

A Taste of Temptation

by Ryan Nemetz

Adrenalin still coursing through my body, the images of the battle lost freshly burned in my head, I wondered onward through the night. It was an unpleasant sight to see the Dragon fairy, The spirit of Bloodtharcken, taken by such evil. Failure oft leaves a bad aftertaste to one who rarely sees it. As I had promised to the Gods that fateful night in Val' Kindud, I would never let evil triumph as long as I existed. And yet, I wonder now aimlessly through the night, knowing that another life, another spirit has been lost, because of me.

The hair on my arms began to prickle as I felt that I wasn't alone. I could sense some other being was near. T'was not animal nor fairy, but something worse. I tapped into the dark powers I had bestowed on me that day I lost control, and concentrated. The noise was coming from right in front of me. I could hear the rustling of fine cloth, and the footsteps, too light to be from a male. A lady approached. I could not tell whom, for the moon was not showing tonight. As the footsteps came closer, I could smell a familiar smell of roses. I immediately went on full alert. Roses do not grow around here. Perchance this lady is carrying them. I needed not wait any longer for my answer.

In full view now, I recognized the outline of the lady. A long, stiffened dress, oft worn by royalty, in the colors of red and black. Her hair pulled neatly into a bun on top her head, and carrying a fan and, indeed in the other hand, was a single red rose. I reluctantly stopped. I should continue on my path. But she stopped as well. My heart started racing. Adrenalin flowed twice as fast in my body now, my mind went into a frantic state of panic. I saw her smile so sinister, it could make Ignis twitch.

"Good eve, Caius." She said in a surprisingly calm voice.

"Lady Tso," I replied. This kind of interaction with someone like her is never good.

"Earlier today, as I claimed the soul of Drusilla, I noticed the look in your eye. The kind that many do not have unless they see something they want. Tell me, what is it?"

"I want you to release her!" I said, trying not to scream. She is of royal blood, unfortunately. I cannot act upon her, as I would go against the Queen, not to mention my morals.

"Ha! You wish me to free Drusilla? Perhaps we can make a trade then..." Her voice trailed off, and I felt a tingling sensation in my head. She was reading my thoughts. I had forgotten she could do this, as the defeat of today stilled clouded my mental senses.

"What could you possibly offer me that I already don't have?" I challenged. Even with access to my thoughts, she could not know the only thing I long for...

"I notice you know I am in your mind now, you are skilled in the ways of the Dark forces. Perchance you wish to learn more of them?" That sinister smile spread over face again.

"Never! I will never be tempted or controlled by the Darkness again. I am Sworn against the Shadows."

"Alas, you need not be controlled, just simply learn more of them. I can teach you ways to

control others, perhaps a certain lady you long for.”

“I need not your assistance in this,” I stated, almost shouting, “You cannot control the will of others forever. Need I explain? Or do you wish me to replay the images of years past in my head for you?”

“You need not, as I have seen it all. You long for this lady, yet you refuse to give up your quest to protect all. One must be willing to bend, but too much will make a man break.”

“I need not your riddles, Tso. Either release Drusilla, or...”

“Or what? Have you forgotten what you just thought a few moments ago? You can’t touch me.” My hands clenched into fists. She was right. There had to be a way to release the spirit without harming lady Tso.

“There isn’t one! As long as I hold the Soul Gem, you can’t use any spell or ability against me, lest you harm yourself.” Her arrogance was starting to peeve me.

“Grr... Lady Tso, I have but this promise to offer you. I will NEVER go back to the Shadows, or let anyone else be consumed by them.”

“So bold a mage like you to offer such promises. But once I am through claiming this power for my own, you are next!” She held up the Soul Gem and I eyed it. One little spell, and I could have it, I could free Drusilla, and right the wrongs. Yes, being a guardian of the Egg, I will protect the child to be, but without Drusilla to watch over her own kin as well, it would be like ripping a small child from a mother’s arms and releasing it into the world. This I cannot allow. It’s one thing to be a hero. It’s also another to be able to accept the consequences for your actions. That is what makes one self a truly good person.

“You really are a letdown, Caius. I was expecting you to actually try.”

“No, now is not the time. Lady Tso, as much as I would love to watch you beg for mercy, it is fruitless to attempt anything. So you and all of your Draco Disciples better watch your backs. When you least expect it, I will be there. Ever watchful, ever vigilant, like a hawk stalks his prey.”

“Big words. But it’ll take more than you to stop all of the Draco Disciples.”

“Just you wait. In one year’s time, I will return to this land, to stop you. Be prepared. I will be faster, smarter, and ever so much more dangerous. You will NOT get away with this.”

“Well then, I have much to prepare for.” She chuckled at this. I shook my head. It is a shame to walk away yet again in defeat. But nevertheless, My promise stays true. Next year, this ends.

“Oh, and do say hello to her for me. You know who I mean.” She added with a smile as she walked past me. I spun around.

“If you harm a single hair on her head, Then nothing will stop me from...”

“Yet again with the empty promises? When will you learn?” I watched as her figure disappeared into the distance. Once again, I was left to wonder the night.

There is much preparing to do for the year ahead, I thought to myself. You will have your chance. I began to wonder again on my path, with the next quest on my mind. In search of the Crystal Claw Staff. With the power of light in this staff, I will be able to finally rid myself of this

cursed Darkness that lingers within my body. Then, the pure heart I once knew will return to me, and give me the strength to defeat Lady Tso and release Drusilla's spirit.