

EXT. SMOKE COVERED BATTLEFIELD - DUSK

A red-crowned crane flies through thick smoke. A woman's voice crackles over a radio:

CHAE-RIN (O.S.)
Captain Kakashi! This is Lieutenant
Chae-rin! We've lost visual!

The crane lands on a large horizontal structure. A wall? It looks around and pecks the surface. A metallic echo.

The structure SHIFTS with the sound of massive gears and crushed gravel. Startled, the crane flies away.

The structure is the HEAD of a massive BATTLE MECH. The head lights up as power surges on.

CHAE-RIN (O.S.)
Captain Kakashi, do you copy?!

Kakashi's strained voice pipes up from inside the mech.

KAKASHI (O.S.)
--I read you, Lieutenant.

CHAE-RIN (O.S.)
Sir. Thought you were a goner.

KAKASHI (O.S.)
Not yet. Just rang my bell a little.

Kakashi's battle mech whines as it struggles to its feet. Once steady, it stands eight stories tall. It towers over the pockmarked battlefield like a living lighthouse.

CHAE-RIN (O.S.)
Orders, sir?

KAKASHI (O.S.)
Fall back to the city walls. Keep an
eye out for that big titan. It's
faster than it looks.

CHAE-RIN (O.S.)
Which titan, sir?

INT. KAKASHI'S MECH - CONTINUOUS

CAPTAIN KAKASHI, male, 50s, dried blood cakes the side of his face. He grimaces as he steers his mech.

KAKASHI
The big one, Lieutenant.

CHAE-RIN (O.S.)
Yessir. See you at the front gate.

KAKASHI
(to his mech)
C'mon, you old tin can.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - CONTINUOUS

Kakashi's mech lurches forward, picking up a little speed.

As he clears the smoke, normal-sized futuristic jeeps and high-tech tanks lay strewn around him like discarded toys.

Big as he is, he runs past the rotting carcass of a monstrous creature several times larger than himself.

EXT. CITY GATES - CONTINUOUS

Massive walls enclose a large city. The main "city gates" are shut. Standing in front are three other large battle mechs, each with heavy damage.

SUPER: Nara Naga, capitol city of the southern territories.

Kakashi's mech rejoins them, then turns to the battlefield.

KAKASHI (O.S.)
How many are left?

CHAE-RIN (O.S.)
Just us, sir.

INT. KAKASHI'S MECH - CONTINUOUS

Kakashi takes this in. Grits his teeth.

KAKASHI
Gods damn them. Computer? Status of the evacuation?

COMPUTER (O.S.)
Total evacuation of civilians remains at four percent.

CHAE-RIN (O.S.)
Still? That can't be right.

Kakashi closes his eyes, bracing himself.

KAKASHI
Computer, how many undead civilians
are inside the city walls?

COMPUTER (O.S.)
Number of undead civilians is at
ninety-six percent of total
population.

Kakashi blinks hard. Struggles to keep it together.

CHAE-RIN (O.S.)
...It's not possible.

KAKASHI
Lieutenant--

INT. CHAE-RIN'S MECH - CONTINUOUS

CHAE-RIN, female, 40s, is horrified.

CHAE-RIN
We've been fighting for barely an
hour and-- this *whole time*?!

KAKASHI (O.S.)
Lieutenant!--

CHAE-RIN
--Everyone was dying?!

MECH PILOT (O.S.)
By the gods... how did they get in?

EXT. CITY GATES - CONTINUOUS

The four remaining mechs turn to face the gate. The massive doors remain closed. It's way too quiet.

KAKASHI (O.S.)
They had help. From inside.

MECH PILOT (O.S.)
Who would side with the undead?!
They're a mindless plague!

KAKASHI (O.S.)
Doesn't matter now. Stay focused. We
still have a job to do.

CHAE-RIN (O.S.)
 We failed to protect our people. What
 else is there?

INT. KAKASHI'S MECH - CONTINUOUS

Kakashi releases the controls and types frantically on one
 of his consoles.

KAKASHI
 Right now this city is a vector. We
 need to destroy it before the undead
 can infect the next one.

CHAE-RIN (O.S.)
 Destroy Nara Naga?

KAKASHI
 Computer, who has override authority?

COMPUTER (O.S.)
 The highest ranking officer still
 alive is Captain Kakashi of the
 Fighting 78s Sectams.

CHAE-RIN (O.S.)
 Sir?

Kakashi does some quick mental math. "Fuck it."

KAKASHI
 Computer, activate Rising Sun
 Protocol.

COMPUTER (O.S.)
 Confirmed. Rising Sun Protocol is
 active. Your presence is required at
 Central Command.

MECH PILOT (O.S.)
 Rising Sun?

CHAE-RIN (O.S.)
 Sir? What does that mean?

KAKASHI (O.S.)
 Listen up, people! This is goi-

A proximity ALARM inside Kakashi's Mech interrupts--

EXT. CITY GATES - CONTINUOUS

Before anyone can react, a GIGANTIC partially rotted CENTIPEDE titan BURSTS through the city wall behind them and GRABS the "Heavy Mech" with its mandibles.

In the blink of an eye, the Heavy Mech is yanked *backwards* into the city and THROWN through several buildings.

Thousands of undead humans swarm it like piranhas.

MECH PILOT (O.S.)

Fuck!

KAKASHI (O.S.)

Cut me a path to the city's center!

EXT. STREETS OF NARA NAGA - CONTINUOUS

The three remaining mechs rush inside the city walls, firing their weapons in every direction as they wade through a sea of their former friends and neighbors.

They pass over their comrade's fallen mech. Undead swarm over and through its broken hull. The pilot is already dead.

The Centipede Titan darts through the rubble at blazing speeds for a monster its size. It zips up behind the Mech Pilot bring up the rear, ready to pounce.

The Mech Pilot spins just in time to GRAB the Centipede by its mandibles. He struggles against the incredible weight.

Chae-rin turns to help-

KAKASHI (O.S.)

Lieutenant! Keep moving!

She hesitates.

MECH PILOT (O.S.)

GO! I've got this bastard!

KAKASHI (O.S.)

Lieutenant!

INT. CHAE-RIN'S MECH - CONTINUOUS

She screams in frustration as she turns to rejoin Kakashi.

EXT. STREETS OF NARA NAGA - CONTINUOUS

Mech Pilot stands firm, but the Centipede digs in all one hundred of its legs, sliding the mech back, shattering pavement and crushing all undead civilians in the way.

Thruster jets on the mech's back FLARE to life as he *pushes* back. The heat *incinerates* the undead behind him.

The mech's arms strain and shake under the weight. He leans forward, gets right in the Centipede's face--

MECH PILOT (O.S.)
C'MON MOTHERFUCKER!

Behind the Centipede, a rotting RHINOCEROS BEETLE the size of a bulldozer CRASHES into the city from the outside wall.

Mech Pilot pulls the Centipede's head down, trying to line up a shot with his wrist-mounted missile launcher--

The Beetle scurries off, revealing a DECAYING RAT the size of a city bus. It snarls and *sprints* for Mech Pilot.

The mech's thrusters sputter and die out. The Centipede yanks to the side, throwing off the mech's aim. The missile shot goes wild, spiraling away into the distance.

The Rat LEAPS over the Centipede, pouncing onto Mech Pilot. He screams in horror as the Rat's teeth peel open the suit while the Centipede holds him down.

EXT. CITY CENTER - MOMENTS LATER

Kakashi and Chae-rin's mechs run into an open public square surrounded by government buildings. They shake several clinging undead off of their legs.

Kakashi stomps them like roaches while Chae-rin keeps her head on a swivel.

KAKASHI (O.S.)
Lieutenant, listen carefully. We only
have a few moments.

CHAE-RIN (O.S.)
Yessir.

INTERCUT: INSIDE KAKASHI & CHE-RIN'S MECHS AS THEY SPEAK.

KAKASHI

The Rising Sun Protocol activates the Orbital Defense Network, destroying the city and self-destructing.

CHAE-RIN

How much time does it give us to get clear of the city?

KAKASHI

...Whoever activates the protocol cannot leave--

Chae-rin realizes. Shakes her head.

KAKASHI (CONT'D)

--That person must share Nara Naga's fate. Or the protocol will cancel out.

CHAE-RIN

-No. No, you can't... The survivors need you! They need a leader!

KAKASHI (CONT'D)

Lieutenant! They already have a leader. You must get them to safety. Warn every living soul. Every nation. They must know what happened here. Otherwise, we died for *nothing*.

Chae-rin can barely keep it together. She nods, accepts it.

EXT. CITY CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Across the square, a building collapses in a cloud of dust.

KAKASHI (O.S.)

It found us. Go!

INT. CHAE-RIN'S MECH - CONTINUOUS

In tears, she hits several buttons and braces herself.

EXT. CITY CENTER - CONTINUOUS

The thrusters on Chae-rin's mech kick on. She rises, higher and higher, picking up speed. Kakashi watches her go as she soars over the city and out of sight.

Across the square, the Centipede clears the dust cloud. It scurries atop the next building and looks around.

Kakashi's mech takes a knee in the center of the square.

INT. KAKASHI'S MECH - CONTINUOUS

Kakashi taps out a final command. He sighs, content.

EXT. SPACE (LOW ORBIT OVER DOMHAN) - CONTINUOUS

Multiple satellites move into position above Naga Nara. Yellow beams of light converge on the city below.

EXT. CITY CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Kakashi's mech enters the beam. A ticking PULSE is heard throughout the city.

The Centipede spots Kakashi and darts for him.

For a brief moment before the Centipede gets him, Kakashi is bathed in a yellow beam of heavenly light--

FADE TO WHITE

A glowing red "sun" grows out of the city center.

Pull back to reveal a viewscreen inside:

INT. CHAE-RIN'S MECH - CONTINUOUS

Chae-rin watches the "rear view" monitor in shock. Her mech SHAKES as the shockwave hits her. She flinches, but it slowly passes. In the monitor, the city is a massive crater.

Several warning lights flash across her face. Her look of horror turns into one of cold and focused determination.

INT. FUTURISTIC NIGHTCLUB/BROTHEL - UNKNOWN

Multi-colored lights flash and spotlights dance around the luxurious open space. People mingle between dance floors, bars, conversation pits, and stripper booths.

Scantly clad humans, elves, and orcs of all possible sexes and genders dance and mingle with human patrons.

Elves (formally known as "Dulra") average about 8ft tall and are built like Amazonian warriors. Pointed ears. Their skin shades can be lighter or darker than humans.

Orcs are 10ft tall with way more muscle. Both masc and femme have jutting lower jaws with two small tusked teeth. Their skin tones range from green to gray.

Towards the back is a mirrored VIP Room.

INT. VIP ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The two-way mirrored walls give a wide view of the club while keeping out the noise. An extra long couch and two beds surround a tiny stage. A mini bar is in the back.

On the couch is a shirtless man in a golden wolf mask. He is flanked by three human women and one lady elf. He is in his 30s. Black. Fit. His custom jacket, shirt, and tie are on the floor but likely cost more than the club itself.

The top of his face is hidden, but he has the drunken shit-eating grin of someone who never worked a day in their life. This is SHANGO.

GLITTERED WOMAN

Now how about losing the mask?

Glittered Woman playfully flicks the mask's "ears."

GLITTERED WOMAN (CONT'D)

No need to be shy here, honey.

SHANGO

Nah, I'm good.

The elf in blacklight body paint crosses behind the couch with a glass of champagne. She bends at the waist to hand it to Shango, but still towers over him.

BODY PAINTED ELF

We promise not to tell anyone how handsome you are.

He looks up, smiles, and takes the glass. She runs her hands over his chest while he takes a sip.

SHANGO

Can't we all just enjoy the mystery?

Glittered Woman shrugs.

GLITTERED WOMAN

Suit yourself. We're yours until midnight. And that's a while away.

BODY PAINTED ELF

Think you can last all those hours with the four of us?

SHANGO
The *four* of you?

Shango cranes his neck to count them all. He chuckles.

SHANGO (CONT'D)
Wow. You're right. *Damn* right. So,
let's make it... an even dozen.

Shango pulls out a pocket datapad and swipes it a few times.

The women exchange befuddled looks. Is this guy for real?

As Shango tosses the datapad over his shoulder, the VIP door opens. A green female orc struts in with a bottle. She's closely followed by seven more women of all races and color.

SHANGO
Now that is service. Welcome to the party, ladies!

The four women already with Shango laugh in surprise.

Body Painted Elf kneels behind him. Leans down to his ear.

BODY PAINTED ELF
We knew you were rich, but now we know you're *crazy*!

She laughs as she playfully bites his ear.

Shango grins and throws up his arms. "What can I say?"

All twelve women glide in as Glittered Woman straddles him.

GLITTERED WOMAN
I've been wanting to peel these off of you since you walked in...

She undoes his belt-- A lion's ROAR stops everyone in their tracks. The women look to each other.

SHANGO
What? Is it stuck? I'll get it--

Shango reaches for his belt, but is interrupted by screams from outside. Another lion ROAR. The women run for cover.

SHANGO (CONT'D)
C'mon! Don't let a little interruption stop all the--

Shango looks up to see two large LIONS approaching the VIP from across the glowing dance floor.

SHANGO (CONT'D)

Ah, fuck. Not now.

The crowd flees the building as the lions park themselves in front of the VIP door. Three massive human figures in heavy golden armor follow behind them. Two of them carry spears and shields. The third gestures for them to open the door.

As the door opens, the women in the room immediately kneel and bows their heads at the sight of The Royal Guards.

Shango sighs in frustration as they enter, each having to duck beneath the doorframe to fit. He tosses his golden wolf mask aside, revealing his face. He's handsome too. Bastard.

The lions stay outside on either side of the door. They sit and keep watch like trained guard dogs.

LORD-GENERAL KEDAR, 40s, black, 9ft tall in ornate golden armor with a purple cloak, motions to Shango to get up.

KEDAR

Let's go.

SHANGO

Sorry. I'm booked until midnight.

Kedar turns back to the door.

KEDAR

Grab him.

The other two guards lift Shango by his arms and *drag* him.

SHANGO

Can I bring the bottle?

He reaches for it, but misses as he's marched out.

EXT. CAIKAR CITY STREET - CONTINUOUS (DAY)

Kedar leads the Royal Guards outside the club. Shango squints and shields his eyes against the midday sun.

Four more golden guards stand at attention, blocking sidewalk traffic as Shango is dragged on board an armored transport in the street.

A small crowd watches in hushed tones as the two lions follow them on board, and the rest of the guards file in.

After the doors close, the transport hovers off the ground, throttles up, and speeds off into a sky-lane several stories above the street traffic.

INT. ROYAL TRANSPORT - CONTINUOUS

Shango is seated between the two guards. Across from him is Kedar, who sits between his two lions. He looks away from Shango in disapproval.

SHANGO

Did you have to bring *both* of your familiars? Unexpected lions are a real mood killer for the ladies.

Kedar doesn't respond.

SHANGO (CONT'D)

I was serious about being booked until midnight--

KEDAR

--The Queen is holding an emergency meeting with the delegation from Tsuru. You were vox'd for three hours and ignored our hails.

SHANGO

Delegates?! Why didn't you say so?!

Kedar looks to him, dead serious.

KEDAR

--Nara Naga has been destroyed.

Shango may be drunk, but this cuts through hard.

SHANGO

Destroyed?

KEDAR

Only a few survivors made it.

Shango gives a thousand yard stare out the window.

EXT. CITY OF CAIKAR - CONTINUOUS

A grand sprawling city of advanced technology in full harmony with nature.

Flying vehicles cut through upper levels. Trees grow around and *through* buildings. Animals of all types move freely.

SUPER: Caikar, capitol city of Ufalme.

EXT. GRAND PALACE - CONTINUOUS

The Grand Palace of Oya sits atop a large hill overlooking the city. The palace is surrounded by open plains and some dense jungles beyond.

In the plains, a fantastic mixture of animals: lions, sabertoothed cats, and elephants live alongside families of dinosaurs like triceratops, and brachiosaurus.

Vehicle landing pads are clustered on the side of the palace. Currently, they're flooded with military aircraft and armored vehicles. On the ground, Royal Guards and troops move with purpose.

On one pad, Chae-rin's Mech stands surrounded by repair crews. Several smaller transports baring the Mech's same colors are parked nearby.

INT. THRONE ROOM - DAY

Ivory, gold, and purple heartwood throughout. A handful of delegates from Nara Naga sit at a large crescent moon table that faces the throne while Chae-rin addresses the court.

CHAE-RIN

We don't know how. Captain Kakashi--
...before he died, Kakashi suggested it
was some kind of sabotage or traitor.

QUEEN MIIRAN, late 50s, wears an elaborate dress and matching headpiece. A smaller empty throne is to her right.

She nods. Solemn.

QUEEN MIIRAN

In that case, I suggest--

A skinny man in heavy robes approaches the throne. This is the MINISTER OF HIDDEN, 40s. He whispers in the queen's ear.

She blinks. Then whispers back through a tight smile.

QUEEN MIIRAN

...How drunk?

A large side-door to the throne room slams open.

All eyes turn to see Shango catching himself from stumbling. He looks a mess. Random shirt buttons still undone.

Shango tries his best to act sober as he takes his seat next to the throne. Kedar follows and stands guard behind him as Shango finally sits down.

Chae-rin stares in disbelief at Shango as he gives a pained wave and smile, but says nothing.

QUEEN MIIRAN
My apologies for the Prince's
tardiness. Please continue.

Chae-rin is impatient, but keeps cool.

CHAE-RIN
We are seeking asylum, medical
assistance, and a base to launch
future operations.

The Minister of Hidden smiles as he approaches Chae-rin.

MINISTER
Our Hidden will be more than happy to
assist. However, to investigate these
claims of sabotage and prevent
further attacks, it may be necessary
to review Nara Naga's vexnet.

Chae-rin squints, unsure of what he's talking about.

CHAE-RIN
Vexnet?

The Minister raises an eyebrow.

MINISTER
Yes, a blackbox that stores data on
population metrics, military orders...

Chae-rin is at a loss.

CHAE-RIN
I don't have anything like that.

MINISTER
Have you checked with the other
survivors? Perhaps during the
evacuation--

CHAE-RIN
--There was no evacuation. Our people
were slaughtered.

MINISTER
Apologies. I only mean to say that as
the commanding officer, surely you-

CHAE-RIN
-Captain *Kakashi* activated the Rising
Sun Protocol. There was no time.

MINISTER
...Then, with your permission, our
Hidden could search the wreckage?

Chae-rin is repulsed by the suggestion.

CHAE-RIN
...There's *nothing left*.

MINISTER
In that case--

The Queen silences The Minister with a hand raise.

QUEEN MIIRAN
That will be all. Thank you.

He nods and bows to her and the delegation before leaving
the throne room.

QUEEN MIIRAN (CONT'D)
(to Chae-rin)
Any further information you can
provide, no matter how small, may be
vital. Until then, rest and recover
as honored guests.

Chae-rin bows.

CHAE-RIN
We thank you, your highness. My
people will not forget your kindness.

QUEEN MIIRAN
Lord-General, prepare emergency
services for our guests and ready our
defenses. We'll begin immediately.

He nods and leads the delegates to the exit.

QUEEN MIIRAN (CONT'D)
And Prince Shango?

Shango has spaced out. He snaps back to reality.

SHANGO

--Yes?

QUEEN MIIRAN

See me once you're properly arranged.

Shango stands and bows. Holds it as the Queen leaves.

INT. SHANGO'S BEDCHAMBER - NIGHT

Shango slouches on a large couch at the center of his bedchamber. Lit cigar in one hand, tall glass in the other.

He stares up through the branches of two trees that grow through the floor and reach to the high ceiling. A cool breeze blows in from the open balcony. A collection of exotic birds and strange animals scurry through the canopy.

He downs the rest of his drink. He examines the glass in his hand, then *tosses it out over the balcony*. He chuckles.

Behind him, the chamber door opens.

SHANGO

I said to stay outside!

Heels click on the marble floor. Shango bolts up, eyes wide as his mother approaches.

The Queen glides past and sits in an armchair across from him. She watches him expectantly.

Shango slinks back down and puts out the cigar.

QUEEN MIIRAN

Disgusting habit.

Shango keeps his eyes down.

SHANGO

They were a gift. From Kakashi.

The Queen nods.

QUEEN MIIRAN

I see...

SHANGO

He vox'd me a week ago. Wanted to know the next time I'd visit.

Shango shakes his head, disapproving of himself.

SHANGO (CONT'D)
I never got back to him.

Queen Miiram leans forward. Caring, but sharp.

QUEEN MIIRAN
Kakashi was a good friend, but many more people are suffering. Ufalme needs its prince. Someone to inspire, lead, and protect--

SHANGO
--The last man to lead was a genocidal psychopath.

Queen Miiran bristles at the mention of "the last man."

QUEEN MIIRAN
Yes. He was.

SHANGO
If I have to choose between the love of my people or their obedience--

QUEEN MIIRAN
--Drinking and whoring are not the way to earn either. You need to do your part.

Agitated, Shango throws his arms wide.

SHANGO
Then vox me when you need to plan a party. I'm no politician. And Kedar can handle the military stuff.

The Queen stands.

QUEEN MIIRAN
That's about to change.
(to the door)
Kedar?! Enter!

Kedar and Chae-rin enter the room.

QUEEN MIIRAN (CONT'D)
Shango, you'll no doubt remember Lieutenant Chae-rin?

He reluctantly stands up. Sways ever so slightly.

SHANGO
Who could forget?

QUEEN MIIRAN

She will be joining you on tonight's mission. You're leaving immediately.

SHANGO

I'm sorry?

QUEEN MIIRAN

An opportunity to counter the undead has presented itself. This will be a covert operation that requires unique skills that you alone possess.

Shango is stunned. He tries to say something, but--

QUEEN MIIRAN (CONT'D)

For security reasons, they will have to brief you on the way. Gods be with you, my son.

She kisses him on the cheek, then leaves. Doesn't look back.

SHANGO

"Leaving *immediately*?"

Chae-rin folds her arms. Kedar nods in sympathy.

KEDAR

The Heron is prepped for takeoff. If you'll please follow me.

Kedar marches out the door with Chae-rin. Shango hesitates.

INT. PALACE HALLS - CONTINUOUS

Chae-rin moves up alongside Kedar as they walk.

CHAE-RIN

General, with all due respect, this is unacceptable.

KEDAR

I understand your concerns, but we have our orders.

CHAE-RIN

(sotto)
General, that man is *drunk*.

KEDAR

I am aware, lieutenant.

Behind them, Shango stumbles out of his bedchambers. He looks both ways before spotting them, then runs after.

SHANGO
Kedar! *Kedar!*

They don't slow down. He jogs up to Kedar's side, opposite Chae-Rin. Takes a breath. Then gives a friendly laugh.

SHANGO (CONT'D)
Kedar, listen. I can't join this... whatever this thing is.

KEDAR
And why is that?

SHANGO
...I'm fucking *drunk*.

Kedar scowls, eyes forward.

KEDAR
I am aware.

Chae-rin is pissed, but ignores Shango.

EXT. LANDING PAD - NIGHT

A black angular stealth aircraft is powered up with its entry ramp down. Several ground crew hurry with their final checks as Kedar, Chae-rin, and Shango approach.

SHANGO
What about this "lieutenant?" You'll let a *foreign soldier* tag along on a secret mission with a *prince*?

KEDAR
Oh? You're a prince now?

Shango fakes being indignant, but he's obviously desperate.

SHANGO
Yes. Yes! As the Prince of Ufalme, you're putting my *life* in danger.

Kedar stops in his tracks.

KEDAR
Lieutenant, you may board. I need a moment with Prince Shango.

Chae-rin gives a sharp salute and heads for The Heron. Kedar turns to Shango, locking eyes with him.

KEDAR

First, you are on this mission as a civilian intelligence specialist. That order is straight from The Queen, so you must obey.

Shango rubs his face, trying to sober up.

KEDAR (CONT'D)

Second, this also means that the lieutenant outranks you. Her role in this mission is also an order--

SHANGO

--straight from The Queen.
Yeah.

KEDAR (CONT'D)

--straight from The Queen.
So you must obey.

Shango nods. Accepting there might be no way out of this.

KEDAR (CONT'D)

And as Prince of Ufalme, you'll do well to remember that not only is Chae-rin an outstanding officer, *not only* is she leaving her people to help us, but she is a *Sectam* Pilot and the only surviving member of the Fighting 78s. You will show her the respect she deserves.

SHANGO

Yes. I'm sorry.

Kedar watches Shango shift back and forth. He's not ready.

KEDAR

Paladin Typhon is in command of this operation. He'll brief you on board once you're airborne.

Shango looks to the Heron. Chae-rin waits at the top of the entry ramp. Ready to go.

Kedar turns to leave.

SHANGO

Kedar?

He stops.

SHANGO (CONT'D)

There *must* be someone better than me.

Kedar puts a hand on Shango's shoulder.

KEDAR
You'll understand why she chose you.

Kedar pats him once, then leaves.

Shango shuffles towards the Heron's entry ramp as its idle engines throttle up.

EXT. SKY ABOVE UFALME - NIGHT

The city of Caikar twinkles in the distance as The Heron coasts in to view.

Its wings fold and tuck inward for a more streamlined silhouette. A BURST of speed blasts shock diamonds out of the rear engines, and soon, it... is... *gone*.

INT. HERON COCKPIT - MOMENTS LATER

The pilot is OLUSO, 20s, black, but taller than an elf. Easily over 10ft. Despite this, the cockpit is large enough to accommodate most Paladins of his size.

He taps his headset, opening a line to the rest of the ship.

OLUSO
Whisper Mode engaged. We're off
scopes and super sonic.
(with a smirk)
And I'd like to remind his highness
this is a non-smoking flight, and
that *includes* the lavatories.

INT. HERON READY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Shango and Chae-rin unbuckle themselves from the jump seats along the wall. Shango can't help but smile.

SHANGO
No worries, Oluso. I left my cigars
at home.

OLUSO (O.S.)
Heard that before. You stink up my
lav again, Prince or not, *you'll* be
the one on clean up duty.
(beat)
Oh, and welcome aboard Lieutenant.

Doors to the ready room open and PALADIN TYPHON steps in. Looks to be in his 60s. Black. Hair and trimmed beard are snow white. His dark purple gambeson is covered in various pips and ranks. He's short for a Paladin. "Only" 6ft tall.

TYPHON
Oluso, current E.T.A.?

OLUSO (O.S.)
Three hours, captain.

TYPHON
Good. Let's get started.

Typhon stands at the head of the meeting table between Shango and Chae-Rin. He taps a button which activates a touchscreen across the table's surface.

TYPHON (CONT'D)
Our mission is an extraction. We're crossing north into The Hinterlands. The subject has been spotted near a small town called Faulken.

The table map animates each step.

TYPHON (CONT'D)
We'll do a covert landing in the woods outside of town, and make our approach. Once we make contact with the asset, we're to bring him in alive. By any means necessary.

CHAE-RIN
Captain? The Queen said we were retrieving a weapon to fight undead titans. Will this man give or build us that weapon?

Typhon gives a grave look to Shango, then Chae-rin.

TYPHON
This man *is* the weapon.

The table opens a long-lens surveillance photo of a man in a high tech yet ornate power armored suit crossing a crowded street. The helmet completely obscures his face. A bluish-grey Nebelung house cat rests across his shoulders.

Chae-rin stares in disbelief.

CHAE-RIN
...is that...?

SHANGO

..Grey Koval.

Shango stares at Typhon who stares right back.

TYPHON

Now you know how serious the situation is.

CHAE-RIN

Our mission is to "pick up" The Demon of Ufalme?

Shango swallows hard.

SHANGO

He's not a demon.

CHAE-RIN

What, then? The Heretic? The Destroyer? The Betrayer-

SHANGO

-None of that. He's just the first human capable of magic.

CHAE-RIN

Magic?! Orcs and Dulra use magic. The Demon is a walking merchant of death-

SHANGO

-Stop calling him that.

Typhon watches them both carefully.

CHAE-RIN

As a boy, his "magic" killed half of Ufalme's army in one day.

TYPHON

One *hour*.

CHAE-RIN

How are we supposed to wrangle something like that? Better yet, how are you expected to help?

Shango glances at the photo, then up to Chae-rin.

SHANGO

He was my friend. My brother.

She's dumbstruck. Shango glares at Typhon.

TYPHON

The Queen has kept her Hidden Agents on his trail for the past few years in case the need would arise.

SHANGO

And no one told me?

TYPHON

You were preoccupied.

Shango grips the table and shakes his head at himself.

SHANGO

Did she order you to kill him?

Typhon stares at him.

TYPHON

If you are in danger, I have authorization to make that call.

CHAE-RIN

Landing within twenty klicks of him is dangerous enough.

SHANGO

...Am I bait?

Typhon softens ever so slightly.

TYPHON

We want him alive. He may respond better to you than a team of armed Paladins dropping from The Heron. Worst case scenario, his body may contain useful information.

SHANGO

You have to let me talk to him alone.

TYPHON

No.

SHANGO

My mother asked me to do my part. This is what I can do.

CHAE-RIN

Do what? Offer to buy him a drink and pray he doesn't turn us to slag?

Shango's eyes dart back and forth between her and Typhon.

SHANGO

I *know* it's a risk, but... Typhon, I can reach him. You remember when he was younger...

TYPHON

I was there. Countless dead. Including the King of Ufalme-

SHANGO

-Gods damn it, I'm not talking about that! I'm talking about the scared boy who lost everything and didn't want to be cut open in a lab!

Typhon exhales. Nods.

TYPHON

I remember.

SHANGO

That's who I'm going to talk to.

CHAE-RIN

What about civilians? We'll have to wait until he's well outside the village in case things go wrong.

SHANGO

He's been laying low for twenty years. I think the last thing he wants is to start a fight.

INT. RUSTIC TAVERN - NIGHT

An armor-clad human is CHOKE-SLAMMED against the wall by a huge Orc. The human, of course, is GREY KOVAL.

The Orc is MOL-DROZ. Older. Battle scarred. Very pissed off.

MOL-DROZ

Well if it isn't Grey "The Demon" Koval. I *thought* I smelled you.

Grey doesn't resist, but even through his helmet, it sounds like he got the wind knocked out of him.

GREY

Hey, Mol-Droz. Sorry about the burn.

Grey points to the old burn scar covering the entire left side of Mol-Droz's face.

Mol-Droz snarls and FLIPS Grey, slamming his back *through* a booth table. Human patrons at nearby tables flee.

A wider view of the tavern shows a dozen humans and four other heavily armored Orcs. Grey's armor looks remarkably similar to the Orcs, but small enough for a human.

A small path of destruction across several tables leads to Grey's current predicament.

Grey tries to sit up, but Mol-Droz puts his hand on Grey's chest holding him down.

MOL-DROZ

You think wearing that armor makes you one of us?

Grey sighs. Still in a bit of pain.

GREY

No.

Mol-Droz leans in.

MOL-DROZ

It's bad enough seeing a runt dressed like an Orc. But then I overheard you ordering Orcish Wine?! You must have a death wish. If you want to steal honor, next time try the Dulra!

Grey puts his hands up in defense.

GREY

That's absolutely ridiculous. Dulra wine tastes *awful*.

Mol-Droz SCREAMS in anger and THROWS Grey into the bar. Glasses and bottles crash all over. Grey puts his hands up again, more serious this time.

GREY

Okay. Bad joke. Sorry.

MOL-DROZ

Not as sorry as you're about to be.

Mol-Droz grabs Grey one more time, but out of nowhere, Grey's cat RIME pounces down into Grey's lap. It *hisses* and *swipes* at Mol-Droz, who almost laughs.

MOL-DROZ

Your cat has more fighting spirit than you!

Mol-Droz lifts Grey up. Rime slips to the floor.

MOL-DROZ
I expected more from a fire mage.

Rime gives an aggressive yowl as he readies to pounce.

GREY
No, Rime! It's alright.

MOL-DROZ
No, Grey. It damn well isn't.

EXT. FAULKEN TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

Grey's body CRASHES through the tavern's front wall.

He sails through the night air and lands, skidding through the icy mud. He slides several yards, hitting the trunk of a massive evergreen "wreath tree."

A light snow falls as Grey remains still.

Human onlookers gather nearby as Mol-Droz climbs out of the hole he made in the tavern wall. The rest of his Orc squad follows close behind.

Rime bounds out from the tavern and runs to Grey.

Grey stirs and gets to his feet. More than a little shaky. He sees the crowd growing...

GREY
Okay. You got us.

Grey leans down, lets Rime jump up onto his shoulders.

GREY (CONT'D)
Let me get Rime his food from inside,
and we'll leave.

The human crowd murmurs in confusion. Mol-Droz raises an eyebrow and folds his arms.

MOL-DROZ
Good people of Faulken! I regret to
inform you that your town has been
visited by The Demon of Ufalme!

The humans recoil and horror and disgust.

CROWD

Make him leave!/Gods no!/We don't
want you here!/He'll kill us all!

MOL-DROZ

Fear not! He's leaving!

Grey has a slight limp as he walks through the snow and mud
back towards the tavern.

GREY

Not until I get Rime his dinner.

A thrown glass bottle *shatters* across Grey's chest plate. He
limps on. Mol-Droz and the Orcs don't budge.

CROWD

Heretic!/Stop him!/Murderer!

More thrown objects. Rocks. Random garbage. Grey ignores it.

Grey is halfway there when a PISTOL SHOT echos out. The
crowd gasps and flinches as the bullet BURSTS into white-hot
liquid metal after hitting an invisible magic barrier.

Even though it didn't touch him, Grey stops in his tracks.
Mol-Droz and the Orcs turn to the crowd in surprise.

The shaky gunman in the crowd marches forward, firing a
dozen more shots in quick succession as Grey stares him
down. Each bullet popping like a firecracker before ever
hitting their mark.

The ground around Grey's feet thaws. In moments, the ice and
snow turn to steam. The mud dries into dirt. Stray leaves of
dead grass curl up black and turn to smoke.

The gunman empties his pistol. The last bullets do nothing.
His hand trembles more and more until he drops the gun.

Grey turns back to Mol-Droz and limps forward.

The crowd is in stunned silence. Half of them back away as
several run for cover.

Mol-Droz's squad fall back into the tavern, drawing weapons.

As Grey approaches, Mol-Droz walks backward, never turning
from him or showing fear. Grey steps inside.

INT. RUSTIC TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

Grey approaches his spot at the bar. He picks up an old canvas bag of his belongings off the wooden floor. Behind him, his boots leave a trail of black scorch marks.

He picks up two pucks of canned fish off the bar, then turns to leave, but stops.

Mol-Droz breathes heavy, watching in silence as Grey helps himself to the bottle of Orcish Wine, placing it in his bag.

MOL-DROZ

If I see you again, I'll kill you.

GREY

Gods willing.

Grey walks out, not looking at him.

INT. HERON COCKPIT - NIGHT

Oluso checks his scopes.

OLUSO

Captain? Asset has left Faulken.
Heading south.

Typhon and Shango approach.

OLUSO (CONT'D)

Something must've spooked him. He's cutting through the Wreath Forest.

TYPHON

Exposure to civilians is low, but any stray undead will complicate things.

OLUSO

If he goes far enough, we *could* lose him in there.

SHANGO

How long at our current speed?

OLUSO

Just under an hour.

SHANGO

Cut it in half.

Oluso looks to Typhon.

OLUSO

Sir?

SHANGO

If we lose track, who knows when
he'll turn up again?

Typhon doesn't like it.

TYPHON

Drop stealth and take us to S.S.2.

Oluso raises his eyebrows. Seems risky.

OLUSO

Aye Captain.

Oluso throttles up and the engines scream to life.

EXT. SKY OVER NORTHERN TERRITORIES - CONTINUOUS

The Heron *punches* through clouds at incredible speed.

EXT. GREAT WREATH FOREST CLEARING - NIGHT

Grey crosses a clearing in knee-deep snow with Rime across his shoulders.

GREY

Why can't you be happy with dry cat
food? Like a *normal* cat?

Rime licks his paws. Meows. Grey reaches back and rubs him behind the ears.

GREY

Yeah, I know. I know, buddy.

Wind blows through the trees overhead. Grey stops. Looks up.

GREY

You hear that?

Rime ignores him and goes back to cleaning his paws.

In the distance, the Heron's engines grow closer.

GREY

The hell?

Grey picks up the pace and heads for the treeline as the engines get louder.

He gets behind the first big tree he sees, draws a knife, and waits. Rime is still on his shoulders, half asleep.

The Heron comes over the clearing in a slow descent. It barely squeezes in. The wings clip a lot of big branches on the way down, making an awful racket and kicking up snow in all directions.

As The Heron finally touches down and cuts the engines, the forest gets dark and quiet again.

Grey is wound-up and ready to go, but nothing happens.

The Heron's floodlights kick on, illuminating the surrounding woods.

GREY

Ah, fuck!

Grey drops to one knee and grips his knife, ready to fight.

The Heron's entry ramp lowers, facing Grey's position. A figure emerges from the bright lights. It's Shango.

SHANGO

Grey?! Grey, it's Shango!

Grey doesn't move.

SHANGO (CONT'D)

Grey?! Uh... You can come out now! I give up! Good game!

Chae-rin's angry voice says something unintelligible to Shango. He looks up the ramp.

SHANGO

(sotto to Chae-rin)

What do you expect me to say?

She gives another agitated response.

SHANGO

(sotto to Chae-rin)

Will you let me handle it?

Shango gets off the ramp and steps into the snow.

SHANGO

I know it's been a long time! But...

Grey braces himself, then steps out from behind the tree into the light. Shango freezes.

SHANGO

Grey?

GREY

Shango.

Shango gives a small wave. No idea what to say.

SHANGO

Hey.

Grey grips his knife behind his back. Rime is fast asleep.

GREY

What are you doing out here?

Shango looks around. Rubs his hands together.

SHANGO

Uh... You want a drink?

Grey looks him up and down. A long moment passes.

GREY

Yeah. Sure.

Grey sheaths his knife and removes his helmet, revealing his face for the first time. 30s, white, scruffy with piercing eyes. Shango smiles and waves him over.

Grey smirks and trudges towards him. Rime purrs.

EXT. UNDER THE HERON'S WING - NIGHT

Shango and Grey sit and drink at a small campfire. Rime is curled up in Grey's lap. Snow falls and the forest is quiet.

SHANGO

Gotta say, I'm happy to see that you found a Familiar.

He motions to Rime. Grey is confused, then laughs.

GREY

Rime isn't my familiar.

SHANGO

Really? I'd have thought that a magic user as... *unique* as yourself would've had your pick of magical creatures.

GREY

Nah. I first saw this little guy some years back when I was lost along the Highland border. Been with me since.

Grey pets him. Rime purrs, closing his eyes.

GREY

(to Rime)

No, you're right.

(to Shango)

He actually saw me first.

Shango raises an eyebrow, then downs the rest of his drink. He pours himself another and offers the bottle to Grey.

GREY

I'll finish with something stronger.

Grey removes the bottle of Orcish Wine from his bag and uncorks it.

SHANGO

Whoa, hey! ...Is that?

Grey takes a big swig out of bottle. Shango's eyes go wide.

SHANGO

Hey! Wait!

He jumps up, grabbing the bottle from Grey's hand.

Grey gives a quiet laugh.

SHANGO

Are you trying to kill yourself?!

GREY

S'alright. I've built up a tolerance.

SHANGO

To *Orcish* Wine?

GREY

Took about... fifteen years. But yeah.

Shango shakes his head, hands it back, and sits down.

SHANGO

You look tired.

Grey looks at the bottle and sighs.

GREY

I am. Gods am I tired.

SHANGO

You hear about Nara Naga?

GREY

I did. It's a cruel fucking world.

SHANGO

Things are stable in Ufalme. But we don't know for how long. The Null Fields are soaking up more power than normal, but nothing comes through.

GREY

Isn't "nothing coming through" the whole point? Sounds like they're working just fine.

SHANGO

The Lieutenant I mentioned... She says the same thing happened to the Null Fields around Nara Naga in the days before the attack.

This makes Grey curious. He leans towards Shango.

GREY

Anyone acting strange? Sudden betrayals? Important people going missing? That kind of thing?

SHANGO

Not that I know of. The Lieutenant suspected the undead had someone on the inside too, but that's...

GREY

They're evolving... Or something... I've seen glimpses of it. Basic strategies. Primitive ambushes. I saw a corpse swing their own severed arm at me once. It could get worse.

Chae-rin's voice from behind startles Shango.

CHAE-RIN (O.S.)

Then why haven't you told anyone?

SHANGO

Gods!

Chae-rin strolls up to the fire, eyes on Grey. Shango takes a moment to recover.

Grey nods, acknowledging her.

GREY
Lieutenant Chae-rin, I presume?

CHAE-RIN
Not much of a Lieutenant when my
entire unit is K.I.A.

Rime stirs in Grey's lap. He pets him and looks at the fire.

GREY
Lieutenant, this is the longest
conversation I've had in... maybe a
decade-

Rime purrs. Grey looks to him.

GREY
Right. Sorry, buddy-
(to Chae-rin)
-Longest conversation with someone of
the *two-legged* persuasion. Know why?

He looks to her. She stares, unimpressed.

Grey snaps his fingers, igniting a small flame on his thumb.

GREY
Nobody cares where a demon comes
from, or where it's going. They just
want it gone.

He blows out the flame. His thumb is fine.

GREY (CONT'D)
Even in Tsuru, and other more
"enlightened" places in the southern
realms. Who would listen, let alone
believe anything I had to say?

CHAE-RIN
That's no excuse. You sit here
playing the victim while the undead
close in on Ufalme.

GREY
What do you want me to do about it?

CHAE-RIN
Good question. Why don't you finish
the damn fight?

(MORE)

CHAE-RIN (cont'd)

They say you could take out an entire army if you wanted. For someone with *that* much power, it should be a *snap*.

She snaps her fingers. Waits for an answer.

SHANGO

Alright, let's take it easy-

CHAE-RIN

-No! I want to know why The Demon who controls fire chooses to hide in a suit of armor and cry in the woods while the rest of the world is eaten alive by Titans!

GREY

Because I can't control fire.

Chae-rin and Shango stare, not sure they heard right.

GREY (CONT'D)

I can *start* it...

He lifts an index finger. It lights up.

GREY (CONT'D)

...spread it...

He fans his fingers out. The flame spreads to each one.

GREY (CONT'D)

But once it's there, it's just *fire*. It'll keep spreading as long as there's something to burn.

He leans over and digs into the snow, extinguishing the flames on his hand. He lifts it to show them.

GREY

If I take down a Titan, I also take out a city. And you talk of *armies*?

He scoffs.

SHANGO

I heard you became a fire mage.

GREY

Tried to. But doesn't matter how powerful you are. If you can't "turn it off," you're just a freak.

CHAE-RIN

So you're a walking box of matches.
Perfect. Thanks for your time. Let's
go, Shango.

Chae-rin goes back to the entry ramp.

SHANGO

But... The reports about your magic...

GREY (CONT'D)

Every year when there's a wildfire?
Or in the city when a greedy merchant
burns down a rival's business? Or
when some idiot leaves their stove
on? Doesn't matter where. It somehow
must've been The Demon.

Chae-rin folds her arms and looks to Shango.

CHAE-RIN

We're wasting time. If he's too
scared to help, fuck him.

Shango looks back and forth to them, not sure what to do.

GREY

That's funny. You join a team of
genetically enhanced soldiers in gold
plated power armor, fly with a Prince
across the continent in a secret
military aircraft worth millions, and
tell a homeless man in the woods that
he's a coward for "not helping."

He takes a big swig of wine.

GREY (CONT'D)

How are the common people of Ufalme
are doing? I'm talking about the
border towns. The old. The sick. The
destitute. Anyone in the royal palace
have a daring plan to help *them*?

Shango rubs his temples. He's too drunk for this.

GREY (CONT'D)

Thought not. Far as I'm concerned,
all of you can eat shit.

Grey takes another sip as Chae-rin *storms* back over and
grabs Grey by top of his chest plate. Rime jumps out of his
lap as Chae-rin *shoves* Grey around.

CHAE-RIN

My people are dead! The handful who survived with me are nothing *but* sick and destitute! I'm trying to stop more massacres! You useless fuck!

Shango gets up to separate them. Chae-rin ignores him.

CHAE-RIN (CONT'D)

I don't care if I only had the power to light a *birthday candle*! After I spent every bullet I had, I'd have given my arm if it meant I could start a fire to burn the rest of those monsters!

She drops him to the ground.

CHAE-RIN (CONT'D)

I'll keep fighting. With or without your "magic."

Shango finally gets between them.

SHANGO

Okay. Okay. It's cool.

Grey stands. Dusts himself off. Points at her.

GREY

She's who you need. Not me.

Chae-rin scoffs.

Rime gives a low aggressive growl. Everyone looks down to see him arched up and hissing at the sky.

Grey realizes--

GREY

Get down!

He and Chea-rin drop to the ground, but Shango is too slow. A figure SWOOPS DOWN from above and HITS Shango sending him backwards a dozen feet.

The figure LANDS and straddles him. A beautiful woman, 20s, pale skin, jet black hair, and blue eyes. She *sniffs* him like a wild animal.

Shango gives a scared but confused smirk.

SHANGO

Uh... Hi?

GREY (O.S.)
Get away from her! SHANGO MOVE!

In an instant, the woman's face contorts and morphs into a monstrous visage. She hisses at him. Two pronounced *fangs*.

GREY (O.S.)
They're vampires!

Shango SCREAMS in terror and kicks her off as he staggers to his feet. More ghastly SHRIEKS call down from the sky.

Several more vampires dive in. Grey throws his hands up, *igniting* two of them before they can reach him. They *crash* like meteors and flail in the snow.

One lands on Chae-Rin, knocking her flat. She draws her sidearm and FIRES three rounds into it. It gives a gurgled yelp and drags itself away.

She bolts up and marches after it, firing four more shots into its back. It lays still, wheezing as it gulps for air and black blood spreads on the snow.

Grey makes a hand gesture and the vampire ignites at her feet. It FLAILS and screams as it burns to a crisp.

Shango sprints for The Heron, shouting into his wrist-comm.

SHANGO
Oluso! We're leaving!

He stops as he reaches the entry ramp-

Typhon *storms* down in full Gold Plate Power Armor with a heavy submachine gun. He lets rip on the swarm circling in the sky above them.

Shango keeps low and scurries up the entry ramp behind Typhon. He looks over to the others still fighting-

SHANGO
C'mon!

Two vampires *swoop* in behind him, snatch him off his feet, and lift him into the sky.

SHANGO (O.S.)
TYPHON!

Typhon pivots and fires several shots at them. One is hit and falls. The other keeps climbing with Shango hanging by a thread. Typhon steps forward... lines up his shot...

BANG! The vampire is hit. It falls, but so does Shango! He screams as he tumbles in free fall--

--Two more vampires swing up and CATCH him. They carry him up higher, above the canopy of the massive Wreath Trees.

CHAE-RIN

Grey! Roast 'em!

GREY

The fall would kill him!

Typhon spins and *sprints* up the entry ramp as The Heron's engines kick on. Snow is blasted up as the Heron hovers, blowing out the campfire.

The entry ramp is still down. Chae-rin runs for it and hops on. She turns back to Grey, offering her hand...

Grey hesitates-

GREY

Fuck. Rime! Let's go!

He scoops up his helmet and runs to The Heron. Rime outpaces him and *leaps* onto the entry ramp with ease.

Grey puts his helmet on just in time to take Chae-rin's hand as she pulls him aboard.

The ramp closes as The Heron rises up through the trees.

INT. HERON COCKPIT - CONTINUOUS

Oluso pulls at the controls as Chae-rin jumps into the co-pilot's seat and buckles in.

Grey steps in behind her.

GREY

Give them some space! If we're on them too fast, they'll drop him!

Typhon leans in and removes his helmet.

TYPHON

He still has his wrist-comm. Give me a long range scan.

CHAE-RIN

Aye Captain.

Chae-rin swivels her chair, punches up a map on a separate monitor, and starts a sweep.

Grey keeps his eyes forward.

GREY
Good to see you're still around,
Typhon. You haven't aged a day.

Typhon doesn't look at him, but nods. Still bitter.

TYPHON
Master Grey.

OLUSO
Why'd they take him alive?

GREY
They're hunting, not feeding... Which
means he'll be taken to their hive.

OLUSO
Vampires have *hives*?

TYPHON
Wild ones do.

CHAE-RIN
I've got something...

She points to her screen. Typhon and Grey lean in.

CHAE-RIN (CONT'D)
See this large clearing? It's
overgrown ruins. Shango's signal is
headed straight for it.

Sure enough, the projected path of the dot on her screen
lines up with the satellite view.

TYPHON
Gods, I've been there... Castle Druig.

GREY
Never heard of it.

TYPHON
It was well before your time.

GREY
Old girlfriend?

Chae-rin rolls her eyes and starts a more detailed scan.

TYPHON

A battle. Must be over three hundred years ago now.

He steps out of the cockpit. Chae-rin blinks.

CHAE-RIN

...Is he serious?

OLUSO

Yup.

CHAE-RIN

Heard Paladins live a long time, but...

GREY

He's the oldest. And crankiest.

CHAE-RIN

...How old--

GREY

--It's *impolite* to ask a Paladin their age.

Chae-rin shakes her head, exhausted with him.

INT. DRUIG CASTLE RUINS (BEDCHAMBER) - NIGHT

Dry roots and dead overgrowth twist all through what used to be a king's bedchamber. Instead of candles, various orange glowrods are strewn about.

Shango is dragged in by SKINNY VAMPIRE, male, 30s, and "BLUE-EYES", the female vampire who first pounced on him.

BLUE-EYES

Master? We have a gift.

In front of a cracked and dirty vanity mirror sits the VAMPIRE LORD. Old and pale. Trying to perfect the whole "Nosferatu look." He has no reflection.

He turns and eyes Shango up and down. Impressed.

VAMPIRE LORD

Mmm. A strong specimen.

BLUE-EYES

Not only that, my lord.

She *yanks* Shango forward so the Royal Crest on his shirt is visible. She *shoves* his hand up revealing impressive rings.

SHANGO

Ow! Easy!

BLUE-EYES

He has *royal* blood.

Vampire Lord grins. Mouth full of fangs.

VAMPIRE LORD

A rare gift indeed.

They drag Shango right up to Vampire Lord.

BLUE-EYES

And as a royal, you have the right to claim him as yours alone to enjoy.

Vampire Lord's lip quivers. He reaches for Shango.

VAMPIRE LORD

It has been... so long. By the old rights, I claim him!

SHANGO

Wait! WAIT!

Blue-Eyes beams with pride. Vampire Lord takes Shango in his arms. Shango struggles, but isn't strong enough.

He yells in frustration. This could be it-

SHANGO

GAH! You'd better make sure you fucking kill me! Cause if you don't-

Vampire Lord gives a menacing chuckle.

VAMPIRE LORD

Oh, I intend to drain you *dry*.

He leans in for the bite... Shango *flinches*--

VAMPIRE LORD

Ugh! What?!

Vampire Lord recoils in disgust. Blue-Eyes is confused.

BLUE-EYES

Master?

VAMPIRE LORD

You fools! This man is *poisoned!*
Tainted by ale!

Vampire Lord drops him. Shango can't believe his luck.

BLUE-EYES
Master, we didn't--

VAMPIRE LORD
--His blood smells like a distillery!

BLUE-EYES
A thousand apologies!

Shango smirks to himself on the floor. Tries not to laugh.

VAMPIRE LORD
Throw him into the crypt. Present him
to me once he's sober.

Vampire Lord waves them away. They pick up Shango and drag him out of the hall.

INT. HERON READY ROOM - NIGHT

A holo of the castle is projected on the table. Grey, Typhon, and Chae-rin study it.

Three levels, very gothic, but rundown and overgrown. Shango's "dot" fizzles out as it moves below.

CHAE-RIN
We're losing the signal. Looks like they moved him below ground. Could be a cellar?

TYPHON
The catacombs.

Grey nods.

GREY
Vampires are weak to fire. I can get to him faster if I go alone.

TYPHON
No. A fire in the ruins above Shango puts him at risk. I'll go.

Grey looks to Typhon.

GREY
Guns blazing? Isn't that risky?

TYPHON
I'll put them down fast.

GREY
You *won't* be fast in that armor. See
all that?

He waves to several spots the holomap.

GREY (CONT'D)
They're called *stairs*.

TYPHON
My NavCon can track him once I'm
below ground.

GREY
Then give me his transponder code!

TYPHON
You? Access to Royal codes?

GREY
Fine. I'll do it the hard way.

TYPHON
I am in command of this operation.

GREY
You're not in command of *me*.

Chae-rin pounds her fist on the table.

CHAE-RIN
This is no time for bullshit! We have
two problems. The first is Shango.
The other is a hive of vampires.

She turns to Typhon, and motions to the holomap.

CHAE-RIN (CONT'D)
Captain. My recommendation is that
you rescue Shango while Grey handles
the vampires. Keep the fire just big
enough to draw their attention, but
small enough to not burn the ruins
down on top of them.

GREY
And what about the ones that flee?

CHAE-RIN
Oluso can circle The Heron around the
perimeter and I'll rain down some bad
news from the rotary cannons.

Grey is impressed. He looks to Typhon.

GREY
A Sectam Pilot in a gunner seat? I
like those odds.

Typhon gives the *tiniest* smirk of approval.

TYPHON
Oluso?

He responds via intercom.

OLUSO (O.S.)
Yes Captain?

TYPHON
Take us in. Lieutenant Chae-rin has
the Conn.

OLUSO (O.S.)
Aye Captain. Thirty seconds to drop.

At the end of the table, Rime sleeps halfway inside Typhon's helmet. Typhon gently turns it over, slipping Rime out.

TYPHON
Sorry, little one.

He slides the helmet on. Grey gives Rime a pat.

GREY
Guard the ship while we're gone.

Rime stretches, yawns, and goes back to sleep.

OLUSO (O.S.)
Ten seconds till drop.

Typhon hits the entry ramp button. Wind gushes in as it lowers. The angled rooftop of the castle comes into view.

TYPHON
Are you sure you're ready?

GREY
Why do you ask?

TYPHON
You drank half a bottle of Orcish
Wine. Most people would be dead.

GREY
If I'd known I would be dropping into
a hive of vampires...

Grey shakes his head, then slips his helmet on.

GREY
I'd have finished the bottle.

Grey jumps out of The Heron. Typhon shakes his head and jumps after him.

EXT. CASTLE DRUIG ROOFTOP - CONTINUOUS

Grey lands with a CRASH. The roof sinks a bit.

GREY
Oh shit...

Grey looks up. Typhon is coming in fast.

GREY
Oh *shit!*

Typhon SLAMS down. The roof *groans*, then collapses into--

INT. CASTLE DRUIG BANQUET HALL - CONTINUOUS

Half of the ceiling caves in. Typhon and Grey fall through.

Dozens of vampires recoil in shock.

VAMPIRES
What happened?!/It's a Paladin!/Is
that The Demon?!/By the Gods!

As the dust settles, Typhon checks their surroundings.

A long and bloody table with human body parts is laid out like a buffet. Dozens of vampires are gorging themselves with plates of gore and cups of blood. This isn't "a feeding." It's a *feast*.

TYPHON
Exterminate the bastards.

Grey gets up into a fighting stance. Cracks his neck.

GREY
...Yeah.

Typhon opens up with his heavy SMG, mowing them down.

Grey moves with blistering speed and fury. He rips and tears his way through them with both fists on fire.

Typhon and Grey are almost overwhelmed as they're attacked from all sides. They stand back-to-back as the vampires fling themselves at them, like waves on a rocky shore.

As the burnt bodies pile up, several try to flee through the open hole in ceiling.

EXT. DRUIG CASTLE RUINS - CONTINUOUS

The Heron circles above the castle grounds.

As the vampires escape onto the rooftop, a long burst of rapid cannon fire tears them apart.

INT. CASTLE DRUIG BANQUET HALL - CONTINUOUS

Chunks of vampire flesh rain back down as Grey and Typhon clear the room out.

Grey sees an opening. He jumps onto the table and runs across it, setting fire to the human remains and igniting several fleeing vampires on the way.

Typhon stomps out the injured vampires scrambling across the floor. With his back to the door, the Vampire Lord arrives.

Grey sees him first.

GREY

Doorway!

Typhon spins and aims, but *hesitates*.

Vampire Lord tilts his head. "Do I know you?"

Grey runs over, palms out. Fire erupts around the doorway, but the Vampire Lord is already gone.

GREY

Fuck!

TYPHON

I'll go after Shango! Grey?!

Grey looks to him.

TYPHON (CONT'D)

You must stop him!

Grey nods, then moves to the center of the room and "aims" at the floor. Fire erupts from him like a giant flamethrower. The heat *melts the stone floor*.

Once the floor melts away, a big BURST of flame sends a massive FIREBALL *through the next floor down.*

GREY (CONT'D)

Now!

Grey stops and moves back.

Typhon *leaps* in, falling all the way down to ground level.

Once he's gone, Grey cuts loose and lays waste to the room with a mini-shockwave of flames.

INT. HERON COCKPIT - CONTINUOUS

A monitor near Oluso blinks: "Incoming Transmission."

OLUSO

Uh, Lieutenant? I got a problem.

Chae-rin answers via intercom.

CHAE-RIN (O.S.)

Go ahead.

OLUSO

We're being hailed by The Queen. She's requesting a mission update from Captain Typhon.

CHAE-RIN (O.S.)

Shit.

OLUSO

Uh-huh.

Several moments pass.

CHAE-RIN (O.S.)

Ignore it.

Oluso grits his teeth in strained agreement.

OLUSO

Aye.

INT. CASTLE DRUIG CATACOMBS - MOMENTS LATER

Typhon marches through the dark twisting crypts as he follows Shango's signal. The beeping in his helmet speeds up as he gets further along.

There is a male guttural SCREAM at the end of a long passage, followed sounds of a struggle.

Typhon *sprints*, reaching the source just in time to see-

The limp body of Blue-Eyes falls to the ground. She lands next to the corpse of Skinny Vampire. Shango stands above them holding a bloodied sharpened bone.

Exhausted, he puts his hands on his knees.

Typhon looks him up and down.

TYPHON

Good to see you haven't forgotten your training.

Shango drops the bone to the ground. Still out of breath.

SHANGO

I would've... gotten more... but...

Typhon nods, understanding.

TYPHON

You were drunk.

Shango smiles and nods back. Typhon hands him his sidearm.

TYPHON (CONT'D)

I'm on point. Follow me.

Shango takes it and and wipes his brow.

EXT. CASTLE DRUIG COURTYARD - NIGHT

Typhon and Shango spill out of the front entrance and rush across the courtyard. The entire castle is ablaze.

TYPHON

Oluso! Extraction on my signal!

OLUSO (O.S.)

You got it, Captain. Coming in hot.

The castle walls shake and crumble to the ground. Embers fly everywhere. In the bright wreckage, something moves.

Grey emerges from the flames, dragging the Vampire Lord behind him by the ankle. No sweat.

The Heron *screams* in low overhead, spins, and lands with the entry ramp down. Ready for dust-off.

Grey *chucks* Vampire Lord forward. He lands at Typhon's feet. He's beat to hell, black blood everywhere. But still alive.

Typhon removes his helmet and stares down at him.

Vampire Lord looks up to Typhon with slow recognition.

VAMPIRE LORD

...You?

TYPHON

Yes.

Vampire Lord is pleased. His laugh becomes a bloody cough.

VAMPIRE LORD

All this time... I thought I was the only one who survived.

TYPHON

You didn't.

Grey's armored boot steps on Vampire Lord's chest.

GREY

These ruins are too small for a group your size. Where's the main hive?

Vampire Lord wheezes and looks to Grey.

VAMPIRE LORD

You destroyed my home and slaughtered my family... for a drunken princeling?

GREY

Monsters have no family. They were your *victims*.

VAMPIRE LORD

I've sired progeny for three hundred years. Yet I couldn't match your body count if I aged to be a *thousand*.

Grey PUNCHES him, knocking out teeth. He only laughs.

VAMPIRE LORD (CONT'D)

You can call me "monster," but you will always be The Demon.

The Vampire Lord's laugh is cut short as Grey STOMPS once onto his head, killing him instantly.

Grey looks up at Typhon who stares at the body.

Typhon doesn't say anything, puts his helmet back on, and escorts Shango onto The Heron. Shango gives a fearful look at Grey, like he doesn't recognize him.

Typhon leans in to Shango so Grey can't hear.

TYPHON

It was never about the fire. *That's* why he's called The Demon.

Grey *wipes* his boot off on Vampire Lord's chest as the rest of the ruins collapse behind him.

EXT. NIGHT SKY - MOMENTS LATER

The Heron goes super sonic, back to Ufalme.

INT. HERON LAVATORY - NIGHT

Shango steps out of a hot shower. The small room's walls glow as warm air dries him off.

He leans against the sink, looking into the mirror. He nervously checks for bite marks. Seeing he's clean, he sighs and trembles.

INT. HERON COCKPIT - NIGHT

Chae-rin sits in the co-pilot seat while Oluso goes over the control systems.

OLUSO

What do you think of her?

Chae-rin looks over to Oluso. She smiles.

CHAE-RIN

Intuitive. But it can't compare to my Sectam.

Oluso flips a few switches. He shares a smile with her.

OLUSO

Gods, I'd love to pilot one.

CHAE-RIN

I don't think they make 'em big enough for Paladins.

Oluso considers this.

OLUSO

I know a few engineers who would like the challenge. Just gotta convince the Captain it's not a dumb idea.

She smiles.

CHAE-RIN

Well good luck with that.

INT. HERON READY ROOM - NIGHT

Grey sits on the bench-seat against the wall. Rime lays on his lap. Grey pets Rime, paying close attention to his ears.

Shango enters half dressed. He throws on a gold, ivory, and purple gambeson.

Rime's eyes open. He purrs.

GREY

(to Rime)

Trust me, buddy. You wouldn't have wanted to eat *anything* we saw down there. It was bad.

Rime gives a curt meow. Shango sits across from them and puts on his boots.

SHANGO

Why do you do that?

Grey looks up.

GREY

Do what?

SHANGO

Talk to your cat.

Confused, Grey pets him again.

GREY

He's my best friend. Why *wouldn't* I talk to him?

Shango nods, both understanding and a little sad.

EXT. UFALME PALACE (LANDING PAD) - DAWN

The Queen along with squads of Paladins wait as The Heron comes in for a landing.

As the entry ramp opens, Kedar and The Minister of Hidden join The Queen's side.

Typhon, Shango, Chae-rin, and Oluso disembark. Grey hangs behind at the top of the ramp. He slips his helmet on.

Rime climbs onto his shoulders and nuzzles his neck. He takes a deep breath, exhales slow, then comes down.

Shango gives his mother a *tight* hug.

QUEEN MIIRAN
I knew you'd bring him back to us.

The Paladin guards glare at Grey. He approaches carefully.

Shango lets go and steps away, gesturing to Grey.

SHANGO
Mother, may I re-introduce you to
Grey Koval?

She holds back tears. Grey freezes... then removes his helmet.

The Queen *embraces him* like the long lost son he is.

Rime is annoyed at The Queen invading his personal space.

Grey hugs her back. When she finally steps back, she's at a loss for words. She gestures to Rime, smiling.

QUEEN MIIRAN
Grey and a *grey cat*. Marvelous.

She takes his hand, then Shango's. She leads them back towards the palace.

Grey slips his helmet back on. The Queen gives a sad look.

QUEEN MIIRAN
You don't need that here.

GREY
Here is where I need it more than
anywhere else.

He nods, indicating the squads of Paladins to their sides.

Kedar and The Minister of Hidden exchange worried glances.

INT. THRONE ROOM - DAWN

The Queen leads everyone inside. She stands in front of her throne, beaming.

QUEEN MIIRAN

Now that we're all here, we can get to work. What can you tell us, Grey?

All eyes shift to him.

GREY

About what?

QUEEN MIIRAN

You've been fighting undead for so long. Surely you have unique insights? How do they react to your magic? Does it change from creature to creature? Any information helps.

Grey clears his throat.

GREY

As Chae-rin observed, they seem to be getting smarter.

QUEEN MIIRAN

Yes, we heard. Any thoughts on why this might be happening?

GREY

...No.

The group stands in awkward silence for a moment.

The Minister of Hidden steps forward.

MINISTER

Perhaps if Master Grey were to accompany myself and the Lord-General to an area more fit for... debriefing?

GREY

No thanks. Last time I was here, you both were too keen to cut me up for the King's little science experiment.

The Minister gives an uncomfortable laugh.

MINISTER

Master Grey, I can assure you--

GREY

No. I can assure you.

MINISTER

There's no need for this--

GREY

Funny. I remember you saying something similar when your agents dragged me from my bed in the middle of the night. Kicking and screaming.

KEDAR

(warning)

Grey.

GREY

(mocking)

Lord-General Kedar?

KEDAR

Our only concern here is how to defeat the undead. If you have nothing more, then you're dismissed.

Grey stares at him for a long moment.

CHAE-RIN

Your highness, if I may?

The Queen nods.

CHAE-RIN (CONT'D)

I've seen the scope of what these undead titans can do. And after seeing Grey in combat, I have no doubt of his effectiveness. His skill abilities will prove essential in further engagements.

KEDAR

I've seen his power before. Millions reduced to ash in minutes. Unbridled wrath. I do not question his abilities. Only his judgment.

Grey's fist clinches shut and shakes. He steps forward.

Chae-rin stands firm and raises her hand to Grey. He stops.

CHAE-RIN

He's here by choice. Not force.

KEDAR
Lieutenant, nothing on this *planet*
could force him.

GREY
(to himself)
Talking about me like I'm not here?
That's familiar.

KEDAR
Why are you *here*, Grey?

GREY
Heard you had a monster problem. I'm
going solve it for you.

KEDAR
A demon to fight monsters for us?
This is nonsense.

SHANGO
He's not. A. Demon.

The Queen sits on her throne. Everyone looks to her, but she's focused on Grey.

QUEEN MIIRAN
You've had a long and difficult
journey. I cannot imagine the
terrible things you must have
endured, nor the horrible things
you've seen. But you're home.

Grey looks up at her. His expression hidden by his helm.
Something spooks Rime. He snaps up and looks to the door.

QUEEN MIIRAN (CONT'D)
For now, rest. We shall continue--

A deep rumble. A small tremor *ripples* through the palace.

Grey spins to the door. Everyone looks around in startled confusion. The palace shakes *again*.

Grey sprints out of the palace. Shango is right behind him.

EXT. CAIKAR PALACE - CONTINUOUS

Distant screams of thousands fill the air.

Grey and Shango rush to the front entrance overlooking the city. It's eating itself alive in pure chaos.

Air-sirens roar to life. Plumes of smoke and debris erupt from ground. Thousands of hovercars and aircraft try to flee, but are shot down by defense turrets.

GREY
They were already here...

SHANGO
Kedar!

Kedar runs up, takes one look, and gets to work.

KEDAR
Battle stations! I want Paladins on the ground!

Chae-rin runs past them. Shango grabs her.

SHANGO
Wait! We need you to--

Chae-rin is horrified. She's not here.

CHAE-RIN
I need my Sectam!

She shakes loose from him and sprints away.

SHANGO
Grey?!

GREY
Get inside.

SHANGO
Where can I--

KEDAR
Shango! GET INSIDE!

Kedar walks backwards, grabbing Shango, eyes on Grey.

Heat waves shimmer around Grey. Rime *yowls* and drops to the ground next to him.

Kedar speaks into his wrist-comm.

KEDAR
All Paladins! Clear a path for Grey!

EXT. CITY OF CAIKAR - CONTINUOUS

The pavement splits open as massive arachnid legs emerge. An enormous TRAPDOOR SPIDER the size of a Ferris Wheel climbs out of the ground.

Coming up right behind it, a BLACK WIDOW SPIDER the same size. Both are covered in rot. Undead human soldiers pour out of the holes in the ground and flood the streets.

EXT. CAIKAR PALACE - CONTINUOUS

Grey gets ready to run as fire erupts from *under his armor*. He looks to Rime--

GREY

Rime! Now!

Rime plants down all four paws. He trembles as an unsettling sound of bones cracking and flesh squelching fills the air.

Ice forms around Rime as he grows in size. The stone *cracks* under him. The air between Rime and Grey turns to *steam*.

When it's over, Rime looks closer to a saber-toothed cat and is the size of a double-decker bus. His fur *shimmers* as if covered in frost. He ROARS louder than any lion.

Grey's body *ignites*. A wild fire inside a suit of armor.

Shango and the others stare in horrified awe.

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF SHOW