fall here, then everything is lost!"

David's mind quickly cocooned the hatchling's one, emanating reassurance and the importance that she remained calm, like when she had been stalking Raven in order to nip at her feathers, and the hatchling calmed down, slithering off from his hands and sneaking through the tall grass, looking for the Rider's familiar.

"After you, then." he indicated the stairs to Arya, which stilled in confusion seeing that the one-eyed Rider made no move towards grabbing his dragon, "Where I am, this home is." he stopped her from protesting, "You'll see soon enough."

Just as they crossed the hatch in the ground, Arya observed with worry in her eyes as the one-eyed man closed it and tugged at a thin metal looking string that she could barely make out from the surroundings. If not for the urgency of the situation, and the accepted rule of do-not-think-about-it that she had started to follow when assisting at the kind of magic the newly christened Rider often displayed without a single afterthought, she would have pinched her nose or throttled the man for keeping such a versatile skill under warps.

She observed with a stricken expression in her eyes as he donned the iron necklace with a satisfied smirk: "In my defense..." he started with a smirk only to be interrupted by the she-elf. She had no time for his antics.

"I'll keep the horse at trot, so you can follow as a fox in the underbrush, if they cut us off again with a too-large force, I'll divert them. Try to go north until you enter a forest of pines, I've sent word to my people, they'll be on the lookout for you, alternatively, go northwest, there is a mountain range known as the Spine there, hid there as long as you can." David graciously pretended to not hear the worry and heartbreak in her voice as she planned the next move as her companions were already dead.

Without another word, David turned into a fox and started following the horse that Arya was leading more with the pressure exercised with her knees than the bridle. In the moonless night, she proved once again why her race was so fucking terrifying: her head twitched from side to side like the one of an hawk, while her eyes were able to tear clearly through the darkness.

David, with the fox's instinct, was building a map of his surrounding in his mind, while his senses never lost the horse opening the way. He could feel, distantly, the worry and attention of the hatchling from inside the trunk he carried on his neck, and if he pushed his mind around what he could perceive as the first floor of his Iron Trunk, he could pick up, although muddled, the presence of his familiar and the chickens, which to his senses were dimmer than a firefly.

Arya led them across the forest, often circling back to confuse the trail and check for pursuers, all the while moving in this or that direction in order to keep away from the noises and the smells of enemy forces brought by the nocturnal breeze.

David's awareness shifted again, this time outwards, as he kept a small part of his mind focused on never getting too far behind from the horse that led the way.

His sensible nose almost didn't feel it at first, dry, bitter... the smell of fire was carried over by the light breeze, which changed direction because of the sheer heat emanating by a section of the forest.

*Arya.* He whispered against the walls of her mind as his consciousness expanded beyond his little group.

*Not the time.* was her sharp rebuke.

With a soft snarl of indignation, David's mind eased its way into the horse's consciousness, passively getting used to the unfamiliar body.

*The horse is too loud against the ground, he's giving our position away. he communicated quickly, hop off, I'll guide the horse as a bait, away from us, but I can't do that and control my body at the same time, grab me and quietly run through the enemy' lines.*

With a spark of exasperation rippling from her mind, and a warning that he ignored to keep his mind closed, she acquiesced to his plan, whispering a few choice words to the horse, which seemed accepting of David's influence as Arya picked up the fox and ran away in the night.

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## **AN p1**

**The last chapter was a slow conversation, I know, but it was meant to be so: when two intelligent and relative powerful people meet each other in a context that can't assure either of them of the other's trustworthiness, words become a game of chess in which information is the pieces and knowledge the victory, such a heavy conversation won't happen again any time soon, instead, I'm trying out now a series of quick back and forth.**

**And in the last chapter, I had to build a whole situation in which Arya would show David the egg: given the context, the long**

verbal sparring looked like the only solution that didn't scream 'plot railroading'.

And yes, sorry for the info on mythology and random fantasy, but I needed something to make the MC and the still-unnamed hatchling bond over, in canon, basically Eragon treats Saphira like a wolf, carrying back and forth food until she actually asks for a name. Besides, it gives me an opening to have David teach the dragon English as her first tongue, with the reasoning that if language can be used as a handle to navigate thought, this will grant the hatchling another shield.

AN p2

The names and description of the Seven Rings come from the fic Ring-Maker, from Lithos Maitreya, which is one of the absolute best LOTR crossovers ever written.

PS

I'm shit with names, you all know it, but I'm gravitating towards either Azura or Meridia, from The Elder Scrolls. Opinions?

PPS

I don't know where to put his 'gedwey ignasia', so over the brow of his empty eyesocket sounds good, I wanted to keep his hands free, and this gives me something over which other characters can poke fun at him eventually.

## 7. Run

### RUN

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Arya ran.

There was really little that she could do beyond focusing on putting one foot in front of another, angling it so that almost no sound declared her presence. She weaved across the trees, placing her feet carefully over their roots in order to leave no trail, tilting her torso opportunely to make sure that not a single hair from the fox-Rider that she was carrying would fall and thusly beg for them to be followed.

As the elf whisked them through the night, lighter than a whisper and as fast as an arrow, David played puppetry.

He remembered the first times he had turned into a fox, before his mind would adapt and synch with the new form, the feeling of everything looking too big, being too loud, too smelly...

He was feeling the opposite. The white stallion that he had hijacked, with the blessing of Arya and the relatively quiet acceptance of the herbivore, besides not trusting the carnivore-hunter-stranger in his head was also fucking difficult to pilot, and that was without taking into consideration the effort David had to keep in order to strangle the horse's survival instinct.

Horses were made to run over great distances in grass plains during the day, David was having the stallion gallop his way through the underbrush in a forest on fire at night. Everything looked smaller than he was used to, thanks to the changed perspective, and his senses, like everything else that evolution had gotten its hands upon, was optimized for a very specific environment.

Needless to say, that horses weren't made for running a breakneck speed at night, not across forests on fire, and not while being hunted by a party of Urgals that acted far smarter than David would have believed them capable of.

A horse's hearing is much keener than the human one. They use their hearing for three primary functions: to detect sounds, to determine the location of the sound, and to provide sensory information that allows the horse to recognize the identity of these sounds. Horses could hear low to very high-frequency sound, in the range of 14 Hz to 25 kHz, while the human range went from 20 Hz to 20 kHz. Horses' ears could move 180 degrees using 10 different muscles, compared to three muscles for the human ear. Horses were able to single out a specific area to listen to. This allowed the horse to orient itself toward the sounds to be able to determine what is making the noise.

Needless to say, the horse's keen hearing was pretty much wasted in the chaotic mess that was fire roaring, Urgals stomping, bark breaking from the heat, and the constant hammering sound of his own hooves slamming against the compact ground.

Smell was less than useless while the horse was guided less than a couple of meters from this or that line of roaring fire, while his lungs started to burn because of the thick smoke.

Like many herbivores, horses had evolved having eyes on opposite sides of the head, only lightly angled forwards, in order to be able to keep watch against predators, and were particularly effective when in vast planes. While the light from the forest fire was making visible the surroundings, David was guiding the horse basing his movements on a very small angle of binocular vision that the position of the herbivore's eyes allowed.

Given that both as a human and as a fox, he had grown used to a single eye on the right side of his head, he was adapting to the change extraordinarily well, even as he knew that the horse was a bait soon to be killed.

A distant part of him was aware of the concern emanating from the dragon that was sharing his mind, and the strangely smooth ride that he was getting while being carried by Arya, that he could hear had shifted his body in order to hold his fox-shape with a single-arm, letting her wield a sword that she had already used twice when an Urgal had spotted her with the corner of the eye.

After a mad run that truly showcased the kind of mental fortitude David could exercise, since the distance between his real body and the horse he was controlling grew at mind-boggling speeds, the white horse found himself in an enclosed ring of fire, Urgals moving just beyond the flames like sharks smelling blood in the water.

He considered galloping across the band of fire, but when it became white-hot, David knew that he might as well stall the unavoidable pursuit at the best of his ability.

A tall man walked across the flames that refused to burn him, as fearing the one that had breathed them into existence: he looked human except for his crimson hair and maroon eyes.

David's consciousness had already left the control of the horse, finding much more productive assaulting one of the unprotected minds of the Urgals in the service of the Shade. He didn't wait to consider the implication of what he was doing, he had no time to absorb the finest points of the Urgal's culture, he had no time to figure out a way to twist the thoughts that shifted through his grasp like water when he tried to manipulate them, because, with his mind's eye, he found himself staring at twisting shadows and whispers of agony. A presence that was pain and suffering, cruelty and hunger. All those elements were already *there* twisting the importance of something, guiding the Urgal's consciousness like through a bridle made of sheer cruelty.

As David felt the mind of the Shade zeroing in on his presence, he retreated with a lurch feeling himself back in his fox form with a brain-burning headache a second later. His lone eye blinked

owlishly, and he saw the trees flash past him and Arya as she ran with him held with his arm.

Even as he considered the implication of what he had witnessed in the Urgals' mind, and fought to oppose the encroaching tiredness, he clamped down on an image that he had found: the two male elves, Gwenlin and Fäolin, bound and beaten, but alive. Then darkness overcame him.

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He came to the sound of gently lapping water over a rocky shore, with the rustle of thin branches and slow, heavy breathing that didn't come from his own lungs.

Blurry, he opened his lone eye, shutting it immediately after since the sunlight had almost blinded him, before blinking several times as he tried to recognize his own surroundings.

He was just beginning to categorize the smells that reached his nose when a wave of pure, unadulterated joy and relief washed across his senses.

*I'm here.* the thought ran across his bond with the hatchling without David's conscious input, along with a wave of calmness that expressed his reflexive appreciation of the sheer trustworthiness intrinsic in the bond. Even when he was hiding the horse, the hatchling had been with him with a connection that ran deeper than the one that clearly resonated in his mind, he could recognize it even better now as he stirred.

Distractedly exchanging a constant flow of joy-satisfaction-hope with the hatchling, the one-eyed fox took stock of the environment.

Arya was huddled in her travelling cloak amongst the roots of a weeping willow whose branches arced gracefully over a small river, with the point of its leaves barely brushing over the crystalline water.

As his eye roamed over the surroundings, he immediately noticed that there was a remarkable difference between what he was seeing and the forest where he had set up his own burrow. The ground was a bit harder, the dirt less moist and colder, they were likely at a higher altitude than where they had been assaulted by the Urgals and the Shade.

Blinking while his fine snout tasted the air, feeling a chill that matched his observations, he lapped a bit from the river, before curtailing the enthusiasm and curiosity of the hatchling at seeing that he could change form. Mentally showing her the images of how he had changed, over and over again, he had to contain a snort at the indignant feeling the hatchling displayed when he considered turning her into a fox.

His consciousness roamed over the bright mind of Raven, who despite her own feelings had done her best to keep the hatchling distracted, and whispered against the quiescent mind of Fleur, who apparently hadn't awakened since the attack.

Satisfied with the state of his home, he trotted towards the asleep elf, willingly rasping a paw against the rocky ground in order to awaken her without being stabbed for the disturb.

A pair of green eyes shot open immediately, darting around confirming the safety of their surroundings before the she-elf shoulders loosened the stiffness that announced violence. After having confirmed that they weren't about to get killed, she narrowed her eyes at the fox sitting on his haunches in front of her: "Why are you still a fox?" she asked tiredly, only to receive a slow blink of his eye as an answer.

*Can we take an hour before leaving? We both could eat.*

Frowning at the proposal that had whispered against her consciousness strong enough to be heard but light enough to not result invasive, she nodded sharply, unknowingly mimicking the movement that a hawk would make.

In front of her eyes, she witnessed the fur receding under clothes that weren't there a moment before, ears retreating and becoming rounder, while the knees of the fox turned in the opposite way. The change had been smooth and effortless, taking less than a second, and once more Arya wondered what kind of magic David's people were capable of.

"Gwenlin and Fäolin were captured, but alive, I saw it from the mind of an Urgal." he announced as he took off his iron necklace, which turned in a robust and large trunk after he carefully placed it against the ground.

That information shot through Arya's mind like a red-hot brand, suddenly bringing hope with it and immediately being discarded in favour of remaining true to her duty. For the first time, the she-elf felt heavy the tattoo of the yawe on her shoulder.

With a shudder as she followed the unlikely Rider down the staircase that led to the forest floor, she answered: "We need to get you to safety, they will get free and buy us more time..."

"A Shade was leading them." he cut her halfway through her explanation, "so he won't be letting the trail go cold anytime soon, but he is controlling the Urgals somehow, there were shapes of death and agony between the memories and conscious thought of the Urgal, I don't think we can outmanoeuvre a horde guided by a single mind."

"He was distracted during the ambush, likely from the attack of my companions and your taking control over the horse." she confirmed David's theory over the prowess of the Shade: "He won't repeat the mistake."

David sighed heavily as they started to walk across the lush grass, only to stop and grin like a loon when his scaly companion made herself known with a squeal that made him acutely aware that he wasn't the only one with a ravenous hunger: "Grab some fruit for yourself and me, will you, we're going downstairs to fill our gullets."

As David approached, the hatchling leapt into his arms, huddling close to his chest. While she hadn't suffered wither hunger or harm, she seemed frightened. A puff of dark smoke blew out of her nostrils while he stroked her neck comfortingly and walked downstairs, murmuring softly. He kept still as the dragon buried her head in his shirt. After a while, she decided that she had enough of physical reassurance and joined him as he started eating off another ham.

He ate quickly, as Arya did while he kept feeding the hatchling, always remaining mindful of his fingers, until she decided that she was full and curled up in his lap, quickly falling asleep.

With an indignant squawk at being ignored, Raved made herself known as she landed over his shoulder: "Hunted! she croaked, "Hunted!"

Distractingly caressing the breast feathers of the needy bird, the newly christened rider couldn't help but compare himself to some alternative version of Snowwhite, snorting, he eyed Arya just as she finished eating an orange with wide eyes, likely being unaccustomed to such fruit given the latitudes where her home was.

"If you show me a map, I can help plan, otherwise, I'm blind." David spoke quickly, aware that the short reprieve they gained with the narrow escape wouldn't last long.

With a tired nod, Arya grabbed the white sheet she was offered along with a pencil, briefly letting her fingers trail over the unfamiliar consistency of industrially made paper before quickly stylizing a map of the area.

David had frankly no idea of how *Alagaësia* was structured, only roughly remembering that the elves were in a forest up north, the dwarves inside some mountains south, and that there was a desert randomly placed without any consideration for the kind of ecosystem that it implied.

"We're here." Arya pointed somewhere at the base of a mountain group, "Near Utgard."

They were just south of a group of mountains that seemed encroached on both sides from a large river that apparently led to a vast amount of water, not having a scale of referment, David couldn't make out the effective distances, not that he expected Arya to be able to draw an accurate map in less than a minute without a ruler, even if it would have been dead useful for that exact situation.

"What is that city?" he asked, already thinking of the possible shelter it would offer.

"Ceunon." was the laconic answer.

"And we've been assaulted here?" the one-eyed man asked pointing at a location east of them.

"Just across the river actually, even an elf can't run that far in less than a day." she replied.

The steely tone brought David to look her over once more, finding bags under her reddened eyes that he hadn't noticed before. With a grimace, he realized that Gwenlin and Fäolin were her friends, and knowing them prisoner of a Shade was likely worse than thinking them dead. *Give me a complex magical problem anytime, but keep away other people' feelings...*

He took a deep breath after dedicating a few second to figure out a way to reassure Arya without rely finding one that didn't sound callous. "One step at time." he settled for saying: "We find a secure position, then we figure out a way to save them." a slow purring from his scaly companion underlined his words, even as the elf shot him a scathing look.

Arya shook his head: "Their sacrifice will be best served by keeping you safe from harm, that means away from the Empire."

A snort was David first instinct, however, he tried to smooth down his first reaction. He wasn't really Hero material, he knew that much, if there really was a need for him to deal with some problem that potentially threatened him, he was down to apply his not irrelevant abilities to find a solution, otherwise, he had always been more than satisfied with researching magic and create stuff that was material for legends. Letting Gwenlin and Fäolin on their own was obviously the wisest thing to do, even the more logical. Sadly, he was also aware that it was a dick move.

David knew that Gwenlin, Arya and Fäolin were pretty much aware of the risks when they decided to start carrying the egg around, and that each of them was more than willing to sacrifice everything in order to complete their task. That Arya didn't hesitate in leaving them behind in order to get David away spoke volumes about the kind of dedication in play, and the one-eyed Rider wasn't keen of gallivanting around saving people that objectively should have just remained home, or planned an effective method of transportation before actually setting off across enemy territory.

And, at the end of the day, Gwenlin and Fäolin weren't his friends, or even acquaintances. After only a few days, David could barely remember how it was like to not have a bond with the hatchling, which was a creature so genuine in her wants and instincts that made everything look new through her eyes, even to an old fucker like the newly christened Rider.

Had he some more experience with the magic of Alagaësia, he would have probably discarded Arya's opinion and headed out to face this Shade, knowing that he simply had to do something to his mind in order to give her the opening needed to kill him, but as he was... his lone eye fell on the asleep form of the hatchling on his lap, purring contently under his distracted ministrations, with a constant feedback of *satisfaction-warmth* from her mind.

He had always been pretty independent, no need to burden himself too much. In the Potterverse, he acted as he wished, and the rest of the world could either be on board or go fuck itself. Now, as he

considered the opportunities that his skill in Occlumency granted him against the opponents he could find, he found himself anchored to the dragon in his lap, new and genuine as she was.

"Your people' territory is the deep forest, yes?" he asked, surrendering to the hard reality of the circumstances.

"We must continue west or north, the Shade won't let his troops leave us a gap to slip through." she shot down David's route before he had a chance of voicing out loud, "And Ceunon is off limits, we're only us two, and even if I'm surprised at your skill with your Mind, you're not combat-ready."

"You can't infiltrate Ceunon with a pet fox at your side? If you change my fur' colour, I could pass for a dog, people tend to see what they wish to see." he proposed, already seeing her shaking her head.

"A woman travelling alone with a dog? In this area? It would be an alarm for every imperial spy of the city." she countered, staring intently at the map as if a solution was going to present itself.

"Your people can't spearhead us trough the Shade' troops?" David was scrambling for the last straws by then, and by the pinched look on the elf's face, she knew that too.

"Too far to act in time."

"We'll lose them on the Spine then." it appeared to be the last option, when he had another idea: "When I touched the egg, I was trying to scree the future, I heard a name... Carvahall means anything to you?" if they were going to be alone and hunted, David wanted every help he could possibly get.

Arya's gaze sharpened, returning his as she stopped blinking for several seconds: "You'll need to tell me how your magic works one day." but her tone was resigned, "Carvahall is a small village in the north, just over the block of mountains we are at the base of, then following the river towards the North Sea."

"We have food and shelter, I can run as a fox while you rest inside, and you can carry me while I sleep as a fox: we can keep it up for several days without stopping for more than a few minutes, and you're faster than a horse." he quickly underlined the vast advantage they had over the opponent: speed.

"If we can lose them on the Spine, we can double back and pass just south from Ceunon and return into the Du Weldenvarden... I'll need to explain our situation to my people, they were expecting a communication yesterday." she nodded, giving her stamp of approval to the plan they had put together.

David took the few minutes Arya spent talking to a bowl of water she had filled from the sink with taking a hot shower and dressing with something heavier and more adapt to mountain-crossing than the light clothes he had been wearing while living in the Trunk. Wool socks and heavy boots covered his feet, while military coloured cargo pants went on to protect his legs. A t-shirt went over his torso, covered by a jumper that he vaguely remembered being made by one of his house-elves, who had knitted it out of the wool sheared from the sheep that had lived in the vast cavern that he had turned into a proper Wonderland.

Arya looked at him strangely once she saw him, probably confused by his uncommon attire, which seemed even stranger than the one she had grown accustomed to seeing him in, only for her jaw to fall slightly as he opened a drawer only to slid out of it a dagger which appeared was made of some kind of bone.

"I was surprised too the first time I saw this." David cheerfully threw to her as he secured a leather harness in order to have the weapon secured to the small of his back. It wouldn't get in the way if he had to run as a human, and would be easy to unsheathe if needed.

Seeing as her eyes didn't abandon the weapon, he wistfully recalled of its origins: "Hagrid, bless his giant heart, gifted me this when I was 13 years old, the blade then went from my elbow to my fingertips." It was made of horn, it was straight and had a side like a saw, while

the other was so sharp it could shave the hairs off his arm. The hilt was an engraved raven, and the leather on the handle was comfortable despite the many years that had passed since then. If it was because of the stasis enchantments that David had placed over every container, jar, shelf or drawer of his life because of paranoia that he would forget about what he had, like some LVL 81 character in Skyrim, or because Hagrid had truly some magic that seeped into his creation, he couldn't tell.

"I have rested enough to run, you can rest." Arya stated as she turned to walk outside, only to be stopped by David's answer.

"My home can't be moved as a necklace while I am inside." David shook his head, "I would be asking to be kidnapped or sealed away if that was the case, rest a bit, and don't talk to the hatchling with your mind, please." he said as he surpassed her on the stairs: "I'll be running west, they won't be looking for fox tracks after they lost yours over the river."

And so the greatest and most deadly game of tag of David's life begun.

As he left the Iron Trunk, he heard Raven flapping towards Arya and getting started with a riddle.

Hiding his nervousness and fear at the idea of being actually captured by the sickfuck that was the evil king, he turned into a fox after having secured his home to his neck.

David ran.

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**AN**

**If I had more time, I would have written an omake in which David gets stuck into the horse, and the future of the land is balanced upon the future of the stallion.**

**Stylo, the last chapter was a bit of a transition, and David was a bit out of contact with the rest of the world because he was getting used to having the equivalent of a curious toddler in his head, plus being able to communicate with Fleur for the first time since her transformation was unsettling, even if in a good way.**

**A chapter that kind of sets the tone for the story, David is less self-absorbed here than in the last chapter, in which he was a bit at a loss with what to do when dealing with a hatchling dragon that shares your mind while being immediately considered the last hope for freedom and rainbows everywhere. There's nothing like the threat of slavery and mind-raping to get someone's ass in gear.**

**In the last chapter, he kind of only reacted to Arya's decisions, only to plan on his own and force Arya to follow his lead, because she's kind of sworn to protect him, and he was going to do as he wanted regardless of her wishes.**

**In this one, I tried to blend together Arya and David' planning, putting in some considerations that he does about himself now that he's confronted with a dramatic situation without the buffer of discarding his humanity into a greater World-Soul. David's starts to find out that he cares about the hatchling for real, and not only because she's useful, while Fleur remains in the background.**