

## Dark and Light

### Chapter 16 - Light

Sid

The Priesthood had an impressive library.

Impressive in that it was utterly useless.

Even the forbidden sections had little of interest. Stories that were wholly unreliable; histories twisted by the Priests for their own agendas, only a page of truth in a tome of lies. And doctrine. So much religious nonsense that Sid was half tempted to reduce the entire library to kindling.

Men consuming Darkspawn to gain 'Dark Magic' was all well and good, but not elaborating on *what* 'Dark Magic' was barely made the information worth possessing.

The only truly interesting thing he found was the information on Wards.

They were... Dark. Or, at least, they *replicated* it.

Where most Light apparatus had an upper limit to the amount of Light it could contain, Wards were limitless. They were more similar to Darkspawn than Mythics in that regard. Slowly building up strength over time, growing ever more powerful with no limits.

Once he'd read about them, had learned a few of the runes that made up Wards, it'd brought to mind more questions.

Wards were how the Priests had brought him and the others to this world. It was how they'd built up the necessary volume of Light to cast a spell so powerful. They'd gotten their Mythic bones, used them as batteries, charged them across countless cities over multiple regions for months, then brought them all together.

When he'd brought up the possibility of there being a 'better' way to accumulate Light, the Head Priest of this temple had gotten nervous.

Too nervous.

They were hiding something.

And so Sid scoured book after book, searching for the secret. Something to do with Light and its properties, how to collect large volumes of it.

Which had made the Head Priest even more nervous.

He tried to bring in assistants; people to read through dusty tomes along with him. But that request had been flatly refused. While Sid might be a holy 'Paladin', his role as a 'chosen one' had its limits. He was allowed access. Others outside the Priesthood weren't.

Luckily for Sid, he had *power*.

His experiments had led to plenty of dead Darkspawn, which meant plenty of Dark for him to absorb.

Being able to throw around fireballs or summon angel wings for himself sounded fun, for sure. But there were far more useful areas he could spend his gathered power.

The ability to stay awake for weeks at a time, never feeling a hint of mental fatigue. Beyond useful for his studies. And a spell that enhanced his memory, gave him the equivalent of selective photographic memory, allowed him to skim whole books in minutes and have their contents stored away in his mind for future reference.

Sitting back in a comfortable armchair, alone in his private study, Sid closed his eyes.

In his head, he summoned up page after page of information. Skimmed through lengthy tomes in search of the secret. The thing the Priests were keeping from him.

Any knowledge worth hiding was information worth possessing.

Wards. Powerful Light magic. Summoning runes.

Tome after tome flitted through his head, page after page, a blur of words racing past.

Phoenix.

So many references to 'the Phoenix'.

Most powerful of the Mythics, supreme general in the great wars, patron of the Priesthood, blah, blah...

*The Nest.*

It only appeared in two volumes. References to 'The Nest' or the 'The Phoenix's Nest'. And neither of those books mentioned *where* the 'Nest' actually was.

For a religious icon as important as this 'Phoenix' was, the lack of information on its nest was surprising.

And, come to think of it, why hadn't the Phoenix shown itself? Sid, Joe, all of the gang – they were supposed to be divinely-selected heroes. The saviours of the world, hand picked by 'God' himself. As the patron and chief of the Priests, why hadn't this Phoenix come to meet with them personally?

Secrets.

So many secrets to uncover.

So many mysteries to unravel.

Something inside Sid told him *this* secret was a big one.

He just had to know it.

Even if that meant *squeezing* the truth out of that Head Priest. He'd get his answers.

## Joseph

He summoned the gauntlets.

All it took was a thought, and the silvery metal shimmered into existence around his bare hands. Gauntlets of white and gold that glowed with internal light wrapped firmly over Joe's skin.

He flexed his now-gauntleted hands as he strode forward.

The pack of goblins glanced at each other, hefted their makeshift spears and growled.

Joe was on them in an instant.

Inhumanly fast, stronger than he'd ever imagined possible, he planted his fist in the first goblin's face.

The creature flew backwards twenty feet. It was reduced to a cloud of Dark before it even collided with the ground. Dead from the blow, its body taking a few moments to catch up with that reality.

He stood still in the middle of the surprised group.

For a long few seconds, the beasts were too stunned to react. Then one took the initiative, leaping at Joe and thrusting its stone-tipped spear.

Joe sidestepped it with ease.

His reflexes were beyond human now. His body more than capable of keeping up with his new, heightened senses.

More spear jabs came, and Joe dodged them all.

*Too slow*, he mused as he moved. *Need faster enemies.*

Demons would be faster. Much, much faster. And stronger. Smarter. And a succubus – they had other means of winning a fight, especially against men. He wasn't ready. Not for *her*.

Not yet.

Joe dodged a spear thrust, slammed his gauntleted fist into the attacker's chest. The punch broke straight through the creature. Its eyes widened in pain and fear for a single heartbeat. Then it burst into a cloud of Dark. And that Dark transformed into vibrant, colourful Light.

A momentary rush filled him as he absorbed the Light.

Then he unleashed *everything* he had.

Full speed. Full strength. No mercy.

He tore the goblins to pieces. Snapped spines and crushed skulls. In the blink of an eye, more than a dozen of the things were reduced to Dark clouds.

*Too easy.*

He needed a challenge. A *real* challenge.

Absorbing the Dark from these goblins was well and good, but it was too slow. The power he was gaining; it wasn't *enough*. Not for what he had to do.

As he walked around the small area, collecting up all the Dark clouds, his boots crushed shells and trinkets and old cloth. The clothes and items the goblins had been wearing. Their discarded spears lay where each of the monsters had died.

Joe looked up at the sky.

Midday. With a bit of luck, he'd encounter a few more goblin groups before nightfall. And, if he was *really* lucky, he might find some orcs in the mix too.

Each one slain was one step closer to rescuing Lily.

When the first true battle happened, Joe watched from the sidelines. Standing on a cliffside overlooking the two armies.

To call it a 'battle' was a bit much.

Thousands of goblins and orcs against tens of thousands of well-trained human soldiers. The forces of Dark, an unorganised rabble with sticks and stones for weapons and loincloths for armour, against lines of sharpened steel and shining armour.

The monsters charged in, were immediately slaughtered.

It lasted only minutes before the Darkspawn turned and tried to flee, only to be cut down by a cavalry charge.

What remained of the creatures were surrounded and butchered.

When all that remained of the monster army was a heavy mist of black over the battlefield, Joe descended from his cliff and made his way towards it. Eyes on that large cloud of raw Dark.

As soon as he stepped near it, the Dark nearest to him shifted and transformed. His body absorbing it as he walked into the black haze. All around him, the cloud began to glow. Dark becoming Light, Light becoming his.

More than that, as he absorbed the newly-made Light, more of the Dark cloud flowed in to the now-empty spot. Only to be transformed into new Light too.

Like water flowing down a drain, the Dark flooded towards him. Transformed into Light. Absorbed.

Thousands and thousands of monsters worth of Dark.

Many multitudes of power more than he'd tasted before.

When he reached the centre of the Dark cloud, he stretched his arms out and closed his eyes, let the power flow into him from all around. Felt it surge into his body, replenishing him and empowering him to new, unbelievable heights.

Only when the power stopped coming did Joe open his eyes.

The cloud of Dark was gone. Fully absorbed.

Cheering voices from the soldiers sounded around him, but Joe ignored them. Focused instead on himself. His new power.

He slipped his special gemstone from his pocket.

Began spending that raw power.

Improving spells and abilities he already possessed, unlocking new ones, making himself into the ultimate Darkspawn killing machine. All the while, in the back of his mind, the sound of a succubus laughing as a girl screamed and sobbed.

One step closer...

How many battles 'til he was strong enough to kill a Demon?