

Prologue

When the Second Fall happened, it changed everything. No one expected it, at least no one who dwelt in the light. The Second Fall wasn't supposed to be a Fall. It was hoped and believed that this climatic event would result in the obliteration of Evil and Darkness. Everything was pointing to it, all of the wondrous signs in the realm of man and in the glorious heavens.

But it didn't unfold that way. In a horrific turn of events, the light was shattered and overthrown. It all happened in a terrible act of betrayal, and at the hands of a man who was once the most faithful follower of our Creator. Because of him, the Evil that had mostly been contained, at the great expense of many warriors, was wholly unleashed on the universe and all its dimensions.

We were reminded and shown just how cunning and underhanded Evil is. It had played its cards well. The Prince of Darkness had worked his great deceit once again.

Total darkness fell swiftly. Even places that had once been the greatest strongholds and dwellings of Light were destroyed. Pillars in many dimensions that had stood since the creation of time were reduced to ash. The places of peace were no more.

A few havens remain, of course, but they're few and far between, and exceedingly difficult to find.

This isn't about a military of warriors banding together and hunting evil things. Oh we hunt them alright...but because it's a matter of survival. Everyone is a warrior because the common man must fight on a regular basis to protect himself, his home, and his family.

There is no common man anymore, not really.

As expected, there are bands of fighters who patrol and cross dimensions, searching for squads of enemies to destroy. But it's not an exclusive event and participation doesn't require mandatory training at an academy or facility. This is partly because all such places were immediately sent into oblivion at the unfolding of the Second Fall. Secondly, there isn't time to train large groups of people.

So, a shepherd can drop his staff in the morning, seek out a hunter to join up with, and be wielding a rifle come that same evening.

Needless to say, those in the Light are still waiting for the day when Evil will finally be bound and destroyed. This is especially true for those of us who are hunters, who keep track of Evil and the movements of its forces across the various dimensions.

The hunters have crossed many beasts and beings, fell and terrible. Yet there are still more undiscovered. Some shield and protect Evil's forces; others look out for themselves only.

Hunters are fearless, truly. Not a glimpse of it will be found in their beings, ever. They can look upon a dragon as large as a mountain, or some ugly fiend of Hell, and see only the challenge. Through them courses only determination, and they're filled solely with the sense of duty and knowledge of what needs to be done.

There is only one they are wary of and it's not the Prince of Darkness...it's the King of Evil. He, it, is the embodiment of darkness itself, and it is far worse than any ever imagined.

This Black King is avoided at all costs, because only One can defeat it...and He has not yet returned to do so. Once He does, all dark and vile things will be conquered and wholly destroyed, never to be seen again.

But until that happens...every day is a fight for survival.

Chapter 1

Just the Way it is

Log Entry by Audra Rane:

I used to not be like this.

I once saw the joy and light in life, and I saw all the wonderful possibilities it had to offer. Right. When I was eight. But life’s cruelty has a way of bringing out the pessimist in a person. It has a way of darkening one’s demeanor.

From a young age I stopped believing that anyone cared about me and my life. As a kid I learned that everyone always wanted something, and they’re only interested in you as long as you can help them achieve their goals. They have the plan and you’re just the tool.

It never changes, no matter how old you get. If you’re smart, you just become quicker at picking up the con.

I get it, though. It’s human nature to be completely self-absorbed –and to take advantage of the kind and loyal. You mistake these traits for weakness. But it takes so much more strength to pour yourself into someone else and not expect anything in return –and to do this over and over again.

Well, it’s been a long time since I’ve been “weak.” Not that I flipped the table and take advantage of and use people. I just don’t care about anything anymore.

It’s a cruel and cold reality that the rare and few decent people you do allow yourself to love will only be taken from you. Especially in a hunter’s line of work, death will probably come sooner rather than later.

Unless you’re the unfortunate person like me, who is forced to watch your fellow brothers and sisters be taken by Death while you live on. You have more than your fair share of battle scars, and you’ve known great pain and have warred terrible darkness. Yet Death hasn’t come around for you yet. So you carry on.

Needless to say, I don't emotionally invest in people anymore. They only want to use you as a means to their end, or they'll disappoint you no matter how low the standards you set.

Or they just end up dying one day while fighting some evil beast. Naturally, this is primarily true for those of us whose profession and life is the hunter. As such, we acknowledge and accept the possibility of being killed every day. However, we have no other choice, because fighting is survival. Plus...it's what we do. We don't know how to do anything else, and I don't know how not to hunt. Even when I'm not intending to track, I'm always put on the trail of something or someone that needs killing.

So it's either be used as a tool, or lose the few people you love because it's always the ones you're closest to who are taken.

Some people might say "that's so sad."

I say, "Boo hoo. That's life. Deal with it. That's just the way it is."

And yet even as I say that...there are three people in my life whom I can honestly say that I love deeply, and whom I show my heart. I don't know how to keep it from them. They aren't just any people. They're the extremely rare and special sort because we grew up together. The four of us have survived from childhood until now. While I've lost many acquaintances and what few friends I've made...they're still here.

Rare and special. It is because of this that my single and great fear revolves around them. I don't fear the Prince of Darkness or any of his fiends. I don't fear fire-breathing beasts or beings that come from utter darkness.

I fear losing the three who keep me sane and from falling completely into the deep chasm that is my hollow soul.

If I were to lose them, I know myself well enough to acknowledge that I'd go on an enraged rampage. Understand: they soothe the aching void where my heart once was but has long been broken and disintegrated. I don't feel much of anything now, day to day, minute to minute.

These three also keep in check my most prominent, and dangerous, weakness. Every hunter has a keenness to track and kill evil things. It is our purpose until the One

returns to slay Evil forever. However, for me, it's the only time I really feel alive. I confess that in me is a lust for battle and the spilling of black blood. I dare even say...not even just for black blood.

I fear that if worse came to worse, the ugly nature of the flesh that is in me would take over...and I could easily kill anyone and anything in my path, good or bad. Any combat and blood would do.

I've kept that latter fear to myself. Not even those closest to me know it, though because they know me they may guess it.

It's because of this cursed weakness that I pray daily that He won't bid these three friends be taken before me. Anyone but them. I pray that I be taken first.

Yes, we hunters pray. Our power and strength comes from the One who made us to combat the Prince and his various underlings. Although, the relationship between Him and I can be a bit complicated, due to my...choice to live in a lacking emotional state and to be completely apathetic to the others He has created.

Hey. No one's perfect. I function just fine the way I am and it allows me to thrive at my job. I've lived this way for so long that I doubt anyone, save for Him, could return joy to me, or reawaken my soul and spirit. No, forget reawaken. How about just find wherever they disappeared to?

And it's also not like my dangerous flaw hangs heavy over me. I'm not on the edge of losing control. The day to day surviving is mundane enough, if you call traversing dimensions to destroy demon hordes and dragons mundane...oh and let's not forget the occasional scrounging for food.

I mean, what else do we have to do?

Speaking of hordes, I need to go. There's an angel commander waiting to strategize over the next assault in the Kraulos Dimension. There are a few demon commanders that need to be relieved of their heads...