

Down With the Divine Empire

At first, it was quiet. The warm wind brushed my skin, making its way under my armor. The others accompanying me relished in the sensation, trying to keep their decorum as we watched...waited for war.

Beside me, Pia, a 19-year-old Tiefling, trembled. The plates of her armor softly rattled against each other.

“Lady Seiche, if we win this battle...do you think I’ll be able to go home?”

Pia hadn’t seen her family since the magic ban was set in place by The Divine Empire of Duchane. Ten years I’ve watched her grow, ten years taken from her family. Her sisters have grown up by now, probably each married with their own babies. Her father had long been dead, mauled on a journey back to them by a beast known as a Crag Cat.

My focus on the line of trees broke for a moment to look at her. All I could see were the orange irises woven into bright pink hair, combined with the lavender of her skin reminded me of the sunsets we used to sit under as she told me stories of her childhood.

“Yes, Pia. *When* we win, you will go home.”

A piercing scream ripped through the serene silence.

“Ready yourselves, men; that isn’t the wind you hear screaming,” said Kamora, a sorceress who’d seen more battles than I’d seen birthdays.

Each one of us readied ourselves, hands glowing with magic. Sorcerers, Clerics, Druids, and Wizards alike are ready to fight till the end to save their magic.

“To the east!” yelled Theo, chucking a fireball at a blur of white shooting toward us.

The creature let out an ear-piercing cry as it was grazed by the flame, slowing down just enough for us to see what we were up against. Its fur was soggy and matted; from 50 feet away, the overwhelming

stench of death burned my eyes. As it regained its bearings and whipped to look at the lot of us, its long, snake-like tongue grazed over its sea of jagged teeth.

“A Crag Cat.” Pia’s voice shook as she backed away slowly.

“Pia...” I said, my gaze on the beast unwavering, “Pia!”

Pia broke out into a run, catching the eye of the creature.

It bolted after her, dodging the attacks we threw at it.

Pia was fast, but the beast was faster. It took her down almost instantly, ripping her throat out and silencing her cries for me to save her.

For a moment, just a moment, time stood still. I watched the light die from the eyes of the little girl I helped raise. When she cried about her magic being a disease, it was in *my* arms. When she heard about the battle against Duchane and begged to join, I allowed it. Against my better judgment, I delivered her to her death. It flashed before my eyes as the creature was shoved from her lifeless body and lit ablaze.

A string of yowls drowned the air as the cat fumbled over its blazing body, charring a path through the waist-high flowers, running into the darkened forest, lighting the way to its death.

There was no time to think about Pia and the family she wouldn’t see. The battle cries of our enemies came at us from each side of the clearing.

Even with magic, their army outnumbered us 100 to 1, but the moment the life drained from Pia’s body, they did more than declare war. They wanted a bloodbath.

With heavy steps, they ran at us, their weapons sharpened and ready, trampling everything in their path.

Arrows whizzed past us, our blood painting mosaics on the trampled flower petals. Our magic whizzed past them, lighting them ablaze, trapping them, or poisoning them.

We fought, exhausting our magic and their magic-less bodies. We began to overcome them, slashing them down as they attacked. One by one, two by two, they all fell.

As my comrades and I fought, I caught sight of a prize. Overlooking the battle, sitting comfortably atop his steed, was Emreis Duchane, the leader of The Divine Empire of Duchane. The man who killed many magic users before me. The man who started it all.

I sliced down my enemies, sworn to protect him, and when I was close enough to touch him, I froze. He was smiling, watching this bloodshed with a broad smile as if he were in paradise.

“Hello, young Seiche.” Duchane sighed, his eyes transfixed lovingly on the battle before him.

“Well? I’m here. Kill me,” He said, sliding off his horse.

Everything within me begged my legs to run, and my tongue was cement. I was useless.

“That’s what you want, isn’t it, Seiche?” He taunted me with each step, “I killed the little girl you raised, I’ve slaughtered every magic user before you, and I’ll do the same with those after you,” he gestured behind me with a smile, “and your friends.”

I felt the color drain from my face. I’d been so focused on Emreis that I hadn’t noticed the silence. Slowly, I turned toward my comrades, friends, and cherished family; they all were lifeless. I dropped to my knees, my stomach in my throat. My heart pounded in my ears so fast it could burst. My hand clawed at my chest as if I could dig out my heart and make it all feel better.

“I can truly sympathize with you, young Seiche, but you’re alone and weak. The thing about you magic users is you never know when to quit, and your friends sure didn’t. Now, the Divine Empire can rise.”

My throat tightened, and tears blurred my vision. Energy pulsed through my body like an earthquake. The ground trembled underneath me, and my hands began to glow. The weapons of the fallen began to drift into the air, slowly surrounding the king of the Divine Empire.

“Down with the Divine Empire,” I whispered.

He didn’t get the chance to scream.