

Sphere of Eternity: Oriundus Rising

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Prologue

The wind whipped through the city square, leaves that were caught in the breeze being pulled into miniature tornadoes, as a huddled female figure hurried through the deserted plaza.

Her cloak was pulled tightly around her shoulders, concealing most of her features, though wisps of chestnut coloured hair escaped into visibility, while the fingertips gripping the hems of the cloak revealed pale, ivory skin, the nails painted a deep red.

Besides the whistling of the wind and the rapid tapping of her feet through the plaza, the only other sound that broke the otherwise silent night was the ringing of the bell from the Council Chambers, informing the citizens that it was just past midnight.

Realising how late it was, she picked up her pace, she did not know why she was in such a hurry, but she could feel an urgency pushing her along, something instinctively telling her that she should get off the streets as quickly as she could.

The sound of a twig snapping caught the females attention as she spun around, startled, her eyes scanning the plaza before finally settling on a cat that had apparently jumped down from a rooftop and happened to land on a stray branch in the process, an involuntary sigh of relief slipping from her lips.

Without warning, a pair of strong arms looped around the female, one arm binding her arms to her sides, the other moving up, a hand firmly covering her mouth. She struggled frantically as she felt herself being dragged backwards towards an unknown destination.

She managed to dislodge the hand over her mouth briefly, as she gave one last shrill scream before darkness surrounded her, the womans scream within the marketplace suddenly cut off by the portal that the female had been dragged into snapping closed silently.

Chapter 1

Her vision cleared slowly as she found herself standing in a bustling marketplace. The scene before her eyes was no longer unusual, it had been dominating her dreams for countless nights now.

To either side she could see both Males and Females of various races. Some sat in cages, others sat off to one side, the only thing that revealed their lesser status being a collar, usually made of leather or some kind of metal. Most were chained to a nearby pole so that they could not make a run for it at an opportune moment.

She felt her feet start to move of their own accord just like they had in all her previous dreams. They carried her past the various slaves that were being sold off, and through a large archway into a coliseum.

She approached the railing that separates the viewing platforms from the lower fighting area, before her in the arena two somewhat humanoid beings were facing off against each other.

One was a tall male with raven colored hair that was tied back into a rough ponytail and a jagged scar running over his left eye and cheek. The most prominent feature about him was a pair of wings emerging from his back which measured from shoulder height to a hands length above ground level.

The other male was only slightly shorter, with fiery red hair, a pair of black bat-like wings emerging from his back.

As she watched, the two males started circling each other, looking for an opening, their eyes never leaving the other. Finally, with a powerful flap of his wings, the red-headed male soared up into the air briefly before diving down at the black haired male...

The young female awoke with a gasp, her chest heaving slightly as she caught her breath, her eyes slowly adjusting to the early morning light just starting to filter in through her windows.

She took a moment to gather her thoughts as she carefully brushed away the hair that was plastered to her face, thinking to herself 'The same dream again... It has to hold some meaning...'

A sharp rap on her bedroom door roused her from her thoughts, a clear voice calling from the other side "Hikaru, are you decent?", awaiting her response before attempting to enter. It took but a moment for her to find her robe, pulling it on before saying "Come in father", the door swinging open to admit an apparently middle-aged man, though in truth he was 220 years old.

He smiled gently at his daughter, saying "I'm surprised that you are awake this early, you usually sleep until well after sun-up" Hikaru blushed slightly as she said "I woke not long ago and found I could not get back to sleep again..."

Her father nodded understandingly "I will be heading to the markets shortly. Since you are already awake, would you like to accompany me? You might see something that takes your fancy there." Hikaru thought it over briefly before saying "Yes, I think I will come along, let me get changed and I will be right down."

* * *

After a quick wash and changing into suitable attire, Hikaru was waiting in the main foyer for her father, he joining her shortly after, saying "Sorry if I kept you waiting, dear."

The two left the building, walking to a carriage that was waiting outside, Hikaru's father holding the door open for her before climbing in himself as the carriage pulled away destined for the markets.

"Father, I must ask... is there a coliseum, or some type of arena not too far from the Markets?" Hikaru asked, deciding to try to make some sense of her dream without being too obvious about it.

"There is, as a matter of fact, attached to the markets. Why do you ask? I would not have thought that would have been something of interest to you..." Her father replied, his face unreadable as he looked at his daughter.

"I must ask... Is this market we are visiting a slave market?" Hikaru asked hesitantly, having never really bothered to ask her father. She knew what he did when he was out and about was his own business. Now that she was accompanying him however, she wanted to know what she was in for.

"Yes it is, my dear. As a member of the Council of Elders, it is my duty to make sure that any trading that goes on within the realm is within the boundaries of the law, and that any beings sold or traded are healthy and treated appropriately."

Hikaru nodded in understanding, though she frowned slightly. She continued "You always attend this same market every month without fail... Why is it so important that you are there?"

Kaeron sighed slightly as he said "Some of the merchants that try to sell their wares at the markets tend to have more unscrupulous trading practices. Others try to discretely sell slaves through less reputable channels. This means that the slaves sold through such methods are not subject to the same restrictions that those sold through legal means are. As a consequence they often get lower standards of living."

While Slave Trading was not prohibited within the realm, it was heavily monitored and restricted to make sure that those that did not have freedom of their own were at least blessed with a suitable living situation and someone who would treat them properly.

Needless to say, there was known cases of slavers that blatantly flouted the law, and treated their slaves badly. Without undeniable proof of their actions however, capturing and punishing them was an uphill battle at best, almost impossible at worst.

Kaeron gave a slight smirk at his daughter, winking and saying in a playful tone "Who knows, you might see a strapping young lad at the markets that will catch your eye and want him for your 21st birthday gift..."

He took note of the deep red blush that appeared on his young daughters face as she replied in an indignant tone "FATHER! You know perfectly well that I do not like... that sort of thing" She looked out the window hurriedly as her father chuckled softly.

"Never say never, my dearest. Love at first sight is always possible, even with someone with a rank as lowly as a slave" Kaeron said in a quiet tone.

He let the conversation drop as the carriage continued along the passageway, various shops and merchant houses visible as the carriage wheeled by, everything from intricate gowns to full suits of plate mail armor visible in windows.

After a short journey, the carriage reached the entrance to the market grounds, its wheels creaking to a halt as the two stepped out. Kaeron stopped only to say "Please take the carriage to the waiting area, we will not be long"

They approached the gates, a number of heavily armored guards inspecting any who wished to enter, checking them for weapons and confiscating them, giving the owner a token to reclaim the weapon when they left.

As Kaeron and Hikaru stepped up to be inspected, the Guard Captain stopped the guard that was about to check them. He said "These two do not need to be checked", pointing to the medallion that Kaeron was wearing around his neck. The Captain added "This man is a member of the Council of Elders, and thus is permitted to carry weaponry anywhere in the realm in case it is needed in an emergency", before bowing deeply to the two of them and letting them pass.

"I must be honest, I've never liked this... privileged treatment we get over other citizens. It leaves a bad taste in my mouth, knowing that we get away with things that other citizens would never be able to do." Hikaru said with slight disdain.

Kaeron smiled slightly and said "I understand what you are saying, my sweet, but there must always be a hierarchy, as well as those that keep order among it, otherwise society would fall into absolute chaos."

Hikaru frowned slightly as she said "Yes, that is true...", knowing that without people to lead, and those to enforce what those of higher rank decided were the 'laws' of the land, that the society they lived in would erode into nothing more than chaos and destruction.

He continued in a quieter tone "Never forget that some of those in these cages, or those peddling their wares in this marketplace have no choice of the life that they lead, the life that fate has dealt to them, it is all that has been left for them by the noble and merchant classes. It is up to those of the Elder class to make sure that all classes hold some semblance of balance, although it is a very fragile balance at that."

Hikaru and her father proceeded deeper into the market, she could see that her father did not miss a thing, he never esitating to stop to talk to a merchant, be it to give them a piece of friendly advice, or to give a harsh warning. His reputation of being one of the toughest, but fairest elders in the realm had been earned several times over, but earned him a position of respect amongst the denizens of the realm that would take something catastrophic to shake.

"Father, I see the coliseum up ahead, would you mind if I went on ahead and you catch up when you have finished your business?" Hikaru asked

"Yes, I may be a little while, take care while you are travelling there. Keep an eye to your purse, there may be a number of guards wandering the markets, but just as many thieves also wander, waiting to relieve an unwary traveller of their belongings..." Hikaru nodded and gave her father a brief hug and proceeded through the bustling crowds to the coliseum gates.

* * *

Hikaru stepped into the coliseum managing to secure herself a front-row seat after a few quiet words to one of the attendants to explain who she was. While she did not like abusing her privileges in society, she had a feeling she would want a good view of everything that went on down on the main floor.

The coliseum itself was a marvel to behold, it being a testament to Inevectus architecture. The pillars that made the arches were constructed of finest white marble, each arch engraved with an Inevectus moral or saying, the spectator benches made of high quality wood and well-padded.

The coliseum itself was constructed in a perfect oval shape, the main floor itself a good 10 foot below the spectator stands so that no matter how far back one was forced to sit, they would still be able to see everything that happened

Not long after Hikaru took her seat, a voice boomed out from the announcers box, greeting all of the spectators "Welcome one and all to the coliseum, I hope you are looking forward to todays spectacle!"

The crowd responded with a roaring cheer as they rose to their feet, applauding, though Hikaru mainly did it so that she would not stand out as not knowing what was happening.

A loud clanking suddenly met her ears, drawing her attention to two gates at opposite ends of the coliseum, one warrior stepping out of each of the gates as they fell back closed with a resounding crash behind them.

"We have an amazing show for you today, one of our newer fighters has progressed with astounding speed through the ranks and currently stands undefeated in his exploits so far. Now, he stands in challenge of the current champion! Give a nice loud applause for Kagato!"

The crowd responded accordingly, though Hikaru was stunned silent, the man that had just been announced was strikingly similar to the one that was haunting her dreams, however the key difference was that he did not have the wings that were visible in her dream.

She was distracted by another roar of applause from the crowd as she realised the other combatant had been announced, though she had not caught his name, he had the look of a seasoned veteran that had been in countless battles and earned his reputation.

“As always, this battle has no time limit and will continue until one opponent is either unconscious or dead. Begin!” With the announcers last word, the loud clang of a gong signalled the start of the fight.

The two men started circling each other, watching for something that may give away the others, this continuing for a moment before the unknown fighter lunged, making the first strike.

While Hikaru wanted to look away, she found herself unable to tear her gaze away from Kagato, the one that had appeared in her dreams. As he intercepted one of the warriors blows and moved to hurl the fighter flying over his shoulder, she caught a glimpse of something on his back that intrigued her, but was not able to get a clear view of it.

Luck however was on her side as the two circled each other once more, allowing her to see what was on Kagatos back.

To her amazement an intricate tattoo of a pair of wings, one being pure white, the other black as midnight covered the majority of his back, the remainder covered with a series of unknown runes that seemed to radiate power.

Finally, Kagato was given an opening as the other warrior attempted to wipe a bit of sweat from his eyes, giving him a chance to sweep the other fighters feet from underneath him. He then followed up with a solid blow to the warriors temple with his elbow, knocking the warrior out but not killing him.

The crowd rose to it's feet once more with an even louder cheer than before as the announcers voice boomed out “Our still undefeated winner and now champion – Kagato!”

She saw him bow politely to the crowd, she could see something from his face though, the way his mouth was drawn tight, the look in his eyes – something about him told her he felt uncomfortable here, he felt this was not his place here.

Following the crowds out of the coliseum, she found her father awaiting outside as she hugged him, finally explaining to him what she had seen in her dreams and the warrior she had seen in the coliseum that was almost identical to the one in her dream.

Kaeron, never able to keep from poking fun at his daughter, said “I told you that you might see a strapping young male that caught your eye!” Hikaru gave an indignant glare, her father grinning and responding “You have set your sights rather high though, gladiators command heavy prices, assuming their owners are willing to part with them at all... I shall see what I can do though, my dear.”

The two sought out the coliseum master, explaining who they were and that they were interested in seeking purchase of Kagato. As Kaeron had warned, the master was quite unwilling to let such a prize fighter go without a substantial fee, though after some negotiation and a little firmness on Kaerons part, the two settled on a price of 5 platinum pieces.

Hikaru was waiting outside as her father flashed a smile at her, waving a rolled up piece of parchment, saying “I managed to get him.”, though when she enquired as to the price, her father refused to respond, simply saying “This is your birthday gift. You are not meant to know how much it cost.”

Upon showing the deeds to a guard, the two were taken down to the holding area, where at last Hikaru could get a good look at the male that had been the focus of her dreams.

He was notably tall, measuring in at just under 7 foot and had long, flowing black hair that was tied up into a loose ponytail. He bore typical signs of slave neglect, showing slight signs of malnourishment and wounds that would need tending to, though they were at least bandaged roughly. The most prominent feature on his body was a broad, clean scar that ran diagonally down his chest.

Hikaru cleared her throat briefly to catch his attention, gesturing for him to stand up as she said in a soft tone "Would you mind coming here and then turning around to face away from me?" Kagato what was requested, letting her get a look at the markings on his back at last.

Hikaru could not believe the detail that was shown in the tattoo on his back, it held such a level that it was either done by a master, or by one of the Timeless Ones personally.

Each feather was inked out flawlessly, while she could now feel the power radiating from the runes. She turned to her father, who was as stunned as she was, saying "You would know more... what language are these runes? I've never seen them before..."

Kaeron ran his fingers over one of the runes, responding softly "I don't believe it... this is high draconic. This script has not been seen for over 4000 years... and yet here it is, tattooed on a mans back. How did you come to have this inscribed on your back... I'm sorry, I don't know your name..."

"My name is Kagato, however you may call me whatever you wish. These tattoos have been on my back as far back as I can remember. Those that took care of me thought that I was cursed and tried to cut one of them out. Finding that they could not do so, they then abandoned me and gave me up to slavery, thinking I would bring misfortune to them."

Seeing the visible remnants of the scar surrounding one of the runes that someone had attempted to physically carve from his back, she hissed in sympathy, running her fingers gently over the scar as she said in an unusually curt tone "Unlock this cell and provide this man with some suitable commoner clothing. He will be coming with us and should be dressed appropriately."

Upon seeing the deed of sale, the guard ran off, returning soon after with a shirt and some breeches for Kagato, the clothes being of the quality expected a servant would wear. He gave a nod of thanks as he said "But why are you doing this for me? I am little more than a lowly gladiator, a slave..."

Hikaru simply smiled softly as she said "There will be time for explanations later. We must get you settled into your new home for now."