

## Dark and Light

### Chapter 11 - Light

#### Sid

The creatures were beyond impressive.

Sid strolled around the huge table, examining the Darkspawn strapped to it from all angles. The creature – a blue-skinned, humanoid Goblin – struggled against the straps and chains that bound it. Whenever Sid entered its field of vision, the Darkspawn snarled at him.

“It has a phallus,” he said, nodding to the small cluster of robed men watching him. “But would it be accurate to describe such a creature as ‘male’? I think not.”

This ‘Goblin’ wasn’t a living animal, despite its appearance.

It was *energy*.

His understanding of the natural world far surpassed what these ‘Mages’ knew. They were still debating if their world was flat or round. They had no concept of the scientific knowledge and understanding that Sid took for granted.

To these simpletons, he could become a legend.

He could build them steam engines, teach them about electricity and the scientific method, bring their entire civilisation a thousand years ahead of where it was now. He could become the most famous man, the *wealthiest* man, who’d ever lived.

But what was the use in that?

Money? It was a trap that so many weak men fell into.

Money wasn’t important. *Knowledge* was.

Understanding.

And these Darkspawn... They were a *mystery*. A puzzle for Sid to explore and unravel.

“Dark is, by all accounts, a type of energy,” Sid continued slowly, circling the table again and again. “A fuel that, when condensed enough, manifests as *these*. Darkspawn.”

He drew a sharpened knife from the sheath at his hip. These uneducated fools didn’t even have *scalpels*. He’d have to change that. Teach them the importance of smaller, sharper blades. A large knife, no matter how well-sharpened, would never cut as clean as a decent scalpel.

“They are not real, living things. They don’t reproduce through copulation, they don’t possess *real* genders. Darkspawn are simple imitations. No different than a painting or stone sculpture. They are energy *imitating* life.”

He slashed the Goblin. Cut a deep gouge in its arm.

The creature howled in pain and rage, thrashing uselessly against its bindings. Snarling and barking, not unlike a rabid dog.

A plume of black smoke rose from the cut.

“Energy,” Sid said, gesturing to the gaseous Dark. “Leaking from it like liquid from a cut waterskin. The question is; what can we use that energy for? How do we harness this raw Dark, and transform it into something useful?”

He already had the answer, of course. All these men knew what Sid was, what would happen to that Dark if he touched it.

“Hear that screeching? The hissing?” He strode around the table to the Goblin’s head. Looked down at it. “Really sounds like it’s in pain, doesn’t it? But it’s not. It can’t *experience* pain. It has no pain receptors, no nervous system, no brain to translate signals into what we know as ‘pain’. This screeching and noise? An act. An imitation of suffering.”

Some of that would’ve gone over his audiences’ heads. They didn’t know what ‘nerves’ or ‘pain receptors’ were. Fuck, they barely understood what the *brain* was. No

doubt, they believed emotions came from the heart or some such nonsense.

He had to dumb things down even more. Explain things in a way these savages could understand.

So, he slashed his knife across the Goblin's throat.

"Notice how it continues to scream?" Sid said loudly, over the aforementioned screams. "No *real* animal with its throat cut would be able to do so. Likewise, this cut would be lethal to any human. We'd be rendered unable to breathe, would drown in our own blood in seconds."

He waited a minute. Two. Three. Across the room, the Mages began to shift uncomfortably, glancing at each other. Waiting, uncertain, for him to continue. All the while, the Goblin screeched and howled and wailed, Dark rising from the gash across its throat.

Curiously, the wounds seemed to be healing. As Dark flowed out of from the cuts, some of it clung to the edges of the wounds. Slowly repairing the damage.

He'd have to explore that – Darkspawn healing – later. He certainly had plenty of test subjects left to experiment with.

"Darkspawn don't breathe," Sid said at last, commanding the attention of the Mage scholars. "They don't eat or drink, they don't sleep. They need no sustenance of any kind. They are simple vessels for the energy you call 'Dark'. Thus, destroying a Darkspawn to exploit the resources within is no different than cracking a rock for the ores it may contain. You are not 'ending a life' because no life exists *to end*."

To think, some of the scholars here at the academy *actually* thought Darkspawn were living, sentient beings that deserved 'rights' and 'acceptance'. That there was an actual *debate* over it was ridiculous.

Ethics and morals should be applied to Darkspawn no more than they should be to pebbles and stones.

One did not give human rights to barrels of oil.

That's all Darkspawn were. Barrels of oil disguised as living animals. Oil that, under the right circumstances, could be transformed into a very potent source of energy.

He just had to make these scholars see that.

## Gavin

Gav slammed his knife into the man's back.

There was a surprised grunt, the breath leaving his squad mate's lungs. Gav gripped the man around the neck with his left arm, choking and restraining him as he stabbed again and again.

A minute later, he was staring down at a bloody corpse.

"Well shit," he panted. Shanking someone, it turned out, was exhausting work. "So much for that idea."

The NPCs in this game didn't give 'experience'. Not like Darkspawn did. He'd been hoping that, upon death, the man's body would've dissolved into the same Light he'd seen several times now. Kill a Darkspawn, get in close enough for the Dark cloud to burst into Light. Absorb it, use it to boost his stats or unlock new abilities.

But no. None of that happened with the man.

Gav looked down at his hands, the knife he was holding. All covered in red. Droplets dripping onto the ground below.

It was so... *realistic*.

Everything about this world was.

The water and weather, the people, the air itself. He could smell the filth of the alleyway, see flecks of dust in the air.

A puddle of red grew out from dead man.

Not 'man', he scolded himself. *This isn't real.*

But then... Why did it feel so...

He shook his head, refused to consider *that* possibility.

None of this was real. It *couldn't* be.

Gav sheathed his bloody knife, quickly emptied the dead man's pockets, then drew his cloak around himself to hide the blood splatter. When he turned and walked out of the alleyway, it was with a wry smile on his face.

Whoever had designed this game, they'd made it *too* detailed. Tonight, he'd have to clean his clothes and his knife and his knife's sheath. So much nonsense work to do. Really, would it have been so bad to make bloodstains disappear by themselves? Forcing players to keep their gear clean was a *terrible* design choice.

At least there weren't any durability meters on his weapons and armour. Thankfully *that* mechanic hadn't found its way into this worl- this *game*.

That's all it was... Just a silly game...

## Hal

Focusing on his 'musical' talents had been the best decision Hal had ever made. Nothing seemed to make the women in this world swoon so much as a bard with a lute. He felt like a goddamned rockstar whenever he stopped at a new inn or tavern with all the female attention he got.

Most of those inns and taverns were clever enough to employ buxom wenches to attend tables and serve as eye-candy. Which meant Hal went to bed with a big-titted bitch almost every night.

Sure, most of the time he needed to use a bit of magical 'encouragement'. But that was his right.

He was a Holy Knight. Or was it 'Crusader'? Paladin? Herald?

Whatever it was!

He was *that*. Chosen by the 'Eternal Light' to save the world and blah, blah, blah. He'd been given his powers by this world's God, either way. That made him and his powers divine providence! He was *supposed* to use them. And, if using 'em got him an endless line of sluts to fuck, all the better.

Tonight, he set his eyes on one woman in particular.

A mature, graceful beauty. Stacked up top, but with clear intellect behind her cool blue eyes. Standing behind the bar, serving drinks and shrugging off every compliment and attempted flattery Hal'd tried to give.

She was immune to his flirtations. Which only made him want her more. A sexy beast to be conquered and bedded.

The woman was, he learned quickly, the wife of the tavern's owner. Happily married, life-long lovers. The kind of coupling that screamed 'happily ever after'. Which explained her resistance to his flattery and flirtation.

She'd already found the man of her dreams, and it wasn't Hal.

When it came time to perform for the tavern, Hal plucked on strings and emotions as one. His singing carried unspoken commands, pulling and pushing thoughts like an invisible tug of war. To the tavern's patrons, the music would've sounded beautiful and energetic and wonderful. To that one woman, the hottie of a wife, it'd be intoxicating.

Most of his power and focus went to her. Swaying her, breaking down walls and building mental bridges. Some of the power he spared for her husband, the tavern's owner. A lesser but still potent lashing on his mind.

On and on he played. Some men and women danced, others cried tears of joy, others still cheered and clapped.

The woman at the bar swayed in place, eyes dazed.

Hours later, after receiving his night's pay from the tavern's owner, Hal made his way upstairs to the private rooms. The small bedroom reserved for the owner and his wife.

Hal commanded the husband wait outside as he took the wife to bed.

## Joseph

The carriage came to a stop.

The sun was still high in the sky, so they weren't stopping to make camp for the night. And the Priest *had* told him it'd be today...

Sure enough, a minute or so later, the carriage door opened.

An old man in clerical robes bowed to him.

"We have arrived," the Priest said, voice creaking. "Please, holy Paladin, come with me."

It was a command. Spoken with deference, in a subservient tone. But a command all the same.

By now, Joe was used to that. The awkward way in which the Priesthood treated him. The sole 'Paladin' walking the 'righteous path'. They acted like he was their superior, placed above them by their own god, yet still they dictated where he should go and what he needed to know.

He accepted it. For now.

For as long as his goals aligned with theirs, he'd play along. Be their 'Paladin'. And they, in turn, would empower him. Enable him. It was an alliance of sorts. A partnership of convenience that he'd allow until he had the power to rescue Lily.

Joe climbed out of the carriage, followed the slow-walking Priest.

Ahead, there was an ancient, dilapidated stone bridge across a huge river. In the distance, hints of mountains on the horizon. And, behind him, an army. Column after column of armed and armoured men. Thousands and thousands of them, *tens* of thousands, all marching in formation along the wide road – columns stretching back as far as the eye could see.

An invasion force.

"The Northern Realms," the old Priest said, drawing Joe's attention back to bridge and what lay beyond. "Conquered by Darkspawn hordes generations ago. You remember the story?"

Joe nodded his head, though most of what he'd been told had gone in one ear and out the other. Only vague impressions remained.

Something about an evil, tyrannical dragon terrorising the people up here. The Priests intervened, used some secret weapon to slay the dragon – the only interesting part of the story to Joe. Then, in retaliation for the dragon's demise, the Dark Princes had sent legions of their spawn to slaughter and terrorise and claim the lands for themselves.

Ever since, the entire region had been uninhabitable. Flooded with Darkspawn that'd kill humans on sight.

"Many attempts have been made over the years," the Priest droned on, walking slowly towards the bridge. "To reclaim the Northern Realms, drive back the invaders. All to no avail. Men are finite, Darkspawn are not. Death and destruction, so perilous and abhorrent to us, only serve to empower the abominations of the Dark. There was no way for us to remove that taint – that Darkness – from this place."

The Priest turned around, bowed his head to Joe.

"Until now," the old man croaked out.

Joe held back a sigh and a rude comment.

He didn't give a shit about any of that crap. Why should he care about 'Light' and

'Dark' and all that shit? It wasn't his war. Wasn't his responsibility. Fuck, it wasn't even his *world*. All that mattered was Lily.

Lily who, even now, was being tortured and tormented by demons. If she wasn't already dead.

Righteous rage flared in his chest at the thought.

He'd find her. Rescue her. Take her home.

But, in order to do that, he needed *power*.

And across this bridge, the Priests had promised, he'd find an endless supply of it. Legions of Darkspawn, waiting to be slaughtered and absorbed. An endless source of power for Joe to carve his way through.

How many Darkspawn would he need to kill and absorb in order to challenge a succubus? How many battles, his army clashing with Dark legions, would it take before he could finally hunt down that demon *slut* and cleave her head off?

Joe joined the Priest on the bridge. Began walking across it. His eyes forward, narrowed at the horizon.

The armies of Light followed behind him.