

Tales of Azeroth

The Eversong Blades (Part I)

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Finally, she could see someone walking on the path towards the eastern end of the forest. She had been lying hidden on the rock overlooking the way for almost an hour. As the person came closer, she was able to identify him as her target. It was indeed the mage she had been waiting for. Now, the moment had come. She couldn't fail at this - this was way too important.

Alarea Veovis eyed the mage. The elf had dark blonde hair and was wearing a typical mage robe, but it was wide enough not to limit his stride. His staff was a robust metal rod with a blue crystal mounted in a socket on top of it.

He was almost beneath her. Silently, Alarea drew her two daggers and took a deep but noiseless breath. Then, within a heartbeat, she rose, stepped forward and jumped.

The tip of one of her daggers was about to sink in his neck when a shockwave flung her backwards. With an elegant salto she landed on the pathway, about ten meters away from her target. She focused on the energies stored in her ring's crystal and tapped into the power of magic, as she had practised so many times. Stepping through the shadows, she appeared behind the mage and was about to attack - only to see the mage teleport forward by a few meters to a safe distance again.

Of course, this would have been too easy, Alarea thought. Her attempt of a quick and silent kill had turned into a battle, and now she had to prove she was capable of completing a mission without the element of surprise as well.

This was the mage's chance for a counter-attack. Freezing cold winds shot out of his hands and engulfed her body. Not only were they congealing her skin; they were slowing her down and pushing her away. Again drawing on shadow magic, Alarea created a shadow cloak which surrounded her and absorbed the cold winds. It had taken her a long time to learn that spell during her training. This was one of the situations confirming that it was worth it. She couldn't use it to defend herself against physical attacks and explosions, but it was great to absorb magical spells. Warming up and running forward again, she reached the mage and aimed for his head.

The mage was forced to block with his staff and the winds died away, as did her shadow cloak. While the mage blocked her right hand attack, she flipped the dagger in her left hand by throwing it upward and catching it so that she now held it backwards. She stepped with her left foot to his side and wheeled around him. When she swung at his back, another shockwave caught her and prevented the lethal blow.

Alarea knew she needed a different approach when a new strategy flashed in her mind. Getting back up she threw both her daggers at the mage. As she had hoped, he blocked her daggers with a barrier, causing them to drop to the ground. While he was distracted, she pulled one of the smoke bombs from her belt, ignited it and threw it at

him. The mage conjured an ice bolt and launched it at her, but just before it was supposed to hit, she dodged to the side.

The mage was hidden in a cloud of smoke by now, but Alarea had already pinpointed his location. Darting through the smoke, she was able to grip his staff, twist his arm and swing him around. With her boot, she flicked one of her daggers from the ground up into the air. She caught it in mid-air and kicked him in his back.

What she tried then was something she had never done before. Predicting his path, she shadow-stepped through the cloud and appeared in front of the mage, who still thought she was disarmed. He stumbled directly into her dagger - and vanished.

The world around her started to turn and fade. Alarea felt dizzy and blinked, and when she opened her eyes she looked at Lormandil's face.

"Well done", her trainer said, smiling proudly.

"Congratulations, Alarea", Tasarion, Leader of the Eversong Blades, said. "You have passed all of the three trials and completed your training. In the Trial of Knowledge, you have proven your education: topics like math, languages, geography, history, politics, and - of course - the facets of your arsenal and skills as an assassin.

"In the Trial of Infiltration, you have proven your skills of subtlety and improvisation. You managed to get insider information we carefully spread among people in the nearby village. There, you elicited information from scholars, officers, and politicians, as well as simple townsfolk by using your charm, clever questioning, or unseen eavesdropping.

"In the Trial of Assassination, you have proven your ability to take out targets. It is not always possible to kill an enemy instantly from the shadows, and you have shown that you can still handle the situation when it comes to direct combat.

"So, I hereby declare you a full member of the Eversong Blades", he said and shook her hand. "Use this day to celebrate, because tomorrow, I will brief you about your first mission."

Tasarion left the room. Gaelin, the mage she had just "killed" - or rather, whose spectre she had attacked - moved to follow their leader.

"Gaelin, wait", she called after him and he turned around. "Tell me, has anyone ever managed to take you out undetected in the trial?"

Gaelin smiled. "No", he confessed. "You were fighting me in an arena I created. I always knew your position. Besides, I see recruits when they are training and I know their style. In the trial, I want everyone to do something creative - and that's what the trial is about. It's about how you deal with the situation when a more discreet assassination attempt fails because the target was prepared. All I can say is that you were one of the quickest."

Without waiting for a reply, he left as well. As she was watching him exit the room, a hand patted her shoulder. It was Lormandil, the old, scarred elf with long, white hair who had been her trainer.

“Congrats, you did well, lass”, he said. “The trials may only *emulate* real situations, but you have mastered them all. I have seen you come so far over the years. I know that, whatever you may encounter on your missions, you can handle yourself.”

“Thank you”, Alarea replied happily. Then her gaze wandered to another elf, who had been silently standing in the corner, watching her the whole time.

Alen grinned when their eyes met. He waited until Lormandil was gone before he came closer.

“They may not have said it out loud”, he told her. “But the Eversong Blades have just inaugurated their best agent.”

That night, while Alarea sat on her bed just before her daily meditation, she felt joy. After all these years as an apprentice of the Blades, she had finally become a full member. She reached over to her bedside table and took the ruby necklace.

I'm so sorry for leaving you, sister, but I'll prove it was worth it.

One day she would find a way to return the necklace, but for now, she kept it as a memento of her childhood. She enclosed it in her hands and thought back.

Her first weeks with the Blades had been tough. Their headquarters were located somewhere in the eastern rural areas of Quel'Thalas. When the recruits had been dropped off, she had been astonished by the huge underground mountain complex. She still wondered how Tasarion had managed to find and acquire it for their group.

The base provided everything they needed: training rooms, class rooms, bedrooms, a kitchen, community halls, a laboratory, a library and a command center. About two dozen people lived here and - due to the space, the relatively small number of recruits, her age, and the fact that she was one of only two female residents - she had even been given her own room.

Everything had been new when she had moved in. She had known in her heart that the decision to come here was right, but that hadn't kept her from becoming homesick. The sudden change of life after losing both parents and leaving her sisters had gnawed on her conscience.

It didn't help that the other recruits had been complete strangers. Most of the Blades were much older, and Alarea had had a hard time finding friends to help her acclimate to her new home. Lormandil was a good trainer, but when she did not train with him, she craved contact with others. Shalindra, the other female recruit, quickly proved herself to be one of Alarea's least-favorite colleagues. She didn't like Shalindra's meddling and lordly behavior. It might have originated from her former upper-class upbringing or the fact that she had to live in a den full of men.

There were two very young recruits: one was Zeno, a young elf with short black hair who had barely been considered an adult when they had joined. Alarea had estimated him to be about the age of her older sister, who had seen her sixteenth autumn not long before the fall of Silvermoon. Zeno always annoyed her by calling her “Daggers”, a habit he had developed during one of their first combat training units because of her

preference for those weapons. Alarea quickly found him to be an overconfident, arrogant idiot with a weird sense of humor. Despite this, she accepted him.

The other one was Alen. He looked the same age as Zeno and had shoulder long, dark blonde hair. Alen was a very pleasant fellow and the closest thing she had to a true friend. Often, they had sat for hours talking about all kinds of topics. He was a good listener who tried to understand her problems and help her if necessary. He had also made their group training sessions with Zeno much more bearable. He and Zeno were friends, however, and sometimes, Alarea had joined them. Quite often, she had not wanted to.

For the most part, Alarea had focused almost completely on her training. When she had not been sparring or attending classes, she had spent a lot of her time reading books from the library. It had occupied her mind and extended her knowledge.

She had barely familiarized herself with life as a recruit of the Blades when another crisis had hit her and her colleagues: mana addiction.

For thousands of years, the high elves had lived in proximity of the Sunwell, its vast arcane powers always surrounding them. After its destruction, more and more elves had fallen victim to withdrawal. For everyone, the symptoms had manifested in a different way; some, like Zeno, had experienced self-control issues. From time to time, he had paced around aggressively, ranting and insulting others. Alen had completely withdrawn from everyone. He had not wanted to be seen and only appeared when necessary. Alarea herself had just felt absolutely sick. She had fought with migraines, stomach pains, or asthenia on a daily basis.

The one who had been struck the most was Gaelin, their mage. As a sorcerer, he had lost his primary source of power as well. Thus, he had been obsessed with finding new ways of feeding on magic.

Progress in their training had drastically slowed down because everyone had had difficulties to concentrate. That was why Tasarion had soon added meditation sessions to their schedule. Meditation had helped to overcome symptoms of withdrawal and allowed them to continue with some kind of daily routine.

Soon, Tasarion had brought news from the outside. Apparently, Prince Kael'thas Sunstrider himself had destroyed the Sunwell after it had been tainted with corruption during the invasion of the undead. He had since renamed their race "Sin'dorei" - or "blood elves" - to honor those who had fallen in the Third War. It was said that only ten percent of the elves of Quel'Thalas had survived. Kael'thas had dedicated his life to finding alternate sources of magic for the remaining blood elves.

The most important thing was that Tasarion had organized mana rings for everyone. These rings contained a crystal full of magic placed in a socket. In case of a crystal losing its power, it could easily be replaced by another one while the old one was refilled by mages. Slowly, and with the help of Gaelin, the Blades had learned to draw power from the ring. They had won a working source of magic and could even use it for magical combat tricks. With the rings, training at the Eversong Blades had returned to normal.

Everyone had continued with regular meditations, however. They reduced the amount of mana they needed and allowed them to extend the average lifespan of their mana crystals to last almost a year.

Alarea had wondered what kind of magic the ring contained; using their new sources of power had turned all of the blood elves' eyes green. She preferred not to think about that.

Her training had been a diverse program over the years. Lormandil had been her main weapons instructor. He had taught her the use of many different armaments, although two daggers continued to be her favorite combination. The other recruits had initially been instructed by Tasarion, but Lormandil had overseen all of the group combat trainings.

There had been more to her education than combat training, of course. Gaelin had taught a lot of theoretical courses about science, magic, herbalism, and history. Tasarion and Lormandil had been responsible for teaching strategy, preparation, and techniques.

Although Alen had referred to her as their best agent, she had certainly not been the first one to take the trials; both Alen and Zeno had passed the trials over a year ago. Her delay had been mostly because of her age. She had just reached a point of maturity, and had missed years of typical elven school education. This had led to many of the Blades giving her individual lessons in fields with which they were familiar.

She had loved lessons with Gaelin, who had, among other things, tutored her in scientific subjects like maths. She had hated politics and court etiquette lessons with Shalindra though. Her interest in those topics had been scarce already, but Shalindra's harsh manner had frustrated her even more.

As Alarea sat on her bed, her thoughts went to Nightsorrow Village. It was the closest village to the Blades' headquarters. Despite its sombre name it was a beautiful town and she loved going there. There were people living their daily lives without worrying about their losses from the Third War, and the area was mostly untouched by the Scourge.

She remembered the first time she had been allowed to join the supply group. It had been the first time she had really gotten out of the underground base. They had taken a cart to the village, met with their provider, and loaded it with enough supplies to last the Blades until their next visit a few weeks later. She had also had some time to explore the village. For about an hour, she had simply sat in the cozy little park.

They had returned to Nightsorrow Village many times. It was the Blades' main connection to the outside world. They could get news and provisions; even the Trial of Infiltration had been staged there. Now that she had passed the trials, she was eager to see more of the world on her journeys.

Enough dwelling in the past. Time to get ready for the future, Alarea reminded herself, and took a deep breath. Tomorrow, she would get her first mission. Whatever it would be, she would have to be prepared. Slowly, she sank into the trance of her meditation, the ruby necklace still lying in her palms.

Some of the Blades were already present when she entered the command center the next morning. Tassarion, Lormandil, and Gaelin were studying maps and plans on the round table in the center of the room. Shalindra and two other Blades were debating something. They gave her a respectful nod, either to greet her, to congratulate her, or both. She went to Alen.

“Good morning, Alarea. Are you ready?”, he asked her.

“As ready as I can be”, she answered. “Do you know what the briefing is about?”

“I don’t know any details. Tassarion will assign new missions to us. From what I’ve heard he is also planning to go on a mission himself.”

“Interesting, sounds like it’s something important if he...”

“Hey Daggers!”, Zeno entered the room. “I was told you’ve passed the last trial? Welcome to the club of grown up murderers, gal. I hope you’re ready for a real kill when the time comes.”

Alarea sighed. “Do you want to be the first?”

“Easy Daggers, easy”, Zeno chuckled.

“I’m sure Alarea is more than prepared for what lies ahead”, Alen said.

“I’m sure she is”, Zeno responded.

Tassarion straightened up and cleared his throat. A nervous quiet descended over the attendees.

“Alright, it’s time I told you about our next plan. We already have a few agents out that are investigating occurrences of undead activities throughout Quel’Thalas. However, we’ve just heard rumors of several demon attacks on Easthaven City. Alarea, Alen, and Zeno, you’ll travel to Easthaven and find out what’s causing the attacks. I want you to gather information about the source and take it out.”

Alarea blinked. She had expected to be sent on a solo mission. All of the other Blades had went on their first mission alone. Instead she was to team up with Alen and Zeno. Did Tassarion not trust her to be good enough on her own? Did he want them to watch her back?

“You three have been training together a lot. I consider you a team capable of executing this mission quietly and efficiently. Report back when you are done or if you encounter any important developments”, he added.

“Consider it done, boss”, Zeno said.

Alarea swallowed her frustration and nodded.

“Good”, Tassarion continued. “Then it is about time we expanded our territory.” He pointed at Shalindra and the other two Blades. “I want you to be our eyes and ears abroad. You will head to the capitals of the factions that seem to be in control over Azeroth at the moment. Shalindra will go to Stormwind, the human capital of the Alliance in the Eastern Kingdoms, Corym and Rolim will go to Orgrimmar, the orc capital of the Horde in Kalimdor. Find out more about the intentions of those factions and look for any signs of corruption.

“Gaelin and I will leave for another mission. I’m sorry, but the details will remain classified for now. Lormandil will take care of our recruits and headquarters for the time being.

“Unless you have any further questions, you are dismissed.”, Tassarion finished.

They talked about a few more mission details, but the real question on everyone’s mind was Tassarion and Gaelin’s mystery destination.

It was already a dark night, but the small street was devoid of almost any lights. The cloaked messenger slowly walked around the corner and headed towards the next junction. As he passed one of the buildings, Tassarion grabbed him and snapped his neck. It was unfortunate the poor guy had to die, but he had played a dangerous game when he had allied with the wrong people.

He dragged him away from the street and into a small courtyard. He searched his body and found the message he was looking for.

Gaelin stepped to his side. “What does it say?”

Tassarion unrolled the parchment and grunted. “It seems to be encrypted.”

“Let me see.”

He handed the parchment to the mage, who ran through a number of spells.

“I think it is a magical cipher; one I may have seen before”, Gaelin analyzed.

After a few more spells, he was successful. He looked at the message, then stared at Tassarion.

“Looks like your intel was right”, he said. “This is most disturbing indeed.”

TO BE CONTINUED