**CHAPTER 24 PUNITOR JUSTICE**

The Seekers followed Swan back through the catacombs, eventually returning to the area of the fresh water pool. She pointed to the south-east door, the one she had avoided earlier.

“Seekers, once through that door we will be going through a series of rooms, apartments and chambers that make up the personal living quarters of Quamara, her cronies, allies and slaves. Whether they plan a once only all-out attack or a series of encounters to wear us out, I do not know. But this I do know. They will show no mercy. Humans they despise, those of mixed elven blood, they consider abominations to be eliminated. All others are only fit as slaves. They are now creatures of darkness, allied with Sharrans and drow. So steel yourselves, my beloved comrades, watch out for each other, for at the end of this day only one group will survive, them or us.”

She looked to Gideon. “Some of you wanted to take prisoners, for information. There is none to be had here. As they purposely kill the Tree, purposely profaned their own family ancestors; they are cursed by the Sheldarine; condemned to death. This cell of the Eldreth Veluuthra is a boil that must be lanced, a cyst to be cut out.”

The others seemed stunned by this uncharacteristic speech. Neon just blinked rapidly, realizing these were not Swan’s words, but those of the nominated punitor.

“Ah, Swannie, just what was that all about?’ began Kilzadi.

“Are you simple, mage?” interrupted Risca, running his fingers along Guifoon’s keen edge. “It is clear. No prisoners; kill them all.”

Oku, always dependable moved to stand beside her. ”My spear will do your bidding.”

Gideon had sensed Swan’s words to be divinely inspired. He let out a breath. “As you say then; no prisoners.”

The scout nodded to all of them. Then she glared at Mandi. “Remember what I vowed to you earlier. Your next betrayal will mean your death.”

The lass returned a hate glare from behind Neon’s back. If someone had read her mind then, it would have saved the Seekers much grief later.

Neon indicated that he could hear nothing at the door. He signed that it was bolted from the inside. Swan shrugged that it did not matter and signaled Okul. Two of the half-dragon’s forceful kicks broke down the mechanism. The room revealed itself to be an empty opulent parlor. Two divans upholstered in wyvern leather faced each other across a golden brazier of everlasting light. It sat on a large owlbear rug. The walls were covered in decadent expensive tapestries. The wall opposite had 2doors, one in each corner.

Kilzadi whistled. “There is much value here. That brazier is pure gold. Someone liked their luxury.”

“When our duty is done, we will return for our rewards” replied the scout. She pointed to the south-east door. ‘There next.” By now, the others had learned not to question her choices.

The door was unlocked and entrapped. Ready for combat, the Seekers entered only to find an empty large opulent bedroom. The floor was outfitted with thick rich carpets, obviously Sembian. A desk and chest of drawers of well-polished weirwood surrounded a large bed covered in expensive Sembian silks. Under the bed was a large locked trunk. Empty bookshelves lined the walls. The bedroom had a feminine essence to it, as various creams and scent bottles lined the dresser top; one even read ‘scale polish crème.’ Frills edged the sheets. A stand-up mirror occupied a corner. Bottles of liqueurs and fine delicate crystal glasses lined a shelf. The drawers were filled with delicate feminine apparel. A jewellery box held necklaces, bracelets, earrings and finger rings, made of precious metals and set with precious stones. A large stand-up closet was packed with deluxe, upper class gowns and dresses. On the west wall was another door.

Neon, with Swan, checked out the chest while the others kept watch.

“Why so much Sembian goods?” mused Risca.

Kilzadi promptly answered. “We know the Eldreth Veluuthra here have been raiding caravans and from that note we found, I would guess that some major Sembian trading companies have been in contact and are paying to have their caravans not raided, as implied in the note from Mirabeta Selkirk. Luckily for us, this Quamara creature apparently has expensive tastes.”

Ensuring that the trunk was not trapped, Neon quickly unlocked it. Inside it was filled with gold and silver coins, but of a kind not minted since the elven Great Retreat. But what caught the eye and drew a growl from Swan were the pieces of ancient elven jewelry.

“These are from the catacombs” she growled. “She defiled her ancestral family’s rest for this; she is cursed in many ways. Let us go on.”

The west door was again trap free and unlocked. It opened into a mirror image bedroom with a door on the north-east wall. This bedroom had a definite masculine look and feel. The walls bore banners; the rings of Sharr, the pierced skull of the Eldreth Veluuthra, the ensign of the Morcane drow house. Inbetween the banners were an assortment of weapons, ranging from ancient elven trick bows and thin blades to modern drow scorpion chains and longknives. The bed here was covered in black and silver beddings with red pillows. It too had an identical chest beneath it.

Instead of wines and liqueurs, there were bottles of spirits; dragonscar whiskeys, Daggerdale drip brandy, Sembian spice rum, two-knight single malt as a few examples. Still covered in dust was a rare bottle of Damaran ‘grune tod’; the green death. Attached to the bottle was a silk ribbon with a tiny card:

*To my darling Trizeen- enjoy it as much as I enjoy you. Quamara*

Mounted on the walls were heads; owlbear, wyvern, peryton, and a young adult black dragon. The closets contained elaborate dressing gowns, robes, shirts and pantaloons; those preferred and worn by the nobility of several Faerunian nations. An ancient elven ceremonial armor suit of full chain mail, bedecked with pearls, adorned with electrum and gold, the kind of which had not been seen in over several hundred years, stood in a corner. Opening to Neon’s skilled fingers, the chest revealed to be full of gold pieces.

The rogue pointed to the door. Swan shook her head. “No. That just leads back to the parlour. There is a secret door in the other corner. But before we go through, we should prepare ourselves for immediate battle. They showed us their treasures to taunt us. They expect to destroy us. The attacks must come now. Let us ready ourselves.”

The Seekers had done this many times before. Gideon called upon Kossuth’s blessing. Then he strengthened Neon. Kilzadi used his arcane mastery to hasten the group. Then he ensured that Mandi remained close and safe with him. Swan prayed quietly for Solonar’s divine favour. When all were prepared, she led them to the secret door.

It opened into a very large storeroom. Several massive barrels stood hither and thither. An assortment of tools, axes and saws were stockpiled in corners. Piles of well-cut weirwood lumber lay about. In the north-east corner a thick door was bolted shut. The Seekers moved quietly and cautiously; Swan at point, Okul and Neon on her wings; behind at center, Risca and Gideon. Kilzadi led Mandi in the rear and off to the side. The party were more than halfway across when the attack began.

The first indication was the sound of air being displaced outwards. It came from behind them. Each Seeker turned to spy two figures standing by the door they entered. The sound indicated they had dimensioned door in. One was the drow priestess they had encountered earlier, sporting a hateful smirk. There was no doubt the second figure was Quamara Keleidsa.

Her attire was an ancient imperial elven regal robe which outlined and emphasized her elf-shaped body. Jeweled bracelets wrapped around her wrists. Her fingers bore precious metal gemmed rings. A ruby necklace rode upon her throat. But it was her physical appearance that identified her. It was rumored that to extend her lifespan well beyond that of an elf, she had performed a dark sorcery to merge the spirit of a green dragon with her own at the expense of the dragon’s life. This she had done well before the fall of Myth Drannor. The rumour was true.

Angled amber draconic eyes shone malevolence. Her features were elongated; her teeth exposed by her snarl, were exaggerated and pointed. Her nails were elongated as to resemble small claws. Pale olive green scales covered below her chin and torso, blending into a dark emerald green down her back. Two small vertical dragon horns jutted above her forehead, peaking and peeking through her shoulder-length auburn hair now striped green.

Before the group could react, she breathed out a cone of noxious, acidic greenish gas to engulf them. As the gas began to fill the room, the priestess led out an ugly laugh. The two of them then vanished as four draegloth appeared to take their place. The demon-drow half-breeds then rushed screaming to the attack.

For some reason[**Lord No’s. NOTE- the reason becomes evident much later in the saga of Darkness Rising**] Quamara had angled her breath weapon so as to miss Mandi and so Kilzadi who stood beside her. The Desert Fox reacted quickly. A quick incantation produced a gust of wind. This had the effect of dispersing the gas away from Okul, Swan and Neon, but piling it up around Risca and Gideon. Acid burning away at their eyes, flesh and lungs, they would have been easy targets for the draegloth. Except for two events, as they hacked, coughed and gaged, Gideon was able to use his psionic powers to generate a force screen around himself and the dwarf. This kept the gas out long enough for them to recover, but also limited their air to a bubble inside the screen. Also the three remaining Seekers free of the choking gas, were now unrestricted to engage the demonspawn. Each used tactics similar to their first encounter.

Okul just charged as the gold dragon combat challenge gave rise in the chamber. Jutting his great spear forward, he allowed two of the draegloth’s arms to grab hold of it as he used it as a lever to jump to the side while blocking the secondary arms. Swinging around, his spiked mailed gauntlet, powered by his huge strength, smashed into the back of the head of the half-fiend, staggering it. Two more quick smashes knocked it to the ground, where a last blow crushed the demon’s skull.

Neon used his mobility and dodged any blows. At the same time, he would drive his rapier deep into demon flesh, spring back and repeat the process. The enraged monster could only flail at empty air as it grew weaker. Finally one last thrust drove the rapier deep into its heart ended its struggles.

Swan strode up and down walls, keeping out of reach as she sent arrow after arrow into the beast. Under the Great Archer’s favour, her arrows struck true and deep every time. Eventually, an arrow through its throat killed it. This left only one last draegloth.

Scholars will forever debate whether it was Neon’s stabbing the creature through its crotch up into its heart, or Swan’s arrow piercing through its forehead into its brain that did it in as both seem to happen simultaneously. Regardless, it was eliminated.

Kilzadi’s second gust of wind had cleared away the last of the gas allowing Gideon to release his force screen. The draconic gas was replaced with the stench of demonic blood and offal.

Swan pointed to the west wall. “This attack was to soften us if not kill us. Another secret door is there. Once through it, we will face their full might. Are we ready?”

Risca just growled as he was too enraged and eager for combat to speak coherently. The others just nodded. Gideon took a long breath. “We have come this far. Let us finish this. No prisoners?” The last being a question directed at the scout; a time to determine if the conditions had changed.

“No prisoners” repeated the scout. She turned to Kilzadi. “You know what to do first?”

The sorcerer nodded. “I will negate their breaths.”

Gideon resigned himself and had the last words. “So be it then. Let’s do it Seekers.”

The door opened into a geological wonder of a large cavern; something that could possibly only be repeated in the Underdark. Multicoloured stones, shaped as flowery blooms blanket the walls and floor. Stalactites of all rainbow colours hung from the ceiling. Among the stony flowers grew hundreds of soft glowing mushrooms, some as large as Halflings. These mushrooms were those types cultivated by the drow. They knew that they were inside the cliff they had climbed to reach the Tree. The cavern extended 25 feet westward and 15 feet southward but most of it turned north 30 feet from the door and then turned west again.

Swan led them to this point. After 20 feet the cavern turned once again, this time south. It was in the large space of this juncture that the Eldreth Veluuthra and their allies made their presence known. Leaping out from behind a rock alcove was the last draegloth, while three flying trolls descended from the ceiling. These creatures aligned in a convex arc facing the Seekers. From behind the screaming monsters, three figures materialized; the drow cleric, the Dragon Lady and a magnificent specimen of a drow warrior.

Taller and more muscled than the average drow, his chest was protected by a darkened mithral breastplate. A regal black velvet cloak covered his back, over which hung his long silver hair, tied in a warrior’s braid. Knee-high black leather boots and studded leather combat trousers completed the look. His left hand held a keen-edged long sword; his right a drow ‘bista killian’ short sword. His red maleficent eyes scanned the Seekers, searching for the foremost fighter. His glances alternated between Okul and Risca, finally settling on the dwarf. With a smug look, he pointed his long sword at Risca; the challenge unmistakable. This had to be Trizeen. All this took a fraction of a moment as the Dragon Lady shouted ‘matta ii refutte’. Battle was joined!

Quamara and the trolls lifted off, breathing as they flew. Clouds of the deadly green acidic gas began to fill the chamber. But now the Seekers were ready for this eventuality. Previously prepared, Kilzadi loosed an empowered gust of wind that filled the entire cavern. The near sub-gale wind force blew back the gas. It would not be a factor in the combat at this time.

Of course Risca accepted the challenge. He so much wanted to take on the drow; become a scourge to that race. Now was an opportunity to take down what appeared to be ‘super male drow’. Raging with holy fury, he charged. Rolling in he struck Guifoon against the drow warrior’s ankle, even as he dodged the long word swipe and shield deflected the bista killian. But instead of a crippling blow, Guifoon bounced off the drow’s boot. Before he could adjust to this situation, a troll landed behind him, its claws scouring the dwarf’s back. As he turned to the troll, he avoided a sword thrust, only to be sliced by the bista. Flanked by troll and drow, even raging, he knew he was in trouble.

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Okul raced in only to have a troll drop in front of him, so sudden that he crashed into the monster. It was as if he had run into a force wall. It hurt! The half-dragon troll’s already tough, scaly skin, its already high strength had been magically enhanced. Instinctively, slashing down, the great spear managed only the tinniest of cuts; a pocket knife against thick bark. Snapping, the troll’s teeth and claws raked the golden dragon son’s, leaving deep furrows. Okul knew he was in trouble.

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Gideon called up Kossuth’s blessing even as he moved forward to put himself in the spell’s range of the drow priestess. She too was incanting a spell. A few more steps in, and instead of unleashing Kossuth’s curse, he felt the divine tie to his god severed, the spell lost. At the same time, he felt himself held immobile as the drow’s spell inflicted him. Slowly she now approached him, a nasty smirk flushed on her face. “A problem, priest? Cannot move, cannot even twitch? Cannot sense the presence of your weak god, weak priest; perhaps because you are standing in an area of desecration, my desecration. Oh, my spells work just fine. Perhaps because my goddess is more powerful, oh well, your loss. Time for a sacrifice to Her; just a little skinning. Just you, the dwarf and the half-dragon. The rest are already claimed. Quamara has prolonged torture plans for that punitor-select and one of our allies has selected that red-headed half-elf as a boy-toy.” As for that mage of yours, we will harrow out the secret of the Draconic Ritual before we disembowel him. **[Lord No’s Note-the priestess had already begun to feel the effects of the ‘Evil Genius Syndrome, which is why she exposed their future plans.’]** She drew out a large curved scraping knife, as she advanced towards her helpless prey; the mark of Shar prominent on the handle. Gideon’s mind was his own, even as his physical body was immobile. He knew he was in trouble.

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Swan raced up the wall even as the Dragon Lady rose up. The scout knew that the serving of punitor justice to Quamara was hers and hers alone. But before she could draw her bow, balls of dark shadow missiles struck, passing through her armour to score and burn the flesh underneath. Her aim spoiled, shutting down the pain, she barely managed to evade the viscid glob that splattered next to where she had been. Should that spell of green slimy, acidic glue have struck her, she would have been held still, rooted to the wall; at the mercy of the merciless Dragon Lady. As she landed, more shadow missiles struck, followed by another glob. Again, hurt, she evaded but could not go on the offence. The pattern repeated a third time. Swan realized that if Quamara held more of these spells, she was being worn down and sooner or later one would get her. She was in trouble.

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Neon had drunk a potion to make himself more graceful in combat style. He advanced at double speed towards the draegloth. The last troll landed behind. The rogue did not sidestep immediately but continued towards the fiend bred. As the troll claw swiped, he rolled enough so that the claw strike hit the fiend instead. At the same time he stabbed it through its ankle. It was then he realized that things had changed; his weapon barely penetrated. The minions had been changed to make them more effective against the Seekers. That had been the purpose of the previous encounters; to gauge their strength and neutralize it. Unless the Seekers did something unexpected and unaccounted for, they were all in trouble, and doomed.

As happened at the lumber camp, battlefield commander instincts arose. *What would they not expect from the Seekers?* Then the answer loomed. *They do not expect us to hurt each other. And Kilzadi is unengaged.* The Seekers had done this before but not at the scale they needed now. He trusted that they would understand and were tough enough to survive.

“Kilzadi”, he roared his order over the combat din, “fireball, empowered and enlarged now!”**[Lord No’s Note- the reader must remember that Neon Wilde first experienced metamagical terms and meanings from his mother’s diligent in-home arcane teaching (she had wanted him to go to wizard school) and so due to this and his adept learning, he knew exactly what he was calling for.**

The sorcerer had been at the rear, out of the combat area, watching over Mandi. He could see that the Seekers were in trouble .Turning back to his charge to reassure her, he was startled by her look of victorious anticipation as she too surveyed the combats. Before he could puzzle it out, he heard the rogue. He did not question the order in the midst of battle but the intensity of what was called for made him hesitate for a heartbeat. Then his trust for Neon’s battle sense overcame his reluctance. His draconic tattoos flared sun-bright as he expended the required magical energy for the spell.

With a din louder than thunder, the entire cavern was transformed into a raging inferno. For a few instances, nothing was visible except noise, blinding light, heat, confusion and screams of agony.

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Okul burned painfully, but not as much as one would expect from such a holocaust. He was after all, the son of a gold dragon; and gold dragons were creatures of the Fire. Trolls and green dragons on the other hand…

When the light of the blast dimmed enough to see, Okul, ears ringing, found himself, in front of the super-troll whose wings were so seared, they hung useless. Its once green draconic scales had blackened in the blast. Rivulets of green blood seeped through the scale contours. Its sharp-toothed mouth was opened in a scream inaudible to the Son of the Dragon as the bells in his ears were slowing diminishing. Okul was an experienced battle-tested warrior. In combat, he did not waste time on wondering who or why. The green blood indicated the loss of magical enhancements. He struck! A mailed fist punch, backed by his great strength, knocked the troll to the ground. This was followed immediately by his spear stabbing through its neck; and again, twice more in quick succession. Decapitated, the monster died. He then surveyed his surroundings, in quest of his next opponent.

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On the opposite side of the chamber, Gideon burned painfully, unable to physically react, but not as much as one would expect from such a holocaust. He was after all, a Chosen of Kossuth, and Kossuth, after all, was the FireLord. Female drow priestesses on the other hand…

When the light of the blast dimmed enough to see, Gideon found himself still held immobile and spell less. The priestess had screamed herself hoarse, as she suffered grievous burns. Hunched over by the agony, attempting to repair herself, her attention was away from the cleric. He saw his chance. While his body was inert, his mind was still free to act. Psionic telekinetic power freed and lifted his crystal headed mace away from his belt and up along his side. As it slid up and away, his will instigated its embodied power. It began to glow as if a fire inside, brighter and brighter. By the time, the priestess righted herself and through still half-blinded eyes, she focused on what should have been a still helpless victim. In front of her, the mace was speedily descending towards her head. *Kossuth smite* he thought as the holy weapon smashed her forehead’ made its way through her head and out the back of her skull, spewing blood, bone bits and brain matter in its passage. *So much for skinning me. And so much for your* *goddess, bitch.* He gave a mental sigh as the sounds of combat reached him but he still had to wait for the spell to wear off before he could re-join the Seekers.

Neon knew what to expect. This knowledge prepared his actions. As the extreme fireball exploded, he was already pirouetting, whirligiging, and gyrating to dance in-between the flames. He managed to evade the majority but some still stung. He suffered only minor burns as his eyesight readjusted. His troll opponent had been completely incinerated, leaving only the heavy- scorched demon spawned draegloth. Even its abyssal connection could not reduce the maximum fire damage. The heat had fused each of its claws, top to bottom. Most of its tough harried scales had been burned off. As it screeched in pain and outrage, Neon drove his rapier through the back of its throat. Then as it gagged, he reached around to draw his razor’ rogue-friend’ dagger, Osier’s gift, across the front of its throat. It collapsed, bleeding out; no longer a threat. Withdrawing the rapier, he looked around to survey the battlefield.

Risca burned. He accepted the pain as a battle cost; his rage and fury and his recent acceptance of the doctrine of the gods of his fathers, of Moradin, but especially of Dumathion; Keeper of the Secrets Under the Mountain, sustained him. He burned painfully, but less than expected. When the blast glare cleared, the troll flanking him had been totally combusted into atoms. This left him free to face the drow warrior mano a mano. Trizeen had suffered as well, especially from the glare. Tendrils of burnt smoke rose from his fancy armor as he staggered back, blind for the instant. The dwarf, hair and beard half singed off, skin red, black and brown from burns, chortled as he looked forward to gutting this drow. He now issued his own challenge;’Crull’ and attacked.

Risca knew that staying low was not an advantage. Trizeen’s magical boots protected him up to the waist and his magical armour the rest, deflecting any weapon away, as he had learned before the blast. The drow was well protected everywhere except for…

He used Guifoon to fend and parry the expected long sword thrust, holding it away for the required second. As the bista short sword sliced in from the side, he managed to shield-catch it long enough to crouch and then leap. Trizeen was in effect weaponless for that minuscule time; but it was long enough for Risca’s helmet and dwarf hard skull, powered by his weight, strength and momentum to crash under the drow’s chin. Risca’s battle experience had taught him that if you cannot slice it or puncture it, then you crush it. The force of the dwarf head meeting drow chin was enough to snap and crumble jaw bones and teeth; lift the drow several feet into the air to land flailing on his back. Even before Trizeen could register what had just occurred, Risca leaped again to land both feet on the drow’s chest; breaking and fracturing ribs. Trizeen’s last vision was of a grinning, bloodied, burned and scarred dwarf swinging a bloodied well-notched battle axe at his face. The last words he heard were ‘she said no prisoners’. The raging dwarf, looking away from the dead drow, examined the battlefield, hoping for more drow to gut.

Swan just barely dodged another viscid glob. Bits had splashed onto her, the acidic glue burning, adding to the agony of the previous swarm of shadow missiles. But she was in punitor mode and just grinded her teeth against the pain. What she needed was time; a respite to go from defense to offense. Then regardless of the sounds of combat all around her, her keen ears caught Neon’s order to Kilzadi. She had already experienced this action, once in the Shadow Plane and once in… regardless she knew how to brace herself. Hearing Kilzadi’s final spell word, she wrapped her energy protection cloak around her, and prepared to evade. The immensity of the blast when it arrived surprised even her.

Despite her protection and her evading, heat leaked through, burning exposed flesh; face and hands. Even so, as soon as the white glare had vanished, she was poised, upside down on the cavern ceiling, bow ready. Seeing the Dragon Lady, she released the special arrow.

Quamara had been ready for the heat, but not for the blast. She was hurled hard against a wall, smashing into it. Her eyes were still glared out as the fireball died. Her wings were damaged from the impact and so could only keep her afloat, not fly. As her vision cleared, she saw the arrow heading towards her.

The dragon bane arrow struck deep, by-passing all her safeguards. Before she could react, the second dragon-bane arrow struck. The convulsion caused her to lose control; shrieking, she free fell to the floor. As she struggled to rise, the third arrow pinned her down. She could not think to use her spells. Filled with torment she spied the punitor who had just landed beside her. Full of hatred, she opened her mouth to use her breath weapon.

Swan moved just as her second arrow struck down the elf-dragon. As she leaped down, she released the third one to pin down the leader of the Eldreth Veluuthra. Landing, she unsheathed Coldkiss. Quamara, eyes, full of hate, opened her mouth as a dragon would to breathe out. Merciless, staring into the half-dragon’s eyes, Swan uttered the death sentence of punitor justice;’ voi es daman ti morte’. Then she rammed Coldkiss into Quamara’s mouth, severing its way up into her brain and released the short sword’s magic. The utter cold flash froze the brain and head. The punitor-select, justice served, regarded the rest of the Seekers. All seemed to be standing victorious over a fallen enemy and observing each other. No other potential enemies were in sight. The Eldreth Veluuthra had been extinguished.

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Wordlessly, they all moved towards Gideon. As they arrived, the spell and desecration on Gideon wore off and he was able to once again move freely. He began to use Kossuth’s blessings to help heal the Seekers.

Kilzadi watched as the Seekers were victorious. Elated, again, he turned to Mandi, to reassure her and again her look of disappointment puzzled him. He ceased pondering as he led her to the group.

Okul reached Swan and gathered her up. He could feel how drained of energy she was. In a short time, all were healed and certain that their goals had been achieved. They had destroyed the local Eldreth Veluuthra and rescued Mandi.

‘And so now?” inquired Kilzadi, looking at Swan. She knew what he had in mind and that he was justified. “Now?” she responded, “now the rest of you go back and collect the treasure we left behind. Then we rest and go home.” Speaking these words, she could feel the punitor essence leaving, reducing her to an exhausted state. As she felt herself fall into a recuperative slumber, in her lover’s arms, she reached out to the Tree. “Now you die in peace.”

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Far away in Sembia, a dark elf hand closed a scrying ball. Jezz the lame, leader of the Vhaeraunian drow, had his own plans for the Cormanthar Forest. The activities of the Eldreth Veluuthra and the Morcanes were interfering with those plans. He would have had to move against them soon. But now that urgency was gone.

*These Seekers would make excellent proxy allies, as long as they did not know who was the puppet master.* Plans began to form.

Even farther away in Thay, a skeletal hand closed a scrying ball. Szass Tam, zulkir of necromancy and de facto ruler of Thay sat back, pondering his next move. He had been, off and on, because of the priest of Kossuth, keeping track of the Seekers, ever since their return from the Shadow plane. They had shown themselves to be truly effective in delaying the Darkness Rising. The lich was still undecided whose side the Red Wizards would aid. Plans began to form.

…*to be continued…*