

Burmeccian Chronicles

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--Chapter 1: Birth--

In the beginning there was the crystal, which brought life, planets, everything in existence. The Summoners learned how to summon the great power of Anima from the crystal. However, the Summoners were afraid of Anima's power, as it was truly immense and difficult to control.

When they discovered this, they split the crystal into four jewels, and they were spread throughout Gaia in hope that Anima would never be summoned again.

Little did they know that Anima was not the only spirit that was contained within the jewels. When the crystal was split rumour has it that four spirits were created, each for one jewel. Alexander was claimed to be the spirit who resided in the jewel of Alexandria.

Many myths and tales have been told of these spirits, but very few have believed them to be true.

However, some rumours are truer than they seem.

Garland had been striving away at his latest project. He had gathered cells from Gaian life forms and was hoping to breed a powerful warrior, a warrior to help Kuja fulfil his task.

However, so far his experiments on combining living cells to generate his warrior were not going very well. The cells he had experimented with either not join together successfully or create a life form that was too weak to even live. Qu cells seemed to ingest other cells when combined. Cells from monsters destroyed other cells and would not combine very easily.

Garland was about to give up. He tried one last experiment: some Burmeccian cells combining with some human cells. He set up the machinery and the cells began to thrive and join. After several months the cells had developed enough to form a rather unusual looking baby.

Garland stopped and carefully took out the newly created baby. It looked rather odd: It looked fairly human, only it had rat's ears, a rat's tail, a half-snout and a small amount of fur.

Garland then placed the baby into a different machine. The machine had several numbers on it. It was a machine used to read battle power and other battle aspects. The machine came to life when the child was placed inside and the numbers came to a stop.

"Maybe it was a mistake to try and combine cells from Gaia." Garland thought to himself. "This one is the only one that has survived and it has a battle power much lower than Kuja's when he was created. I don't have any use for this weakling."

Garland then took the baby out of the machine. The baby's innocent eyes looked into Garland's cold stare. Garland then gave a weak smile. "I suppose I shouldn't let you go completely to waste." He then took the baby into Bran Bal and towards a giant blue airship with a lava coloured eye underneath.

The invincible stood right before Garland and the half-breed child. Garland spoke some words in Terran before the two were teleported in a blue flash into the airship.

Garland started the airship engines before turning to look at the child again. "You're going to a new home. You may not be as strong as Kuja, but you are still a fairly powerful warrior. You should be able to send me some souls in a life on Gaia." He then turned to the screen on the Invincible as the engines had reached full power.

"Take us to the settlement of Burmecia!" Garland said to the device. A cursor highlighted the area of Burmecia on a map of Gaia and the airship began to move.

The two were soon outside the gates of the rainy city. Garland had programmed the Invincible to land outside the city. It was night on Gaia, and the Burmecians were sleeping in their homes. Garland sneaked into the city, starting by using a float spell to glide over the wall as the gates to the city were locked shut. He looked around to look for a suitable home for his baby "warrior".

He was approaching the castle; he had entered the area of Burmecia where the Dragon Knights lived. If his child were to send souls to the Iifa tree, he would have to become a Dragon Knight. Growing up with a Dragon Knight would probably ensure it.

He eventually came to a house and smiled. The name "Fratley" was carved on the stone door. Garland had read about the name "Fratley" when researching in Duagerreo for places to obtain cells. "Fratley" was one of the most powerful Dragoon families with each generation producing a strong Dragon knight.

"Perfect." Garland whispered to himself. He placed the baby in front of the door and knocked. He then fled and was soon out of sight.

Sir Lion-heart Fratley woke with a grumble to the knock. "What on Gaia?" he moaned before forcing himself up and putting on a dressing gown and grabbing a small candle and lighting it. He combed his clawed fingers through his long brownish blonde hair as he shuffled towards the door, still moaning and grumbling at being woken up in the middle of the night and opened it.

He looked around rather angrily, his blue eyes staring harshly onto the rainy streets. He thought this was some sick kind of joke. The baby then started gurgling noises which turned Lion-hart's attention to him.

Lion-heart gasped in disbelief. Who would abandon a poor child? He picked the baby up and got a shock when he looked at it more closely. It was not a normal Burmecian baby; its snout was nowhere near as long as a Burmecian's and it had less fur than regular Burmecian child. He also spotted that this child had five fingers, not the normal four of a Burmecian.

Lion-heart quickly came to the conclusion it was half Burmecian. It shared traits of a human, so the child was a crossbreed of the two. "How could this be?" Lion-heart thought to himself. Burmecians were supposed to be unable to breed with humans.

Lion-heart decided to leave the question for now. He covered the child in some old garments and laid him on the suite in their living room. The baby quickly fell asleep, after Lion-hart was sure the child had settled, he returned to bed.

Lion-heart's biological son, referred to as "Junior" by Lion-heart and "Fratley" to everyone else, was the first to wake. He was only two years old, but he still managed to clamber out of his bed and walk around the place, ready for a new day.

He climbed down the stairs of the house and was on his way to the kitchen when he heard a gargle and some other unusual sounds coming out of the living room.

Fratley became curious, and opened the living room door rather cautiously. He walked in and looked around to see what was making the noise. He eventually turned to the suite and stared at the half breed baby laying there.

Fratley walked towards the suite, eager to get a closer look. As he peered in at the baby, who was

snoring peacefully, he discovered something that freaked him out. This baby had five fingers! It had too little fur to be a true Burmecian newborn. He had heard stories of monsters and demons that would take the form of others to deceive people, and thus Fratley came to a rather simple conclusion.

“MONSTER!!!” Fratley screamed at the top of his lungs before rushing up the stairs to alert his parents. “MONSTER! MONSTER! MONSTER!”

Lion-heart leapt onto his feet and grabbed his spear from the wall. His wife April also woke up quickly and followed Lion-heart, who had dashed into the corridor to search for the beast.

“Where?!” Lion-heart asked Fratley concerned. Fratley ran back down the stairs with Lion-heart following. Fratley opened the door and pointed into the living room still shouting “Monster!” as loud as he could.

Lion-heart dashed into the room, looking around for the “monster”.

“THERE! THERE!” Fratley shouted, pointing to the baby. “MONSTER! MONSTER!”

Lion-heart looked towards the child and breathed a sigh of relief. He then turned to Fratley. “Calm down junior, there’s no monster.”

Fratley stopped bellowing his lungs out and just looked confused at his father and the baby, who was now crying from being woken up. April came down the stairs and entered looking worried.

“It’s alright darling.” Lion-heart called out. “Fratley was just getting confused.”

April’s green eyes then turned to the baby that lay crying on the sofa. “Where did that baby come from?” she asked turning to face Lion-heart.

“It was abandoned on the doorstep last night. That was who it was when the bell rang.” Lion-heart answered.

“Who would do such a thing?” April said before walking up and taking the baby to comfort it. April was a very kind, caring and gentle woman who loved nearly every living soul. “Hey, it’s...” she started as she noticed while cradling the baby. She was interrupted by Lion-heart before she could finish.

“...a half breed.” Lion-heart finished. “I suppose we should take care of it, it obviously doesn’t have a family that cares for it.”

“I suppose so.” April agreed. “What are we going to call him though?”

The family then debated over what to call their adopted son. Many names came up, but eventually Lion-heart came up with the final name that the family agreed to.

“Frato. We will call him Frato.”

--Chapter 2: Training--

Frato had then shared a Burmecian upbringing with Fratley. The Burmecians were rather uncomfortable with the idea of having a half-caste in Burmecia at first, but eventually they accepted Frato.

Frato was being shaken awake by his father. Frato grumbled and rolled over, wishing to get more sleep. He was shaken a second time.

“Come on Frato get up.” Lion-heart said firmly.

Frato then opened his eyes and looked at the rain outside. It was very early; the sun had not yet risen. Only the darkness and gentle rain could be seen in Burmecia.

Frato eventually forced himself onto his feet and then looked at his father. Lion-heart had a stern

look on his face, although he didn't seem to be angry.

"Get dressed, take this and come downstairs." Lion-heart commanded whilst handing Frato a rather short spear. The spear was shoulder length to Frato, who was only about half the height of Lion-heart. Lion-heart left the room to leave Frato to dress himself.

The eight year old quickly got dressed and took his new weapon and rushed down the stairs. The day had finally come; he was going to train to become a Dragon Knight.

As Frato reached the bottom of the stairs he saw Lion-heart and Fratley smiling at him. Fratley was used to waking up early as he had been training for three years already.

The three then went outside into the garden. Fratley went away from the group and begun training alone for he had learned what Lion-heart was about to teach Frato. Lion-heart faced Frato.

"As you are probably aware, the time has come for me to train you." Lion-heart stated, looking into Frato's broad smile. "Becoming a Dragoon is no easy task and requires skill, strength, determination and dedication. You think you're up to it Frato?"

It didn't take a second for Frato to decide.

"Yes sir!" Frato boomed, still smiling madly. He couldn't wait to start.

Lion-heart then led Frato to a barrel with a target painted onto it. He then showed Frato how to hold his lance properly, as Frato was holding it in such a way that he was pointing it sideways.

"Before I can teach you anything else, you must first learn to use you lance properly." Lion-heart explained. "I want you to hit the target in the centre with a charging attack."

Frato nodded then focused his attention onto the barrel. He ran forwards towards the barrel with his lance outward. The lance pierced the barrel easily. Frato looked to see how he did, and found he was at least an inch away from the target.

Lion-heart took one look at where the lance had planted itself. He shook his head and said "You're not quite there, try again."

Frato removed his lance and tried again to pierce the target. He failed again, but this time he was closer to the target. Frato tried again, and again, and again, and eventually...

"I did it!" Frato beamed, smiling intently at his lance which had pierced the centre of the target. Lion-heart looked at the lance to check.

"So you did." He admitted. "Right, let's move on to the next exercise."

Lion-heart quickly moved the barrel away to prepare for the next exercise. Frato was swinging his lance, trying to get used to the motion. Lion-heart then drew his own lance, which was a lot longer and looked a great deal more powerful than Frato's. Frato looked at his adopted father with his eyes wide open. He dare not think what might be coming next.

"Now you know how to use a lance, you must learn to defend and attack with it." Lion-heart said without a single hesitation. "We'll start with attack; you attack me by swinging your lance downwards. This way I will show you how to block it as well."

Frato did as he was told, and swung his lance vertically towards the ground beneath his father's feet. Before his lance even touched Lion-heart, Lion-heart moved his lance across him to block the strike. Lion-hart then moved his in such a way that it caused Frato to back off, even if Frato didn't intend to.

"Good strike Frato, now let's see if you can block it!" Lion-heart commented, before swinging his lance at lighting speed in the same motion at Frato. Frato had little time to react, and just managed to move his lance into the same position that Lion-heart had used to block. Lion-heart's lance hit Frato's with such force Frato's lance was knocked to the floor. However, the strike had been

stopped.

“Nice try Frato, but you need to tighten your grip. You would have been spared from that strike, but easily defeated afterwards.” Lion-heart concluded. “However, practise makes perfect.”

Frato stared dumbfounded at his father, and then at his lance that lay on the floor. This was much harder than Fratley and Lion-heart made it look. However, Frato wasn't going to give up now. He had dreamed about becoming a Dragon Knight, and he was determined to live out his dream.

He picked his lance back up and nodded at his father. Lion-heart swung his lance down again in the same fashion as before, and Frato blocked it. This time he managed to keep the lance in his grip. He then pushed his lance forwards, which took all of Frato's strength due to the power of his father's strike, and just managed to push his father back.

“Excellent Frato, that's more like it.” Lion-heart complimented.

Lion-heart trained Frato in several other different forms of blocking and attacking, and although it took quite a few attempts for Frato to master each block and attack he never lost hope.

There was something in Frato, an urge to fight, that awakened from within him when he started his training. He enjoyed every blow he struck and blocked and he was focused to improve his strength and technique.

“Now for the next exercise.” Lion-heart announced after putting Frato through the basic blocks and attacks. “One of the Burmecians main strengths lies in their feet. The Burmecian ability to jump has been credited and abused throughout the centuries and has given us a great advantage in battle. A Dragon knight must learn to jump effectively.”

Frato then looked slightly worried, he was only a half-breed. Did he have the Burmecian ability to jump to extreme heights? He looked down at his feet, which looked quite Burmecian, were it not for his pink skin that lay over them. There was a very thin layer of fur over his feet, and claws instead of toes. It was hard to tell whether they were more Burmecian or human.

Lion-heart looked at Frato and gave a little smile. “This is going to be interesting. Have you adopted the jumping ability from your Burmecian side? I want to see you jump as high as you can.”

Frato took a step backward, bent his knees as far as they would go and propelled himself into the air as high as he could. He left the ground with extreme speed, and Frato saw the ground fall beneath him. How high Frato had reached surprised even him. He was on the same level of the air as the second floor of the house. He then fell back down to Gaia and landed on his feet.

Lion-heart made a little noise of satisfaction. “So you do have the ability to jump. You didn't jump as high as Fratley on his first try but you came close.”

Frato just breathed a sigh of relief, he could jump, and he could still become a powerful dragon knight. His dream had not faded because of his race.

Lion-heart was not satisfied with just seeing Frato jump. Being the strict teacher that he was, he made Frato do some jumping exercises involving jumping on and off walls in a ricochet, jumping across the garden in a single leap and even having him evade attacks by jumping.

After they had finished their training, Lion-heart decided that they would finally have their breakfast. Both Fratley and Frato were ravenous, and were grateful to finally receive some food. When the three entered the house April was already up and nearly finished preparing the breakfast.

Lion-heart seemed in a hurry to eat his breakfast, and for good reason. He had to attend to his Dragoon duties, one of which was to guard the King of Burmecia and the royal palace. He was running late after giving Frato a longer training session than he intended.

Fratley seemed to stare at Frato while he ate his breakfast. After Lion-heart had finished and was getting ready to leave and when he was sure April wasn't listening, he finally asked Frato

something.

“Frato, dad will be gone for most of the day and mother will be busy looking after the house.” Fratley said between mouthfuls of food.

“I know that Fratley, but why would that matter?” Frato answered, still chewing his food. Fortunately his parents weren’t paying him any attention.

“Well, I was hoping that you and I could spar outside.” Fratley said looking hopeful “It’s just that training alone all day is dull, I’ve grown tired of it fairly quickly.”

Fratley always trained outside when his father was doing his duty, Frato often watched.

“Spar?” Frato asked confused, he had no idea what the word meant.

“You know, fight. Only we don’t try to kill each other.” Fratley explained. “You feel up to it?”

Frato was about to reject the idea, he knew they could wind up getting injured. However, something stopped him from saying no. An instinct inside of him was telling him to say yes, he wanted the challenge of fighting his older brother, he wanted to become stronger. Eventually the instinct took control with a little help from Frato’s curiosity. He wanted to know what a battle would be like.

“Okay.” Frato finally answered. “Sounds like fun.”

“Alright. We’ll spar in the garden after breakfast.” Fratley said smiling, just before putting more food into his mouth.

--Chapter 3: Spar--

After breakfast the two sneaked outside with their lances. If April found out what they were up to they would most likely be yelled at.

The two found a clear space in the garden that was not easily seen by the house. They did not want to be interrupted whilst they were sparring.

Fratley moved his lance to point at Frato; he moved his long blonde locks of hair out of his face and grinned at Frato, looking at him through soft blue eyes.

“Ready?” Fratley asked.

Frato moved his in a similar fashion to Fratley; he quickly ran his clawed fingers through his short brown hair and grinned back at Fratley, looking at Fratley with his cold blue eyes.

“Ready.” Frato answered.

In less than a second their two lances clashed against each other. Frato moved his lance back but before he could attack Fratley swung his lance at Frato’s right leg. Frato jumped to avoid his attack. As Frato fell from his low jump he swung his lance downwards towards Fratley, but his lance hit the ground as Fratley sidestepped to avoid the attack. Frato cursed as he lifted his lance from the ground.

“Come on Frato, I know you can do better than that. Use your speed; I know you can keep up with me.” Fratley said before swinging his lance at Frato’s chest for another attack.

Frato jumped high into the air to avoid the attack. He then moved his lance to prepare for an attack from the air. Fratley saw this and leapt back.

“Frato, I know exactly where you’re going to land. A jump attack like that won’t work against me.” Fratley said sternly.

Frato saw Fratley’s change in movement and moved his lance slightly. Just as he was about to hit the ground Frato threw his lance at Fratley with great speed and strength. The lance whizzed through the air and gave Fratley little time to react. Fratley attempted to sidestep the attack but he was too late. The lance sliced into his left arm. The lance fell to the ground and Fratley cursed at the

pain that the deep cut in his arm was causing him.

Frato quickly jumped and retrieved his lance. He turned to Fratley and looked a little concerned at the wound he had made in his brother's shoulder.

"Are you alright?" Frato asked a little concerned.

Fratley nodded and Frato smiled. "Caught you out there didn't I?" Frato asked, grinning wildly about getting the first good strike.

"Yes, but you should never let go of your weapon. If an enemy gets hold of it you're finished." Fratley stated. "Okay, let's continue."

Fratley ran forward and attempted to strike Frato by swinging his lance towards Frato's side. Frato blocked the strike with his own lance and tried to force Fratley back. However Fratley was too strong and Frato eventually had to move back and move his lance away.

Frato then tried to strike Fratley's legs but missed as Fratley took to the air in an extremely high jump. Frato looked at Fratley and moved away from where Fratley was going to land. Fratley then threw his lance towards Frato at the peak of his jump. The lance cut through the air at a tremendous speed. Frato just managed to jump out of the way before the lance impaled him. Fratley landed a short distance away from the lance and retrieved it.

"What was this about never letting go of your weapon?" Frato asked.

"In that situation I'm always going to get my lance first." Fratley replied. "Besides, that's a well known attack of a Dragon Knight."

"Whatever." Frato answered before charging towards his brother.

Frato swung his lance at Fratley again, who sidestepped and tried to plant a strike of his own. Frato quickly moved his lance to block the strike. Fratley tried to strike Frato again, but Frato blocked this second strike. Fratley then spun around with his lance and struck Frato's lance with such force it knocked Frato's lance out of his hands. Fratley stopped his spin and spun the other way in another strike. He saw Frato was without a lance a moment too late and couldn't stop his strike.

His lance sliced across Frato's chest and Frato fell to the ground next to his lance.

Fratley stopped his spin and dropped his lance before running over to Frato.

"Frato! Are you alright?!" Fratley said worried. The cut he made was deep and was bleeding rather quickly. Frato was breathing and was still conscious. He found it hard to speak.

"Go...get...mother..." Frato said through deep breaths. Fratley acted on these words and ran into the house.

Within seconds April was running into the garden with Fratley. As soon as April saw Frato she gasped in shock before kneeling next to Frato, attending to his injury. She wrapped some rags around the wound and lifted Frato up. She rushed into the house with Fratley and laid Frato across the suite in the living room.

Frato was still breathing heavily as he lay across the couch. April rushed into the kitchen and brought back some Hi-Potions. She opened the bottle and forced the strange green liquid into Frato's mouth. As soon as Frato swallowed the liquid he started breathing more freely and the cut across his chest closed into a small scratch and stopped bleeding.

"How did he get such a wound?" April asked Fratley who was relieved to see his brother healed from his attack.

"There was a monster..." Fratley lied.

"In the city?" His mother asked raising an eyebrow.

"Yes...it attacked Frato, but I scared it off." Fratley explained. He didn't sound too convincing.

Frato, who hadn't been listening and had just become fully conscious, interrupted.

"Fratley! We forgot our lances!" Frato exclaimed.

"Lances!?" April repeated "You've been sparring haven't you?"

"Sorry mother." Fratley said sheepishly.

"How many times have I told you that you shouldn't spar?! It's dangerous! You could have killed Frato! You should only spar when your father is supervising!" April nagged.

"But father's always busy with his duties as a dragon knight." Fratley moaned.

"We need to train." Frato said trying to help his brother in this verbal battle. "Sparring is the best way to train."

"I don't care!" April began to shout. "Training is only good if you survive! Frato could have died from that wound! You could have died Fratley! Do you even care?!"

Fratley just hung his head in shame. Frato had a guilty expression on his face as well.

"You can get your lances and you can come back inside." April said to break an awkward silence. "You can stay inside for the rest of the day, that way I can see to it that you don't end up killing each other."

Frato and Fratley did as they were told and walked outside to get their lances. The two picked up their lances, as Fratley turned to Frato after retrieving his lance he had to move his lance in front of him. Frato's lance had struck Fratley's and they were in a deadlock.

"Frato, what are you doing?!" Fratley asked, rather shocked from Frato's sudden attack.

"Sparring, what does it look like?" Frato answered with a smirk.

The two moved their lances away to break the deadlock. Fratley put his lance over his shoulder, whilst Frato entered a battle stance.

"You heard what mother said!" Fratley exclaimed.

"I know, but I don't care." Frato answered "When I was fighting you, I felt happy, I felt satisfied. Come on Fratley, enter your battle stance!"

"I'm not sparring with you Frato." Fratley said sternly before turning and walking towards the house. As he walked he heard Frato scream and run towards him.

He turned and blocked Frato's strike just in time. Frato moved his lance back and swung it Fratley once again. Fratley blocked the attack. Frato continued to try and attack Fratley but Fratley kept blocking all of Frato's attacks.

Frato then jumped back. "Come on Fratley, attack me!" Frato taunted beckoning Fratley to him.

"Frato, we're in enough trouble as it is..." Fratley began, but he was interrupted as he had to block another attack from Frato.

"If that is how you will act, then you leave me no choice." Fratley said before trying to strike Frato with his own lance. Frato blocked this attack, and he was forced backwards as he blocked an array of strikes from Fratley.

Frato jumped back to break away from Fratley.

"Yes, this is what I want." Frato said happily before charging towards Fratley. Fratley prepared to block, but Frato jumped before he reached Fratley. He swung his lance in a vertical circle and landed striking Fratley with immense force. Fratley blocked the attack with some difficulty.

Fratley pushed Frato back with his lance and Frato charged again, however before he could reach Fratley...

“FRATO! FRATLEY!”

The two looked towards the direction of the ear piercing yell. They saw April, with an infuriated look on her face.

“I can’t trust you for five seconds can I?! Get inside now!” April yelled.

Frato and Fratley looked at each other with rather shocked and worried faces before walking towards the door of the house. As they walked past April, she gave them a hard smack across the back of the head. They entered the house rubbing the backs of their heads and were followed shortly by April. They both knew that more would probably be to come.

--Chapter 4: First Lesson--

“Hurry up you two! You’ll be late!” April yelled as Fratley and Frato scurried around upstairs in a desperate attempt to get ready.

Eventually the two ran down the stairs fully dressed and ready. They were preparing for their first day at the Dragon Academy. The Dragon Academy was a school for young warriors who aimed to join the Dragon knights, the elite soldiers of the Burmecian army, when they were old enough.

April looked at her two children to see if they were in fact ready, as quite often they would try to get away with not combing their hair or washing.

“Okay we’re ready, let’s go.” April finally concluded before walking towards the door. The three of them left the house and walked down the dull, rainy streets of Burmecia. On the way they saw Lionheart standing guard near the Royal Palace.

Eventually the three reached the Academy. It was a tall, gloomy building, with stone dragon heads around it for decoration. There was a plaque on the door which read “The Royal Dragon Academy of Burmecia: Where warriors are born.”

“Well, this is the place.” April said as Frato and Fratley stared at the building. “I’ll see you boys later. Goodbye, and behave!” April said as she walked away from them waving. Fratley and Frato were left to themselves. They looked at each other and marched into the building.

The two entered a bright room with red carpets and walls. A single Burmecian soldier stood nonchalant next to a door.

“Your class is through there.” The Burmecian soldier muttered before prompting them to go through a door. Fratley and Frato quickly shuffled through the door and down the corridor behind it. The corridor walls were covered with pictures of Dragon Warriors and Burmecian soldiers who had fought for their country.

Eventually the two reached a classroom that was rather dull when compared to the other rooms of the academy. It was a simple stone walled room with a few pictures. There was a desk, where a Burmecian male was sat. There were small blue mats lined out on the floor from the desk where a few Burmecian children of Fratley and Frato’s age were sat.

Many of the people who were sat on the floor were familiar to Fratley and Frato. There was Dan; an average sized brown haired Burmecian. Next to him was Gray; who was slightly taller than Dan and had darker hair. He was a good friend of Dan. They also recognised Din, Kal and Gary from their times out in Burmecia.

“Please sit down you two.” The Burmecian male asked in his seat. Fratley and Frato did as they were told and sat down on two mats next to each other. They looked around seeing if they could start a conversation but the whole class was sat in silence.

“Are there any more students to come?” The teacher said before looking at a register on a piece of parchment on his desk. “Where’s Kyle?” He asked looking at the class with stern eyes.

“I think he’s off ill this morning sir.” Dan explained to the tutor. He replied by rolling his eyes.

“It isn’t very ideal to be off on the first morning.” The teacher said rather gruffly. “Perhaps he doesn’t take his training seriously.”

“Or he’s just a coward.” Frato sneered. The rest of the class giggled slightly.

The teacher did not look impressed. “Silence, that is quite enough.” He said raising his voice so it was louder than the laughter. The class fell silent again. He took the parchment again and looked down it, checking if everyone was present. “Anyone know where Freya Crescent is this morning?”

“Freya Crescent?!” Gray said incredulously. “But she’s a girl!”

“Girls are just as welcome at the Dragon Academy as boys I think you’ll find.” The teacher said with a little smile. “Does anybody know where Freya is?” He repeated.

Everyone just looked at each other and shrugged. No-one knew where Freya was, none of them expected her to attend the academy. After a few moments of confusion the doors burst open to reveal the female in question. She came in wearing a small orange trench coat and brown trousers.

“Sorry I’m late.” Freya apologised looking a little embarrassed. It was only her first day at the academy and already something had gone wrong. “I…” she began, but was quickly interrupted by Frato.

“I was doing my nails!” Frato called out in a feminine voice obviously trying to mimic Freya. The class started laughing again, all except for Freya, who was deeply embarrassed and the teacher, who was rather angry with the disruption. Freya returned Frato’s outburst with a cold stare.

“That is enough!” The teacher eventually shouted which stopped the laughing and any other sound. Everyone’s attention was now focused on the teacher. “Your apology is accepted Freya, however I must point out that we do not tolerate lateness in this academy. I will punish you if it happens again.” The tutor explained. Freya nodded in agreement and the tutor turned to Frato. “I’ll also punish you if you continue to disrupt my lesson.”

Frato just turned away and folded his arms. He was not happy. Freya gave a light smile at Frato, which just seemed to tick Frato off more. Freya quickly took a seat next to Fratley.

“Right, now that everyone is here we can get started.” The teacher began. “My name is Ivan and I will be your tutor during your time here. The rules are simple. Treat others as you would treat yourself. Respect your elders and tutors here. No jewellery, for safety reasons. No toys, sweets or anything else that is not required for your training. Any rule-breakers will be punished accordingly.”

There was a brief pause, and then Ivan continued.

“For your training, you will build the strength of both the body and the mind. A Burmecian warrior needs both in order to fulfil his duties. For today we will be training the mind. I thought it was best to start off with something straightforward.” Ivan explained before grabbing a pile of books of Burmecian literature.

Frato just sighed heavily, he hated reading and studying. He was much better suited to physical activity. Before he could train he became easily bored with his mother’s reading and studies she set for him and Fratley. He much preferred watching his brother train.

Fratley didn’t mind too much. It was a nice change from working himself half to death in a massive training session. He enjoyed some aspects of Burmecian study from his mother. Learning about new lands, learning about new people to meet and monsters to fight deeply interested Fratley and he wished he could go to these places and witness them for himself.

Freya smiled at the idea. She loved to read. However she didn’t like the literature that most young girls liked. She hated romance stories; she preferred adventure and action stories. Freya also took an interest in learning about her country and her people when she was too young to train.

Ivan handed everyone a book, which turned out to be one about the history of Burmecia and the

Dragon Knights. Frato and a few others groaned when they saw the title of the book. Frato loathed history, if he was going to be forced to read something he wanted to read something remotely interesting. Like an action or adventure story, or a book about how to fight. History didn't even matter to Frato. He knew Burmecia was built, there was Royal family, there were the Dragon Knights and there were battles and people. That was all Frato thought he needed to know.

Fratley didn't seem too surprised or bothered about the book. He had hoped for a book or a diary of a journey around Gaia.

Freya was probably the only one in the room who was smiling. It was light smile, but a smile nonetheless. She enjoyed listening to the history of Burmecia.

The class opened the book and began to read from the front. They were reading aloud, starting with Ivan and then taking turns around the group. Some of the pupils had trouble seeing as they couldn't read very well, if at all.

The book itself was quite unusual. It stated the following:

“In the beginning there was the crystal and from the crystal derived all of the universe and the planets including our home planet Gaia. With Gaia four spirits were created each for an area on Gaia. The crystal was split up and spread across Gaia to prevent abuse of the power of the Holy Spirits. With the jewel that currently resides in the city of Cleyra, came the holy spirit of Burmecia. This spirit created Burmecia and its entire population.”

Frato rolled his eyes as he followed the words. No-one believed in the holy spirit of Burmecia. In the past there may have been stronger belief but that soon faded away. No-one had ever seen the spirit. It was said that he looked over Burmecia for eternity but with wars and natural disasters that occurred he couldn't have been protecting the city very well.

The book went on to say how the Royal family had been formed and how they ruled over Burmecia. It continued to say that the Dragon Knights were elite soldiers chosen by the King for the toughest missions.

The class read the book all the way through, by which point all the class knew what had happened in Burmecia in the earlier centuries. Well, all except Frato who looked like a zombie after they had finished reading. Whether he had learned the history of the city or not was debatable.

“Okay, class is dismissed. Put your books here and you may leave.” Ivan breathed through a small sigh of relief. “Remember, next week we are doing physical training so make sure you come prepared.”

Frato punched the air as he walked out with Fratley. He loved physical training.

--Chapter 5: Love at first sight?--

Frato was looking forward to his next lesson at the Academy. Frato loved to fight; he loved any activity that involved duelling with an opponent or tests of strength.

This was a good contrast to the rest of the students. Fratley just looked to the physical training lesson as “another training session”. Freya was hoping to prove herself in front of her students, though she knew she was likely to receive ridicule thanks to her gender. She wasn't looking forward to it, but she wouldn't back down. The rest of the students were hoping they would come out of their next lesson in one piece.

Whether they liked it or not the following lesson came. Frato and Fratley had the same mad dash to get there on time as the previous lesson. Although they were eager to attend the Academy this didn't let them escape from the fact they were heavy sleepers.

“Freya, it's time to get up. You don't want to be late for the Dragon Academy again.” Freya's

mother called to her sleeping daughter.

Freya groaned and shifted herself into a sitting position. She stared at herself in the mirror on the wall opposite her bed. The day had come. She would have to prove that she, a mere girl, was more than able to become a powerful warrior for the vast army of Burmecia.

It was more than easy; she had already been picked on for even attempting to become a warrior. She was reminded of Frato's irritating remarks of her previous lesson as she opened the wardrobe next to the door to pick her clothes for the day.

"What does that idiot know?" Freya thought to herself as she got dressed. "I bet he's never even met a girl his age." Freya then looked at herself again in the mirror. She was wearing a white combat outfit. It consisted of a fairly loose top with short sleeves. These were joined with trousers which lied quite close to the skin to allow for mobility. It was also fairly tough to pierce.

Freya quickly brushed her locks of white hair, which reached to her shoulders, before going downstairs for breakfast.

Fratley and Frato were on their way to the academy. They travelled without a parent as they knew their way there and both their parents were busy. Fratley was leading the way to the academy along the stony, wet road under the endless rain of Burmecia. At least, Frato thought they were going to the academy, he then found they were not.

"Fratley, we're going the wrong way." Frato said slightly confused.

"No we're not." Fratley replied quickly.

"Yes we are! The academy is that way!" Frato said pointing down the road on their right. He was right; they were going the wrong way.

"I'm going somewhere else first." Fratley explained.

"Where?" Frato asked.

"Someone's house." Fratley replied after a slight pause.

"Whose house?" Frato asked again, he was determined to find out what was prolonging them from the lesson he had been excited about all week.

"What business is it of yours?" Fratley retorted, he was determined not to tell Frato, for he knew Frato would object.

"I'm going there." Frato replied hastily. "Tell me, who?"

"Dan's house." Fratley lied.

"We've just been past Dan's house." Frato answered, starting to become suspicious. "Whose house are we really going to?"

Fratley sighed, knowing his efforts to conceal his destination had failed. "If you must know, Freya's house." Fratley finally answered.

"Freya's house!?" Frato replied in shock. "Why do you want to go to her house!?" He asked in the same surprised tone, he then started to grin. "Do you fancy her?" He asked giving Fratley a light nudge.

"No." Fratley replied sincerely. "I just want to know why she joined the academy that's all. That and I want to know a little bit more about her, I barely know her."

"Right." Frato said sarcastically. "Well, as much as I want to see you completely fail at an attempt to get a date I can't stand to be around her."

"You don't even know her." Fratley snarled. "Besides, you're coming with me anyway. Mother told

us to stick together.

“She thinks she can become a warrior. I know her well enough.” Frato snorted.

“What’s wrong with her becoming a warrior?” Fratley asked. “Are you afraid she’ll become stronger than you?” He asked with a little smile.

“Stronger than me? Get real!” Frato sneered. “Women aren’t made to be warriors.”

“How would you know? You wouldn’t know a woman if one came and sat on your head.” Fratley replied smirking.

“Name one successful female warrior.” Frato stated.

Of course, Fratley’s list compiled of zero seeing as no females had entered any army on the Mist continent.

“My point exactly.” Frato said after Fratley’s long silence.

Despite what he said Frato did follow Fratley, after all he knew he would eventually get a smack off his mother if he left Fratley. It wasn’t long before the two were outside Freya’s house. The door opened as soon as they got there to reveal Freya in her sparring outfit, with a red raincoat on top. Freya seemed startled to see the two boys standing in the rain waiting for her.

“What are you doing here?” Freya asked, stammering.

“I just wish to escort you to the Dragon Academy.” Fratley replied with a reassuring smile. “I was hoping to get more acquainted with you.”

“Thanks, but I don’t need an escort. I..” Freya then saw that Frato was with him. “What do you want?!” Freya asked him, irritated by his presence. Her memory of his remarks in the last lesson at the academy was strong.

Frato was just looking at her in disgust. He snorted and then asked a question of his own. “What makes you think that you can be a warrior?” He seemed to emphasize the second “you”.

“The same thing as you.” Freya responded. “What is wrong with a female warrior?”

“Women aren’t made to be warriors.” Frato stated as if it was a fact. “How would you like it if I started doing a hobby that females do? Like knitting, or if I did the housework?”

“I wouldn’t care.” Freya replied lightly.

“Actually Frato, it would make a nice change.” Fratley added. “You normally don’t lift a finger around the house.”

Frato growled at Fratley and then at Freya when she started laughing. He then stormed off down the dull, wet and grey street towards the academy. He then turned and called to Freya and Fratley.

“Come on! We’re going to be late for the academy!” Frato shouted.

Fratley and Freya obeyed this time and began to follow Frato, who seemed to be walking twice as fast as normal. Fratley and Freya trailed behind and they weren’t too concerned about keeping up with Frato despite the harsh rain that battered them continually.

“So Freya,” Fratley started, desperate to spark up a conversation. “...just why are you attending the academy? Most girls shudder at the thought of it.”

“What is wrong with a girl joining the Dragon Academy?” Freya asked starting to get frustrated. No-one seemed to acknowledge it as anything other than a shame.

“Nothing! Nothing at all!” Fratley answered.

“Really? You really think that?” Freya asked in an astonished tone.

“Of course. I don’t see any problems with female warriors in Burmecia. As long as they help protect

Burmecia they are fine by me.” Fratley answered. Freya smiled as he spoke.

“No-one’s ever told me that before.” Freya responded in a soft voice. “Even my mother was against the idea at first, but I managed to sign up for the academy behind her back and I was accepted.”

“They couldn’t turn you down.” Fratley reassured her. “So, what do you like to do outside of the academy?”

“I like doing a few things: cards, sport and reading. I love to read. Especially books about Burmecia.” Freya answered.

Fratley admired the sound of Freya’s voice. It was like a choir of angels singing in harmony. He realised she had finished speaking and snapped out of his stare. “I like reading, I suppose. I prefer hearing stories about journeys and travels. I don’t have much time to read now that I have to train.”

“You train outside of the academy?” Freya asked in astonishment.

“Yes, my father insists on it. He trains both me and Frato.” Fratley explained.

Freya sighed and began let her mind fall into thought. She wondered whether anyone else in the academy trained before they had attended their lesson. Fratley was a viable exception, Sir Lionheart was well known in Burmecia for his skill and strength. She mulled over whether he would be the only knight to teach his children before they went to the academy.

As Freya thought, Fratley looked at her again. He became lost in the long, silky strands of Freya’s hair and then fell into the pools of emerald green in her eyes. Fratley wondered as he admired Freya just what he was feeling. It was something he had never experienced before. Whatever it was, he liked it and he wanted to be as close to Freya as possible.

Freya stopped her train of thought and decided not to worry about it. She then turned to Fratley and realised he was staring at her like some form of zombie.

“What are you staring at?” She finally asked rather irritated. Fratley then realised just what he had been doing and turned away rather embarrassed.

“Sorry...” He muttered sheepishly.

In a few minutes they were outside the academy. Frato hadn’t bothered to wait for them and was already inside. Freya and Fratley just walked in silently.

“This is it.” Freya thought to herself as she entered the building.

--Chapter 6: Second Lesson--

The lesson started off in the same room as it had the week before. Ivan read off the register with everyone stating “Yes sir” at their name. There was no bickering or conversation as everyone was waiting with anticipation or fear as to what they would be asked to do for the lesson.

Registration ended and the teacher looked at them all, trying to see if anyone had come without anything they would need. After a brief glance Ivan then began to speak.

“Before we go outside into the training area I want to go over a few ground rules. First, no-one is to do anything with their lance until I say so. Second, no jewellery or anything valuable is to be worn or taken outside for the session. If you do have anything valuable please place it in this box before we go outside.” Ivan then held up a small, green wooden box and placed it on the table. He then continued “Finally, as we walk outside we will be passing other classes and lessons. So I want to be as quiet as you can. Now, we may go outside.”

After he finished this, the class rose and filed out of the room. Ivan led the class through the corridors of the academy towards the training area. When the class were outside they saw a large field consisting of saturated grass and puddles. There were some targets in which holes from spears had been made, an area to do high jump (which reached the height of a two-storey building), a

swimming pool and a little shed with a door hanging open. Inside was a stash of armour, shields and anything else you could use in battle. All of this was being pelted by the everlasting rain of the city.

Ivan then led the class into the centre of the field and stopped. He then spoke to the class once again.

“Okay, this is the training area; we shall be coming here for each practical lesson.” Ivan then walked over to the targets and placed his hand on one. “For the first exercise, I want you to charge at the target and pierce the centre of the target.”

Frato and Fratley both groaned at the prospect of doing the same exercise they had done in their training with their father. Perhaps their early training sessions were a mistake.

The class lined and took their turns trying to get their lances to pierce the target. None of the other students succeeded and were a few inches away from the target.

Fratley’s turn came, and he pierced the target right in the centre without any difficulty. The rest of the class just stared at him in awe as he removed his lance from the target and walked. Ivan looked and gave a light smile.

“Very impressive Fratley.” Ivan commented. “Next!”

Fratley walked away thinking it was nothing. To him, that was such a basic skill. As he watched the other students he realised just how far he had come in his training, but he knew there was still a long way to go.

Frato was next; he charged at the target and pierced the target in the centre. Just like with Fratley, the rest of the class watched in awe. Frato removed his lance and walked to where Fratley was standing.

“What a waste of time.” Frato said under his breath.

Freya was up to try the target test next. With such a hard act to follow, she wondered how she would cope. She charged at the target and thrust her lance forward into the target. After she finished her attack, she looked to see where her lance had impaled the target.

Freya’s lance was impaled right on the line between the centre of the target and the inner ring. She was so close. The rest of the class muttered in disbelief. She had outdone them all! Ivan looked and his eyes widened slightly, he then smiled and looked at Freya.

“Very good. I’m certain you’ll hit the target dead-centre next time.” Ivan commented.

Freya removed her lance and rejoined the line. As Ivan had predicted she hit the target in the centre on her second try. It took just over an hour for all of the class to manage to pierce the centre of the target. After this was achieved Ivan called everyone back into the line again.

“Okay, for the next exercise I want you to throw your lance at the target from here.” Ivan said before walking a few metres away from the target and using his clawed feet to make a mark in the grass. “You may in battle need to hit an enemy from a distance, and missing your target could mean your life’s end. Okay, who’s first?”

The first student took his place and tried to hit the target by throwing his lance. The lance hit the target, but in the outer ring. His aim was off.

Frato was next, he was slightly happier with the prospect of doing something new, as was Fratley. He threw his lance with as much accuracy and power as he could muster and the lance flew straight into the target. Frato saw that he was about half an inch away from the centre of the target. Frato growled as he retrieved his lance.

“Close.” Ivan stated looking fairly impressed by the half-breeds skill. “Next.”

Fratley was next; he threw his lance and pierced the target exactly in the centre. He smiled as he

removed his lance from the target and the class were watching again in awe. Fratley's skill amazed everyone there except Frato, who knew too well what Fratley was capable of.

Frato just knew that if anyone would outclass him here, it would be Fratley. From their sparring and training sessions, he knew Fratley was one step ahead of him. He related this to the fact that Fratley was older than him, and had received more training from their father. He promised himself that one day he would beat Fratley. He would become stronger and more skilled than his brother. He would be the best, this was Frato's dream.

Freya was the next person to throw. She looked at the target and then her lance, then back at the target. She took one step back and threw her lance at the target. Her lance had pierced the centre of the target almost exactly on the spot Fratley had pierced. The class looked open eyed at the target. Freya had proven herself to be better than the vast majority of the class.

Ivan congratulated her on piercing the target as she removed her lance and walked towards Fratley. She was contented; she knew she had shown that she was capable of becoming a warrior, despite her gender.

Frato was furious, Freya had outdone him. She hadn't trained nearly as long as him and yet she had outdone him! He had been beaten by a mere girl! Frato could easily accept that Fratley was better than him, but there was no way on Gaia that he would accept that Freya was better than him.

Frato managed to pierce the target's middle on his second try. However, few other members of the class managed to hit the centre on their second try. After approximately fifty minutes, the rest of the class had hit the target in the centre.

Ivan called the class together once again to explain what would be their third exercise. "Okay, I want you to get into pairs." Ivan said clearly.

The class started to form twos; Frato looked around for Fratley so he could pair up with him. His eyes finally laid upon his brother, but when they did Frato's mouth hung agape.

Fratley was pairing up with Freya. Frato's ideal partner had been stolen by someone he was beginning to dislike. His hate for Freya grew slightly. He had firmly decided that he did not like her, not in the slightest. She could have been the nicest girl in the world and yet he hated her.

Now in the knowledge that his brother had a partner and he didn't, Frato looked elsewhere. He eventually paired up with Dan.

When everyone had found themselves a partner Ivan began to explain his instructions. "Okay, the best way to learn to fight is to fight someone else. I want you to spar with your partner. No-one is to try and kill their partner; any major injuries are to be reported to me. Begin."

At Ivan's command the class started to battle with each other. Each member of the class was clashing and hitting their lances with each other.

Freya and Fratley were having what was probably the most interesting "fight". They were clashing their lances much faster than most of the class, and their attacks seemed so much stronger and fiercer. Fratley seemed to be winning, as Freya was being forced back fairly slowly. It was still a close fight. Ivan watched the two in amazement; he was awed by their natural talent.

Frato was having the time of his life. He smiled as he thrust his lance into Dan's, blocking his attack. He then launched an assault of his own, Dan just able to block the strikes. Dan countered by charging into Frato, who sidestepped and launched an attack on the back of Dan's knees. This caused Dan to fall to the floor on his back. Dan was offered a hand by Frato and he was helped up. The two continued their fight.

After several minutes Ivan eventually called for the class to stop. Thankfully no-one had suffered any major injuries, although some had suffered a few scratches and cuts.

"I think that will do for today, though I was impressed by some of your natural fighting abilities."

Ivan was looking at Fratley and Freya and seemed to be addressing them more than anyone else. "You all have the makings of strong Burmecian warriors. That will be all for today, I will see you all in the next lesson. You are dismissed."

The class dispersed and all started to make their way home. Frato rejoined Fratley, who was waving at Freya as she went towards her home. When she was out of sight Fratley walked with Frato.

"Now that..." Frato said to Fratley, smiling. "...That is what I call a lesson."

--Chapter 7: First Date--

Freya and Fratley became more accustomed to seeing each other at the academy, and they were found together there talking to each other increasingly more often. Frato loathed this, but there was nothing he could do to stop it. The two gradually became inseparable.

Another lesson at the academy had finished and Frato and Fratley were leaving. As they stepped out into the pouring rain Frato sighed.

"Well, that's another lesson finished." Frato then looked down slightly and placed his clawed, grubby hands on his stomach, which gave a loud rumble. "I'm starving, let's go home and get something to eat." With that he started running towards their house. Frato never did have much patience.

Fratley sighed and shook his head as he saw Frato sprint off into the distance. They were supposed to stick together when coming to and from the academy, but the number of times that actually happened now was remote. April was beginning to trust them walking round the city on their own.

Freya walked out of the academy and quietly said "Goodbye" as she passed Fratley. Fratley looked up and took a step forward.

"Freya..." He called.

Freya stopped and turned round to look at Fratley. She could sense there was something on his mind. "Yes?" She replied softly.

Fratley couldn't maintain his eye contact and instead looked at his feet. It was not normal for him to be shy, not to anyone. He usually talked to Freya like any other person. However, something about this made him lose his calmness about this situation. "I...uh...I was wondering whether you were doing anything tonight." He stammered.

"No, why?" Freya answered, hoping he would gain the courage to look at her.

"I...I was wondering whether you would like to go out with me." Fratley asked, still staring at his feet.

Freya smiled; she enjoyed spending time with Fratley even if it was just at the academy. He stood up for her and he made her feel comfortable and secure. "Sure, I'd love to." She replied reassuringly.

Fratley finally looked up at her. He smiled as he saw the gentle green eyes looking back at him. "Really?" He asked with slight disbelief after a brief pause.

"Really." Freya nodded. "So where shall we meet?"

Fratley thought for a moment. Although he knew the areas of Burmecia very well he didn't know many places where he would like to take Freya. After reflecting on all the areas of Burmecia he knew he eventually made a decision.

"How about meeting at the fountain, near the royal palace?" Fratley suggested. The area near the fountain was often quiet, being outside the business area of Burmecia.

"Okay, we'll meet there at seven o'clock." Freya said, starting to look eager.

"Fine, I'll see you there." Fratley replied. He started to walk towards his home. He turned and

waved at Freya as he strolled.

Freya waved back, before shouting out “Don’t be late!!!”

The fountain was a peaceful place to be in, quiet and calm unlike most of the rainy city. The fountain obtained its water from the rain like most of the citizens did. Some of the Burmecians even came out and took water from the fountain for themselves and to stop it overflowing. The peaceful little splashes of rain in the fountain were peaceful to listen to.

Behind the fountain a couple of yards away was the entrance to the Burmecian Royal Palace. The palace was huge, it overlooked the entire city. Greys and blues displayed themselves from the palace walls, which were made of solid stone. The entrance was a set of blue, marble double doors which were guarded by two Burmecian soldiers. The soldiers took little notice of what people were doing by the fountain as it didn’t concern them, as long as it wasn’t criminal.

Fratley was the first of the two to arrive there. He was wearing a yellow raincoat with a white fluffy collar, with a black vest underneath. His trousers were the same colour as his coat, and had little pockets around the belt for anything he wanted to carry.

He sat down on the ledge of the fountain to wait for his proclaimed “date” to arrive. He was quite nervous, it was his first date and he didn’t know what to do or how to act. Then again, he knew there was no reason to be nervous around Freya. They knew each other very well.

He wasn’t waiting for very long before Freya arrived. She was wearing a red raincoat with a similar covered top underneath. She was also wearing orange trousers with red leather wrapped around her feet and ankles. Her head was covered with a pointy red hat with ear ornaments.

Freya smiled at Fratley who looked up at her. Fratley smiled back and spoke very lightly.

“Hello.”

“Hello Fratley.” Freya said calmly before sitting next to him on the ledge of the fountain.

“Not a bad evening is it?” Fratley asked, trying to start a conversation.

Telling a good evening in Burmecia to a bad one was a very difficult process. With the fact it always rained and sometimes the odd thunderstorm occurring it was hard to tell. The rain did vary, sometimes being fairly light to being so hard that two seconds in it would soak you head to toe. At the moment the rain was fairly moderate, beating down fairly quickly.

“I suppose not.” Freya answered “So, what do you want to do?”

“I don’t know. What do you want to do?” Fratley answered calmly.

“I don’t know.” Freya answered. “I figured you’d have some ideas.”

“Talk?” Fratley suggested. “I just want to be with you.”

Freya gave a light sigh. “I want to be with you too Fratley, but I would like to be doing something with you. I mean, what is there to talk about?”

“We could talk about us.” Fratley answered. Freya began to look at him with interest. Fratley continued “We have known each other for quite a while now and I think our friendship has developed into something more.”

“What do you mean, something more?” Freya asked. Her eyes were focused on Fratley’s face, looking for any signs of an answer.

“Well, this is embarrassing to say but...” Fratley paused, took a deep breath before looking up into Freya’s eyes and continuing. “...I think I love you Freya.”

Freya looked quite surprised with Fratley’s statement. She didn’t speak; she just looked into his soft

blue eyes that were filled with innocence. Fratley continued to speak.

“I love your courage. I love your devotion and patriotism. I love the way you talk. I love the way you act. I love you Freya.” Fratley said almost as if to some form of rhythm. “Do you love me back?”

Freya, although charmed and honoured by Fratley’s comments, didn’t know what to say. She paused for a moment, looking at the cute blue eyes that were watching her. She thought, but the answer was clear to her.

“I love you too Fratley, you’re the only one who seems to understand me. Whenever I am around you I feel safe, secure and comfortable. When I’m with you, I could be in no better place.” Freya replied softly.

Fratley smiled in silence as he admired her. He moved closer to her before whispering her name “Freya...”

Freya remained still, but she smiled too. She whispered back “Fratley...”

They moved their heads closer towards each other and their heads met, sealed in a romantic kiss. They moved their heads back after a few seconds, after having expressed something which words never could.

There was a slight pause. Neither knew what to say or do. They had experienced their first taste of romance. Fratley turned slightly and gave a small sigh of content. Freya looked at him curiously.

“Did you like that?” She asked curiously.

“I don’t think I have experienced anything better.” Fratley answered positively.

“Then do it again.” Freya suggested.

Fratley turned back and found Freya giving him another kiss, full on the lips. Fratley moved his muscular arms around Freya and they embraced. Then they heard a call.

“Fratley...!?”

The two stopped their embrace and looked to see the owner of the voice. They turned to find Frato standing in front of them, looking very surprised and slightly disturbed.

“Frato?!” Fratley spluttered before standing up to confront his brother. “What are you doing here?”

“Looking for you, mother said she wants you back fairly soon.” Frato explained. “What are you doing?”

“That’s none of your business!” Freya answered rather angrily.

“You were...” Frato lowered his voice and scrunched up his face. “...kissing.”

“What’s wrong with that?” Fratley asked unfazed.

Frato lowered his head and looked at the stony street. “I didn’t know you felt that way about her Fratley...” He turned away and began to walk back the way he had come. He stopped, lifted his head and looked back at Fratley. “I’m going home; if you don’t want to get killed by mother I suggest you follow me soon.” With that Frato left.

Fratley gave a heavy sigh and shook his head. He turned back to look at Freya, who looked fairly disheartened at the fact that Fratley would have to leave.

“I’m so sorry I have to leave so soon.” Fratley apologised. “I was hoping to spend more time with you than this...”

“It doesn’t matter; you don’t need to be sorry.” Freya said trying to comfort him. “We’ll see each other again.”

“Yes, I suppose.” Fratley said looking slightly happier. He turned away from Freya and turned his head to look back at her. “Goodbye, Freya.”

“Goodbye Fratley.” Freya called to him as Fratley began to walk away.

--Chapter 8: Assault--

Frato was marching down the raining streets of Burmecia looking fairly depressed with his head hung low. He was lost in a train of thought.

“Fratley...in love with Freya?” Frato mused to himself. “I don’t believe it, but there were always spending time together.”

Frato then lifted his head up to look at the Burmecians who were walking past. They knew he was there, and tried to stop themselves from laying their eyes on him. They were trying to avoid him. They just walked past ignorantly on their journey home.

“I know I’ll never get a girlfriend.” Frato thought. “The Burmecians here, they either don’t notice me, or they try to avoid me. No-one likes me. Only my family like me. Who would like a half-breed?”

This depressing thought made Frato even more upset. He continued to walk slowly through the rain, which seemed to be raining heavier than before.

A few minutes later, Frato was snapped out of his depression when he heard some fairly quiet, deep voices from somewhere off the street he was walking on. A normal human would not have been able to hear the voices, but Frato’s enhanced Burmecian ears allowed him to hear the conversation clearly.

“How much gil don’t you think we have here?” One of the voices asked.

“A few thousand easy.” Another voice answered. “What a steal! This ought to see us through.”

The voices were coming from a narrow alley that went between some of the houses and shops in Burmecia. Frato walked quietly to the entrance of the alley and saw two Burmecians talking to each other over a huge stash of gil. They didn’t notice Frato as he began to eavesdrop on their conversation.

“I can’t believe how much we stole!” The first Burmecian exclaimed as he examined the gil with his eyes flaring with delight. He was smaller than the other Burmecian; he was wearing a dirty, torn blue shirt with some baggy shorts of a similar colour. He also had some short, grubby brown hair.

“Be quiet!” The other Burmecian hissed. “We don’t want the guards to hear...” He was fairly tall, and was clad in a brown leather jacket which was stained with dirt and a few drops of blood. He also some long black trousers which had tears at the bottom. He looked around nervously through his black locks of hair, which weren’t very long. His dark brown eyes eventually caught sight of Frato, and they widened with alert.

“You!” The Burmecian said firmly with a hint of anger. “What are you doing!?”

Frato hesitated and quickly tried to think of something. He eventually forced out the words “I dropped something.”

“A likely story.” The dark haired Burmecian replied sarcastically. “How much did you hear?”

“Nothing! Nothing at all!” Frato lied, trying to sound convincing.

“You liar!” The dark haired thief spat. “Why I’ll...hey, wait a minute. You’re not a Burmecian. Who or what are you?”

Before Frato could answer his apprentice answered him. “I know who he is! He’s that half-breed that Sir Lion-heart adopted! I’ve heard of him!”

The dark haired Burmecian replied with a pleasant and acknowledging grunt. “I remember now,

you're Frato aren't you?" He asked with an evil grin.

Frato nodded, not looking at either of the two thieves. Instead he was staring at his clawed feet nervously.

"Well Frato, we don't like half-breeds around here." The thief sneered, still grinning wickedly. "Especially ones that meddle with our affairs. I guess we'll just have to teach you a lesson." The thief then drew a small dagger from inside his jacket before advancing towards Frato.

Frato would have stayed to fight had he had brought his lance. Despite the handicap of two to one he would have had a much more effective weapon. That and Frato would never back away from a challenge, no matter what the odds. However, his lance was currently in his house, as he didn't think he would need it when going to pick up Fratley. Frato turned around and started to run, but before he could get out of the alley, another Burmecian jumped down to block his path.

The Burmecian sneered, showing his missing tooth. He was wearing a white shirt with a cut across the chest, with brown baggy trousers. "You're not getting away..." The Burmecian said quietly but cruelly to Frato, who was gasping in shock with his eyes wide with despair.

"Hello mother, I'm home!" Fratley called as he entered the house. He looked around before picking up a piece of bread off the kitchen table and gnawing at it.

April appeared with a small, pleasant smile on her face and looked at Fratley. "Good to see you back Fratley, I..." she stopped as she noticed his brother's absence. "Where's Frato?" She asked with her face turning to one of concern.

"He went off ahead of me." Fratley explained, his mind then noticed the absence of Frato and he looked back at his mother with the same amount of concern showing on his face. "Isn't he here?"

"No, you're the only one to have come back so far." April answered. The concern on her face now changed to worry. "I wonder where he is..."

"He might have gotten lost." Fratley suggested, trying to brush off the idea. He knew Frato was capable of looking after himself in the streets of Burmecia. He couldn't have gotten into much trouble, this was Burmecia after all. "Or he could have gotten into a fight, you know what Frato's like."

"I do." April said looking less stressed. "I also know it is just like him to be late. You two are nearly always late for the Dragon Academy, despite my efforts to get you there on time."

Fratley looked a little ashamed. "It's not our fault..." Fratley muttered.

April didn't seem to hear Fratley's excuse. "Let's just wait for him, he'll turn up." April said. "He can't have gotten into TOO much trouble."

Frato swung his fist with as much power as he could muster at the Burmecian who blocked his escape route. The Burmecian ducked, and gave him a powerful uppercut to the chin. Frato backed off slightly as a reaction, and another fist slammed into his back.

The brown haired Burmecian had joined into the fight. Frato was knocked down to the floor. He tried to get up, but he was kicked fiercely in the ribs and back by the two muggers. Frato couldn't do anything but feel the powerful, painful, pummeling kicks collide with his body.

The Burmecians then began to pummel his face with their fists. Frato was writhing in pain, and he was trying to call for mercy.

The dark haired thief then advanced towards Frato, his dagger poised ready to strike. The other two thieves backed off as the leader walked up to Frato. He leaned over, looking Frato in the eyes.

“Now I’m going to show you what happens when you tangle with the Demon Dragons.” The leader spat, showing his blade.

He took a slash at Frato’s left shoulder, leaving a deep cut. Frato screamed in agony as the wound was made. This time there was an answer to his screams.

“What’s going on there?” A loud male Burmecian voice shouted.

“Guards!!!” The leader yelled in panic. “Run!!!” He commanded, and the three thieves leapt into the air onto the nearby buildings and started to flee.

True to the gang’s suspicions, a Burmecian guard appeared in the alley to investigate the scenario. He looked around and saw Frato lying wounded on the floor, and immediately rushed to his aid.

“What happened here?” The Burmecian guard asked, attending Frato’s shoulder wound. Frato looked at the guard and sighed with relief.

“I..was attacked.” Frato managed to force out of his breath.

“How informative.” The guard said sarcastically. “Who by?”

“The demon dragons...” Frato answered recalling the group’s name. As Frato said this, the guard’s eyes widened with recognition.

“We’d better get you home.” The guard said eventually. “So, you must be Frato.”

“How do you know who I am?” Frato asked defensively.

“Your father told me about you. You’re fairly well known. It’s not often that we see a half-breed in Burmecia.” The guard replied smiling. He helped Frato and supported him until he was certain Frato could stand.

Frato sighed slightly. He was getting recognition just for being born. Sure, fame was all good and well, but he had done nothing to be worthy of it. He was just another Burmecian in his own eyes. Just another normal Burmecian. However, other people thought different.

The guard began to escort Frato back home. Frato was in no condition to be left alone, he was clutching his bruised ribs in pain and his left arm lay limp.

“So who are you?” Frato asked, eager to know who his saviour was.

“My name is Leo. I’m a Dragon Knight, like your father.” Leo answered. “I get on fairly well with Lion-heart.”

“So I see.” Frato commented.

Leo just chuckled slightly. He then began looking at Frato’s bruises on his ribs with concern. He eventually overlooked them as minor injuries.

The two eventually reached the residence of Fratley. Leo knocked on the door as Frato started looking and checking his own bruises.

April swung the door open and looked at the two standing at the doorstep. Her eyes lay to rest over the injured Frato.

“Mrs. Fratley, your son...” Leo began but was interrupted.

“Oh, Frato!” April screamed as she ran up to Frato and gave him a tight hug. Frato eyes widened with pain again as his ribs were squeezed with the pressure of April and her inescapable embrace.

“M-Mother...don’t hug me...” Frato wheezed. April backed off and looked him with surprise. “...it hurts.” Frato finished.

April looked at Frato again, confirming the bruises and the bandage on his shoulder. She beckoned him inside. “We need to attend those bruises and that wound on your shoulder.” She said in a

slightly calmer tone. Frato stumbled into the house.

“I would like to ask your son some questions if that is alright.” Leo asked April rather formally.

“Now?” April asked surprised. “He’s just been injured!”

“Of course not.” Leo spluttered, a little intimidated by an angry April. “Sometime tomorrow perhaps?” He asked sweetly.

“Fine.” April answered before turning and shutting the door, leaving Leo in the pouring rain.

Leo’s questioning with Frato the following morning did confirm he was attacked by the demon dragons. The demon dragons were a notorious band of thieves and muggers known for stealing, mugging and various crimes.

Frato recovered from his injuries in a few weeks. He still insisted on attending the academy despite his mother’s word against it.

The Demon Dragon’s were eventually caught by a few of the Burmecian knights. They were imprisoned for their crimes for a few years.

--Chapter 9: The Test--

Frato was now thirteen, a teenager. He was currently in a morning rush along with Fratley to get ready. However, this time they weren’t getting ready for a regular lesson at the academy. Today was the day they would take the practical exam of the academy. They had already taken and passed a written examination at the academy (which Frato only passed by the skin of his teeth). If they passed the practical exam they would be qualified to join the army of Burmecia, they could fight for their country.

Frato was currently putting on his fighting outfit. It consisted of a light blue mythrill shirt which was strong and supposed to be difficult to pierce. With this, was a pair of dark blue trousers made of a similar material with pockets made for carrying potions and other battle items. After Frato had put on his clothes he picked up his lance and made his way downstairs.

Fratley was rushing his way through his breakfast in an attempt to leave to get to the academy on time. He managed to spill some of his muesli onto his baggy brown trousers, which had pockets like Frato’s trousers. This was combined with a black vest and a yellow top.

Frato sat down and started eating his muesli at a similar pace to Fratley. After a manic scramble the two finally managed to get themselves ready. April was checking to see if they were ready and then followed them to the door.

“Goodbye you two. Take care!” April called as she waved her sons goodbye. They waved back as they walked down the street towards the academy. She then sighed to herself as they began to walk out of view. “They grow up so fast.”

The rain in Burmecia was moderate as Fratley and Frato trudged towards the academy down the wet, cobbled street. Frato was smiling as he marched down the street with his brother. He was quick to spark off a conversation.

“I wonder what we’re going to be asked to do for our test.” Frato pondered aloud, still looking happy. He was savouring the prospect that he would end up in a battle.

“I don’t know. We’re probably going to be sent outside Burmecia to fight some kind of monster.” Fratley answered. “Or we might have to defeat an existing Dragon Knight.”

“If we are going to fight a monster, I want to go against one that’ll put up a good fight.” Frato stated. He started swinging his lance at an invisible opponent. “I need some exercise.”

Fratley just gave a slight smile which broke his determined look and kept walking towards the

academy. After a few seconds Frato started speaking again.

“Just think Fratley, we’ll be warriors! We’ll be able to fight to protect our kingdom in the army, just like our father!” Frato seemed excited about the idea.

“We will if we pass the test.” Fratley added.

“If we pass the test?” Frato said trying to silence a laugh. “You mean you have doubts about succeeding? What could they possibly ask us to do that would be out of our talents?”

“Well, they could send us to fight a Grand Dragon above the Grotto.” Fratley replied, smiling again.

Frato laughed lightly. “Like that will ever happen. Seriously though, what could prove a problem to us?”

“Your lack of concentration and the fact you are not being serious.” Fratley answered, frowning slightly.

“When I am in battle, I pay attention to nothing else but the fight.” Frato boasted. “Just because I am being confident doesn’t mean I am not being serious. You however, seem far too tense.”

“I’m mentally preparing myself.” Fratley retorted. “I am not tense; I know I can pass this test just as much as you do.”

“Doesn’t seem like it to me Fratley.” Frato said honestly.

Fratley paid no attention to Frato’s comment and just kept walking towards the academy. Frato didn’t bother Fratley with any further conversation. There didn’t seem to be much to say, and what there was Fratley wouldn’t pay much attention to it.

After a couple of minutes walking the two teenagers were stood a few yards away from the entrance to the academy, which seemed even more daunting than usual. As they walked towards the doorway they could see Freya making her way to the entrance. She seemed focused but to a lesser extent than Fratley.

Frato couldn’t resist the urge to call out “Hey Freya! Ready to fail!?” He managed to shout enough for her to hear and a few other students, but she chose to ignore Frato rather than respond. She knew Frato only enjoyed it when he found that it annoyed or aggravated her.

Fratley however, didn’t choose to ignore it and tilted his head slightly to talk to Frato without anyone else hearing. “She’s got just a much of a chance to pass this exam as you do, if not more.” He said sternly with a frown on his face.

“Thanks Fratley, that has really boosted my confidence.” Frato replied with extreme sarcasm. Frato did know Fratley was right, but he wouldn’t accept it and he certainly wouldn’t admit it.

Without any hesitation the two brothers walked into the academy. They made their way to their usual classroom, where their classmates had gathered some of which looking very anxious as to what the test would be and some feeling extremely nervous.

After a few minutes, which seemed like hours to some of the students, Ivan appeared. He had a slight smile of confidence on his face.

“Now is the time when we see if all your training has paid off. Today is the day of your practical examination; if you pass you will qualify to join the ranks of the Burmecian army.” Ivan stated, sounding rather enthusiastic. “For the practical exam, you are to travel to a cave to the west of Burmecia not far into the mountains. There are Ironites which inhabit this cave as well as other monsters. You are to kill an Ironite and bring back some of its horns as proof of your victory. There will be Dragon Knights stationed in and around the mountain for the test, so should you fail you will be taken out of the mountain safely.”

The security of the Dragon Knights seemed to put the class slightly at ease, but it didn’t stop them

from still being nervous.

“I shall lead you towards the cave entrance, but from there on you will be on your own.” Ivan continued. He then stood up and motioned for the class to rise. Without another word, the class filed out of the classroom and out towards the entrance of the academy. Ivan left the room when the class had left and then began marching towards the western side of Burmecia.

Frato, Freya and Fratley were all walking next to each other in the pouring rain as they headed towards the cave. Frato had Freya had positioned themselves so they were as far away from each other as they could be and still talk to Fratley, who was stood between them.

“So we have an Ironite then, this should be fun.” Frato muttered.

“Ironites can be quite tough. They have tough, resistant skin and can cast thunder spells.” Fratley commented.

“They’re not as tough as me.” Frato boasted. “They might be a problem for Freya though.”

“You wish.” Freya leered at Frato.

“Leave her alone Frato.” Fratley said.

Frato glanced at Fratley for a moment but didn’t say anything. The three of them walked in silence for a few moments.

The rest of the class were muttering amongst themselves about the upcoming battle. The conversations they were having seemed to calm them down a little.

It wasn’t too long before the class had reached the outskirts of the town and the western gate. The western gate was a tall iron gate which was guarded by two Burmecian guards.

Ivan stopped at the gate as did everyone else. The two guards nodded at the group before proceeding to open the gate. Without a word or a moment’s hesitation the class marched through the open gates and into the mountain side.

The mountains were extremely tall and were quite steep. There was white snow lying on top of the high peaks with rain falling on the sides of the mountain. The rock was grey, covered in similar covered gravel which had been eroded by the rain.

Luckily the class were not journeying far into the mountains. It wasn’t long after they started ascending the peak before they could see a large cave in the mountainside with a large group of Burmecian Dragon Knights stood in front of it.

The group stopped before the Dragon Knights and the mouth of the cave. The cave had a triangular opening and was very deep. You could not see the back of it. It was surprisingly quite light, the sun was reflecting into the mouth from outside the clouds of the Burmecian rain. Drops of water could be seen falling from the mouth as a result of the rain, it was a damp cave and not very pleasant.

“Greetings.” One of the Dragon Knights stepped forth. “I am Sir Lion-heart Fratley and I will be leading the Dragon Knights during your examination. My job is to make sure none of you get killed. You are in safe hands with us.” Lion-heart brushed some of brown hair under his helmet before continuing. “You will have to give us a few moments as we place lamps in the area of the cave you are allowed in. If there is no light where you are, turn back. I wish you all good luck in your examination.”

Ivan then stepped forward towards Lion-heart and faced the group. “You will each be given a whistle. If you are in danger and you need help blow it. A Dragon Knight will come to help you.” Ivan said aloud. Lion-heart nodded during the last sentence. “Today is the day where you must prove yourselves. Make me proud.” Ivan smiled and then stepped aside to a small basket of whistles which he handed out to the students.

A Dragon Knight came out of the cave and gave a thumb up to Lion-heart. As Lion-heart had been

explaining to the group the Dragon Knights had moved to inside the cave and had taken their positions. Lion-heart smiled and turned to the group.

“Okay, we are ready. Let the examination commence!” Lion-heart announced to the class.

--Chapter 10: The First Battles--

“Let the examination commence!” Lion-heart called out to the class, who on that very instant made their way into the cave. The front row, which had Freya, Fratley and Frato in it started to sprint into the cave to get a distance from the rest of the group and break away. There was little point in it though, the cave split up into several tunnels only a short distance into the cave. After a couple of minutes everyone was on their own.

Sure enough, there were candles lit throughout the tunnels of the cave which were attached to the walls of the cave. They provided just enough light for the young Burmecian students to see their way through the dark, damp maze. It was still very dark; the dull, black stone walls looked hidden in the darkness. The candles didn't really hinder the activity of the monsters lurking in the cave.

Fratley had to adjust his eyes to the darkness as he stepped carefully through the cave. He was trying to hear the movements of any nearby Ironite. His advanced hearing was only picking up the sounds of his footsteps as he trudged deeper into the cave. He figured that the monsters would be somewhere deep in the cave.

After several minutes trekking deeper into the cave Fratley heard his first sound. There was the sound of something gliding through the cave with an odd growl. Could this be the Ironite he had been searching for? The sound was apparently moving closer, Fratley took a step forward and the growl became louder and the soft flap of wings became faster.

The monster had detected Fratley's location and Fratley's hearing had also detected the monster's precise location. It was far too dark to see anything clearly. As the monster came within striking range Fratley took a swing with his lance in hopes of catching the monster with the blade.

The blade had connected with the monster who was knocked back by the blow. The monster roared ferociously and tilted its head back and begun to prepare and fire attack from its mouth. The new light allowed Fratley to see some yellow muscles and a pink dragon's face charging up the attack.

Fratley charged with his lance outstretched in front of him. Using his new vision of his foe, he managed to hit the chest of his opponent, but the tough skin meant it only pierced a small way into the monster's hide.

This caused the monster to belch out the flame breath attack it had been preparing, but as it was reacting to the blow the majority of the flame was spewed out towards the ceiling. After the flame had been discharged the monster growled angrily as Fratley removed his lance from the tiny hole.

Fratley now knew he was facing an Ironite, the opponent he had been searching for. Victory would assure his place in the Burmecian army. He prepared to attack once again but the Ironite charged into Fratley's chest causing minor damage with its horns and knocking Fratley onto the rocky floor.

Fratley immediately sprung back onto his feet and dodged another charge from the small dragon. As the Dragon glided a few feet away from him he used the chance to power up a Dragon Knight ability he had been taught in the academy. His lance glowed a fiery red colour as he pointed it towards the pink menace.

“Feel the force of the fire of nature! Cherry Blossom!” Fratley yelled. As he spoke, beautiful bright, glowing pink petals began to appear around the dragon. The red energy from Fratley's lance was discharged and it set the flower petals aflame in a powerful explosion which sent a burst of light through the narrow passageways of the cave. Fratley squinted slightly as the monster screamed in pain, it's scales slightly singed by the attack and causing better damage than Fratley's previous attack.

The Ironite was now furious; it glided full force in an insane charge at Fratley giving him very little time to react. They collided and Fratley was sent sprawling onto the floor with a wound on his chest.

Fratley decided to stay on the floor for the moment in an attempt to fool the dragon. He looked at the wound on his chest, which didn't seem too serious, as it was merely two small circular shallow cuts where the dragon had momentarily impaled him with its horns. Fratley carefully and slowly reached into his pocket for a potion. He could hear the monster growling nearby; it was obviously suspicious of him. He applied the potion to his chest slowly and carefully, watching the wound heal itself under the influence of the potion.

When Fratley was sure the potion had worked, he leapt back onto his feet and turned to where he had heard the monsters movements. He saw flames glowing in the darkness where the monster was located. The Ironite was preparing another fire attack. What was worse, it was almost fully charged.

Fratley had a second to react before the inferno gave out in a wave from the monster's mouth. The fire lit up the cave and covered the area Fratley had been standing, he couldn't be seen anywhere in the blaze. The attack eventually ended and when it did Fratley was not to be found.

The monster growled in delight, but the victory was not to last long. In a matter of split seconds a spear rammed straight through the monsters head. Fratley landed about a metre away from the Ironite, in the time he had to react, he had jumped enough to avoid the attack but not too high to hit the roof of the cave.

The Ironite fell to the floor, dead. Fratley used his nose and his hands to find his spear and removed it from the monsters skull. Although it didn't pierce much skin, it had pierced enough to break the monsters skull.

Fratley couldn't see well enough in the current darkness to cut off the horns that he needed so he dragged the monster corpse to a nearby lamp. He then sliced off the monsters horns with his lance and placed them in one of his pockets. Afterwards he cleaned his lance of the monster's blood with a bit of cloth from one of his pockets.

He then recalled which way he had entered this area of the cave and began to make his way back to the entrance.

He had barely taken five steps from the Ironite corpse when his sensitive ears picked up a fairly loud sound from elsewhere in the cave.

“RRRRRAAAA OOOORRRR!”

Fratley turned in the direction of the sound, eyes wide with shock.

Freya marched through the cave in search of her Ironite. Her ears were trying to hear the sounds of any nearby monsters as her eyes weren't good enough in the darkness of the cave.

She was in luck; it wasn't long before she heard the sounds of a creature crawling across the stone floor. She followed the noise of the creature and when she thought she was close enough she lunged at it with her spear.

Her spear met tough, scaly skin. The monster then growled and turned around to bite her. Freya moved back and evaded the bite. The monster then gave a small charge which managed to knock Freya back.

Freya scowled and decided to charge back at the monster. Her lance was outstretched, and it began to glow white.

“Lancer!” Freya shouted as she impaled the monster in the waist, discharging the glowing energy in her lance. The glow gave enough light to show it had not been a lethal blow, but it had left a nasty

wound in the monster's hide. The monster screamed in pain as the energy discharged into the fairly deep circular cut.

Freya smiled at the damage she had done, but her emotion quickly returned to a determined one as she knew the battle was not over. She removed her lance and jumped back to prepare another attack.

The monster roared angrily and began to prepare a spell in its mouth. Instead of flame however, thunder began to form. In an instant a huge bolt of thunder was let loose and Freya just managed to hop out of the way of the strike.

As the monster finished discharging the attack Freya began charging up her own attack. A red fire glowed on her lance and was growing rather quickly. The monster turned to her just in time as she pointed her lance towards the creature.

"May the force of fire engulf my foe! Cherry Blossom!" Freya yelled. As she said this, petals fell around the monster. The fire from Freya's lance discharged and set all of the petals ablaze, engulfing the monster in a mass of flame. The light enabled Freya to see that she was facing an Ironite. The tension Freya was feeling raised slightly, this battle would ensure that she would be the first female in the Burmecian army.

The monster screamed in pain as the flames began to subside. The Ironite growled in the blackness, smoke coming from its scales. Fire began to form in the creature's mouth as it prepared its fire breath attack.

Freya saw the opening in the monster's defence and charged towards the creature at full speed with her lance pointed firmly ahead of her. She reached the Ironite in time and rammed her spear directly into the beast's mouth.

Her attack had been successful, she had attacked with such force she had pierced the back of the Ironite's throat. Her lance was sticking out at the other end. However, the fire attack had now discharged and spurted out towards Freya. It caught Freya almost full blast and knocked her onto the floor and partially covered in flames.

Freya quickly rolled along the damp cave floor back and forth, and the fire was put out in a few moments. She got back onto her feet and walked steadily towards the dead Ironite, which was only standing with help from Freya's lance. Blood had spilled all over Freya's spear and the cave floor.

Freya removed her lance by feeling for it in the almost pitch black darkness. This got her hands covered in blood but this didn't bother Freya, she had won. She then proceeded to drag the corpse to a lamp and cut off her Ironite horns, her symbols of victory and proof of her strength. She placed them in a pocket on her waist with a smile. She then cleaned up the vast amount of blood on herself and her lance with a rag.

She stood up and remembered the way she had come. Her memory served her well, she remembered the nearest of the two candles next to her from where she had come. She made her way down the dark, damp and murky cave corridor. After travelling for a few minutes, an alarming sound reached Freya's ears from somewhere fairly far away from her.

"RRRRRAAAA OOOORRRR!"

"That was no Ironite..." Freya said to herself in worry.

--Chapter 11: Battle to Battle--

The examination was continuing to take place in a maze of dark, damp, dripping tunnels which were candlelit so the Burmecian students could make their way through. The students were not alone, not only were there Dragon knights and Burmecian knights patrolling the area to ensure their safety but there was also the vicious monsters which inhabited the cave. One of the types of monster which lived in the dark cave was the Ironite, a tough flying creature with scaly skin and muscles with an arsenal of fire and lightning attacks. These Ironites were what the students were looking for.

If they killed an Ironite and obtained an Ironite horn they would qualify to join the ranks of the Burmecian army.

One of the students, Frato, was currently trudging through the black cave in search for the Ironite. He had a rather aggravated expression on his face as he had yet to find the monster.

“Come on Ironite! Show me your ugly face so I can cut it off!” Frato called into the cave, leering. He walked a few more steps forward before calling out again. “Come and get a piece of me!”

Frato’s ears then pricked as he heard soft footsteps coming towards him from around the corner of the rocky cave. As the footsteps came within range Frato leapt out and swung his lance downwards at the owner of the footsteps with immense force. Steel hit flesh, and Frato heard a gasp followed by a thump as something hit the floor. The footsteps stopped.

“That was easy.” Frato sighed to himself. It was too dark to see what he had knocked out so he began to drag the unconscious body to nearest candle. Frato felt fur under his palm, and he doubted he had knocked out the Ironite that he needed to.

Eventually Frato reached a candle, so he turned to examine his victim. As he saw what he had knocked out, Frato’s eyes widened with shock and fear. In the candlelight on the stone path lay an unconscious Burmecian student. Frato had found and attacked a fellow Burmecian.

Frato desperately tried to think what to do. If he left the poor Burmecian laying on the stone path a monster would surely come and either eat or wound the man. Then an idea hit Frato’s small brain. The whistle! Frato quickly pulled his whistle from his pocket and blew it as hard as he could. He then proceeded to run full pace away from the knocked out Burmecian.

“Trust my luck...” Frato thought to himself as he fled from the scene of his crime. He was running so fast he hadn’t looked where he was going and he ended up crashing into something hard.

Frato was knocked back onto the floor from the impact. What he had bumped into roared and spread out its wings in the darkness. As Frato heard the roar, he leapt back onto his feet and readied his spear for attack.

The monster charged towards Frato who swung his lance at lightning speed and managed to hit the monster in the face and force it back. The creature howled in pain, but the damage had been minimal thanks to its tough skin. The beast roared and began charging up a fireball in its mouth.

Frato took the opportunity to charge at the monster at full speed. Frato reached the monster before the attack was unleashed and slashed at the monster once again knocking it back for a second time. The monster roared and unleashed the fire breath attack as a counter. Frato jumped back to avoid the flames but was caught with some of the attack.

Frato slapped at his shirt in a desperate attempt to put out the small fires on it. He was successful, but so occupied in putting out the fires he didn’t notice the monster charge again and was sent flying into one of the cave walls. Feeling the pain of small burns, slight cuts from the monster’s horns and the impact against the stone wall; Frato just managed to get to his feet. The monster growled slightly as it noticed him rise from the rocky floor, but Frato concerned himself with his wounds as he muttered some words.

“Breath of angels, heal my wounds. Reis’s wind!” Frato muttered to himself in a clear tone. Green and white flashing light was generated from his lance and flowed through the air elegantly before entering his body. The pain he suffered began to ease and the scratches and cuts began to fade as Regen took full affect.

The green and light seemed to infuriate the monster, and it started to gather electrical energy its mouth and claws. In a flash, powerful electrical bolts were shot straight at Frato. Frato jumped out of the way to avoid them while they hit the ground causing a small electrical explosion.

While the monster finished firing the thunder spell Frato was busy using another ability he had

learnt. His lance began glowing with an eerie red light; he then pointed the lance into the air and shouted "Luna!"

At that word, the red light left his lance and formed a breeze around both him and the monster. The light then formed a bright fiery circle which revealed that Frato was indeed fighting an Ironite. The circle then faded, and the Ironite and Frato were both glowing with red aura.

The aura increased both of their strength slightly, but filled their minds with such a rage that they would only attack each other continually. This berserk state took affect as Frato and the Ironite charged at each other full force. When they met, Frato slashed at the creature before he was hit with the charge. The monster backed off from the slash and Frato ran and swung his lance again.

This process continued, the Ironite couldn't charge and hit Frato without a slash from his lance thanks to his Luna ability. Blood was being spilt from the creature, but Frato wouldn't relent until the monster lay dead. It wasn't long before the creature did die, as with the constant slashing Frato managed to pierce the monster's head. The Ironite fell, defeated.

The red aura left Frato, who started to regain his wits. He lurched over and started breathing heavily. By using Luna and killing the monster in a merciless massacre he had tired himself out, only noticed now thanks to the berserk state. A grin forged itself on Frato's lips as he felt the sweet satisfaction of victory. Without much delay he dragged the Ironite corpse to the nearest candle and proceeded to slice off the horns to prove his victory.

After placing the horns in his trouser pocket Frato started to look around. Which way had he come? With the confusion of running from the unconscious Burmecian and being in a berserk state he had forgotten which way he had come.

"Maybe it was this way..." Frato thought to himself as he took one the passageways in the cave that he thought seemed familiar. There was one problem, all of the passageways were dark and candlelit and there was not much difference between them.

He trudged further down the stony corridor, hoping to find a way out. However, all he did find was less candles. Eventually he found himself in total darkness; there wasn't a candle in his line of vision.

Frato noticed the lack of light and turned around to backtrack, but there was a crumble beneath Frato's clawed feet. Frato stopped dead in his tracks. After a second, the ground he was standing on gave way and he fell several feet down a cliff. He landed painfully on his back on a pile of rock, though he survived and thanked the gods that he didn't break his back. He managed to get back onto his feet.

He looked up to see where he had fallen from, only to see darkness. He looked around, only to see darkness. Then he saw slow movement in the darkness. It looked as though a whole wall was moving in front of him.

Then, a pair of eyes focused on him; Frato took out his lance into a defensive position and froze to the spot in fear. It was only a second before Frato's ears filled with an almost deafening sound.

"RRRRRAAAA OOOORRRR!"

Frato's free hand dived into his pocket to obtain his whistle. He found the whistle, put it to his lips and...

Smack.

The gigantic beast swiped at Frato with its claw which sent Frato flying to the floor and the whistle hurtling out of Frato's hand and out of reach. Frato got back onto his feet and tried to jump back up the cliff he had fallen down, but as he leapt he was hit with another swipe from the giant claw of the monster.

Frato was sent flying into the cliff face and he fell once again, landing on his back rather painfully.

Once again, he just managed to struggle to his feet. He looked up at the beast that was mauling him with ease.

A growling, slowly moving figure was moving in the blackness, leering at him. As he saw the giant beast, two questions occurred in Frato's mind:

“What is such a powerful monster doing in a cave where beginner warriors are sent?” and “Am I going to live?”

The monster growled once again as Frato stood motionless in front of the creature.

“Please gods, don't let this thing kill me...” Frato prayed.

--Chapter 12: DRAGON!--

The slow moving figure lurked in the darkness, looking at the wounded half-breed warrior in front of him. Frato was looking on in terror; he felt this could be his last moments of life. He heard the ferocious beast growl again, but then Frato heard something he had not expected to hear.

“Looks...tasty...” A growling voice snarled to Frato. Was the monster actually speaking? Frato tried speaking back.

“W-What do you mean, “Looks tasty?”” Frato asked the growling beast.

The massive monster made an odd grunt, and lifted its head slightly.

“It...knew...what...I...thought...” Frato heard as a response. What was going on? Whatever this thing was, it shouldn't be able to speak, only roar and growl.

Although Frato didn't know it, he was using telepathy. Garland had given him the ability to communicate telepathically with genomes and certain kinds of dragon. He wasn't technically speaking to the dragon. Although Frato was speaking, it was what he thought that communicated with the dragon.

“What's going on?” Frato asked around the cave to no-one in particular.

“I...don't...know. Breakfast comes...and...it...knows how to speak...into...my...mind.” The dragon's voice entered Frato's head again.

“What?” Frato asked. “Who are you?”

“A red dragon.” The growling voice answered. “I have...no name.”

Frato had heard of red dragons. They were supposed to be fearsome beasts that settled on Mount Gulug. Little else was known about them, as very few people had seen them and lived to tell the tale.

“What are you doing here?” Frato asked, still trying to figure out how on Gaia he was having a conversation with a red dragon that should have killed him by now.

“I leave Mount Gulug...to find own territory...dragons there crowded and I was fought out. I was weak...” The dragon replied. There was another growl in the darkness and the dragon continued. “I'm hungry...I want breakfast...You look like a tasty meal...”

A shiver went up Frato's spine and ruffled his fur. Frato responded quickly.

“No no no no! You don't want to eat me! I'm full of bones and I won't taste good.” Frato blurted out in a scared tone. “If you help me out of this cave I can help you get all the food you want!”

There was an agonising pause, and then the dragon tilted its head slightly. It growled quietly and Frato heard a response.

“...Really?”

“Really.” Frato answered affirmatively.

The two were silent for a moment, and then the dragon advanced towards Frato. The dragon's teeth latched on to the back of Frato's shirt, near the neck and Frato was lifted off the ground. Frato screamed and squirmed, but to no avail. He was then thrown into the air and he landed rather roughly on the dragons back.

Frato felt the dragon move away from the cliff he had fallen from. The dragon was surprisingly fast for its immense size, as it rocketed down the tunnel of the dark cave in a brisk march. Frato held onto the dragon for life.

After several minutes of the dragon stomping into the cave, Frato could finally see light. Within seconds the dragon was flying in the open air over the majestic blue sea. Frato could admire the dragon's muscular red body and black wings which were at least three times Frato's height in width.

Frato the pointed his lance just above the hole in the cave they had left.

"This way dragon!" Frato commanded, the dragon obeyed and started to fly back towards the cave.

As the dragon flew over the mountains Frato asked a question.

"Say, dragon, do you think we can be friends?"

"If you get me food...we'll be friends. If you don't...you'll be breakfast." The dragon's voice growled in Frato's mind. Frato laughed nervously in response.

It wasn't long before Frato could see the other entrance to the cave. There were a few Burmecians outside of the cave, one of which was Lion-heart.

"Okay, land here." Frato said pointing his lance to a spot next to the Burmecians. The dragon descended and as it dropped in the air Frato heard its voice again.

"So this is the breakfast...you promised me eh?"

"NO! Don't eat them! I'll get you your breakfast when I've finished talking with them!" Frato said panic-stricken with the dragon's idea. Frankly, this dragon didn't particularly care who or what it ate, as long as it ate something.

The dragon landed next to the group of Burmecians. Frato jumped off, and his ears picked up another loud noise.

"AAA! DRAGON!!!" The students all screamed and ran away as fast as they could whilst the dragon knights there drew their lances and approached the red dragon cautiously. Lion-heart managed to see Frato with the dragon.

"Frato! What is the meaning of this?!" Lion-heart shouted out in fury. "Get away from that dragon this instant!"

"Relax dad, I can control him!" Frato responded.

"You can't control a dragon!" Lion-heart replied angrily. "Guards! Attack!" At that command, Lion-heart and the other dragon knights all charged towards the red dragon.

Before the knights could do any damage, the dragon leapt off the ground and took to the skies. The dragon knights all looked up and focused on the dragon. Lion-heart leapt using his powerful legs to gain enough height to attack the dragon. He ended up too far away from the beast to use his lance, so he prepared a dragon knight ability instead.

"Spirits of the deceased dragons, blast away my foe." Lion-heart whispered in the air, as he said these words, white roaring energy forged on the end of his lance taking the shape of a circle with an emblem of a dragon's head inside. "Dragon's Crest!" Lion-heart shouted and the circle of destructive energy left his lance and soared towards the dragon.

The red dragon moved to try and avoid the circle of energy but the attack hit the monster on the left side causing major pain as the power of all the spirits of dragons Lion-heart had killed burned away

at the beast. The blast knocked the dragon back, who decided to fly away to live for another day. The dragon knights cheered as the dragon began to fly away. The students stopped fleeing and turned back to regroup at the mountain. Frato just watched in shock. He ran up to Lion-heart and took out his horn from his pocket.

“Here’s the Ironite horn.” Frato said quickly to Lion-heart, who smiled as Frato shoved the horn into his hand.

“Congratulations!” Lion-heart said full of pride. “Hey, where are you going?”

Frato was running in the direction the red dragon had flown. He didn’t answer; he was more concerned about the dragon and where it had fled to.

“What has gotten into him?” Lion-heart asked himself rather confused with Frato’s actions. He turned around to the dragon knights. “Make sure the students who fled come back here safely.”

Frato was running as fast as he could, but already the dragon was out of sight. It had hidden amongst the peaks of the mountainside. Frato tried calling out for the dragon.

“Dragon! Dragon!? Dragon!! Where are you?!” Frato shouted.

“Here.” A growling response came from behind one of the peaks. The dragon glided over the top of the peak and landed right in front of Frato. The beast was clearly unhappy, it was snarling very loudly. There was a gash where Lion-heart had hit him with the energy attack.

“Why did your friends attack me!?” The dragon growled angrily.

“They are scared of dragons.” Frato replied nervously. “They thought you were going to attack them!”

The dragon scowled again, but eventually stopped. There was a small pause as the dragon remained calm. However this was short-lived as the dragon then looked at Frato with eyes filled with flame and anger. The beast was growling once again.

“Where’s breakfast!?” The dragon snarled, changing the topic. “You promised!”

“I’ll need to find it first. You can help me look.” Frato answered, drawing his lance. He began to search for any monsters that might make a decent meal for a dragon. After a few moments of searching, a Zuu came flying out towards the two. Frato pointed at the black bird with a smile of triumph.

“Breakfast time dragon!” Frato called out.

The red dragon growled in delight and flew straight at the bird, which attempted to flee. The dragon was faster though and sunk its teeth right into the bird’s side, causing blood to spill all over the rocks and grass below. The Zuu fell helpless in the dragon’s jaws as it died as the red dragon ripped it apart and consumed it.

Frato had a sickened expression on his face as he watched the dragon eat every last morsel of meat from the monster. He was used to seeing monsters die, but not being eaten straight after their death.

When the dragon finished, it stomped back over to Frato. “Delicious...” The dragon roared happily. “You are my friend now!”

“I think I ought to give you a name.” Frato said thoughtfully. “I can’t just keep calling you dragon. Now, what can I call you...?”

“I know no names.” The dragon’s voice replied in Frato’s head.

Frato thought long and hard, and then he found a name. “You’re a red dragon, and you are faster than the wind. I’ll call you Redwind!”

“Redwind?” The dragon responded confused by the name.

“Yes, Redwind. You will hereby be known as Redwind.” Frato replied.

The dragon just gave a grunt and turned around. It clearly wasn't interested in whatever Frato called him.

“I have to go back now. The others will be worried about me.” Frato said, turning to leave.

“Goodbye, Redwind.”

The dragon just grunted as Frato left and took to the skies once again, probably to look for a more appetising meal.

--Chapter 13: Unpleasant March--

“I don't care whether that dragon is tame or violent! You are not keeping a dragon!” Lion-heart shouted angrily at Frato. Clearly, keeping a dragon as a pet was more trouble than it was worth. Lion-heart continued to yell at Frato. “It isn't safe! Who knows what a dragon would do in Burmecia!?”

Frato looked at his now dirty and blood-stained feet as the two stood in the grass to try and think of a response. All of the students had either left the cave or had been carried out by a knight and were on their way home. The dragon knights were resting outside of the cave and talking politely to each other, although some were looking with interest at why the Burmecian in charge of them was bellowing to his adopted, half-breed son.

The students were being lead back to the academy by Ivan, or being taken to the Burmecian nursing facility to be healed. Fratley and Freya were the only ones staying behind. Fratley was waiting for his father and Freya was just staying with Fratley. The students were to be dismissed anyway so Ivan wasn't bothered about the two staying with the knights. They were also watching Frato and Lion-heart with interest.

Frato had asked Lion-heart the stupidest and craziest question he was ever likely to ask. He lifted his head up to respond to his father.

“But father, I can control him.” Frato said in almost a whine.

“Since when did you know anything about taming wild dragons?” Lion-heart spat in response. “You are NOT keeping a dragon! End of discussion!” Lion-heart then turned and marched towards the other knights without saying another word.

Frato gave a heavy sigh as he knew his father wouldn't listen. But who would believe him? Talking to dragons wasn't exactly an everyday activity; and Frato knew nothing about keeping any form of pet or monster, let alone a dragon.

Frato just walked miserably towards the group of dragon knights wondering whether he had actually talked to the dragon or whether he had just imagined it.

As Lion-heart approached the small army of dragon knights they all turned to face him, stood straight and saluted him. Lion-heart was one of the most powerful warriors in Burmecia and was well respected by everyone.

“It's good to see you can assemble in a seconds notice.” Lion-heart chuckled lightly. “Our work here is done. Our mission was successful; there were no deaths and only a few casualties on the students' behalf. Well done knights. Let us return to Burmecia and inform his majesty of the results of the examination.”

The dragon knights saluted once again, and begun to march back home in a neat square formation.

“Come on you three, it's time to go home.” Lion-heart said to Frato, Fratley and Freya before he leapt to the front of the formation and lead the miniature army in a pleasant march.

The three quickly started to walk behind the troops before they were left behind. Fratley immediately sparked up conversation with the two.

“What was that about?” Fratley asked Frato with a look of curiosity and humour.

“What was what about?” Frato answered confused.

“Why was father shouting at you?”

Frato gave a heavy sigh of despair. He didn't want to explain himself to Fratley, especially with Freya around. He already felt like an idiot, he didn't need a harsh reminder from Freya.

“I'd rather not talk about it.” Frato answered with a small hint of sorrow in his voice.

“Come on, we want to know.” Fratley tried to reassure Frato with a calming smile. “You can tell us.”

“I can tell you, but not Freya.” Frato answered, he was starting to get a little aggravated.

“Why not?” Freya asked looking rather hurt. “I have a right to know too Frato. Did you fail your exam?” Freya then grinned wickedly.

Frato went from slightly aggravated to extremely annoyed with that one statement. He turned to Freya and snarled ferociously.

“NO! That Ironite was a piece of cake!” Frato barked loudly. “If you must know, I was asking to see if I could keep a creature I found in the cave!”

“What was it? A Malboro?” Freya asked sarcastically.

“No, Frato hates Burmecians with bad breath, never mind a Malboro.” Fratley stated with a chuckle.

“He ought to smell his own. Maybe it might convince him to freshen it up.” Freya laughed.

“That's not funny!” Frato shouted again. “It was actually a...” Frato paused for a moment, then blushed and lowered his head.

“Spit it out Frato.” Freya prompted.

“...A red dragon.” Frato finished, still blushing wildly. His eyes were closed; he didn't even want to know the response.

Both Fratley and Freya's eyes widened in shock, and then they both burst out in hysteric laughter.

“Good one Frato!” Fratley managed to say between bursts of laughter.

“I'm being serious.” Frato added.

There was a painful pause as everyone who heard tried to take account of what Frato said. After a few seconds, Fratley laughed even harder, Freya fell onto the mountain rock rolling in laughter. Some of the dragon knights were now trying to refrain from laughing, as they were not allowed to talk whilst marching unless they were singing a marching song. Those who had seen the dragon decided to remain silent. They didn't find it funny in any way. Lion-heart shook his head and lowered it slightly and marched a little faster.

It took quite a while for the laughter to subside. When it did, Frato was still bright red in the face from embarrassment. He looked up angrily at his brother.

“It's not funny.” Frato muttered in almost growl. “I nearly died.”

“You mean you're NOT joking?” Fratley replied sounding extremely surprised. He hadn't believed Frato up until now. “Red Dragons are extremely rare! They live in Mount Gulug! Very few people have seen them in all of Gaia! Never mind those who have survived their encounter!”

“I think Frato must have got knocked out by an Ironite and dreamed it.” Freya muttered with a grin.

Much as Frato would have wanted to believe that the dragon was a dream, he couldn't. It was real. Even with that wish, Frato would never submit to Freya's petty comments or ever admit he had lost a battle.

"It was not a dream! I know that was real!" Frato shouted back. He was still blushing but it was hard to tell if he was red with anger too. Frato didn't want to believe it was real, but he couldn't dream a memory of talking to a dragon. He wouldn't ever dream of watching a Zuu get ripped apart and devoured in front of him by the very same dragon only to hear how good it tasted. He would never shake the thought from his head that he was a FREAK!

Just who talked to dragons anyway? Half-breeds?

Frato doubted it.

"Whatever you say Frato..." Freya said sarcastically.

"I can prove it to you Freya!" Frato replied angrily. "Just ask my father, he SAW it. He even blasted it with a Dragons Crest attack!" Frato sounded as if he was bragging. "Isn't that right dad?" He began to shout at his father, who was at the other side of the group of dragon knights.

Lion-heart didn't respond, instead he snarled as if Frato had just insulted him. There was a long pause before Frato's eyes widened and he realised why his father hadn't responded.

"Sorry...I mean Sir Lion-heart." Frato apologised, emphasising the sir in his sentence. Everyone had to call a dragon knight by "Sir" and Frato was no exception. The King of Burmecia gave you that title, and if someone didn't call you by that title it was a great insult.

Lion-heart responded this time by marching neatly out of the formation, past the dragon knights who kept marching in their formation and headed straight towards Frato, Fratley and Freya. He lowered his head, whilst still marching to keep up with the dragon knights, and leaned towards Frato.

"I don't want you to mention that infernal dragon once more, you hear?" Lion-heart snarled quietly to Frato so the knights wouldn't pay attention. You're lucky no-one got hurt or killed by that dragon today, including yourself. If I see or hear of that blasted dragon ever again, you can kiss your bed and food at my house goodbye!"

Lion-heart began to march away from Frato but then decided to return. He looked as if he had remembered something. He leaned towards Frato again with a look of anger still present in his voice and eyes.

"And forget to call me sir in public again and I'll give you a lesson you'll never forget!" Lion-heart finished before leaping straight to the front of the formation and continuing the march.

Frato eyes widened with fear from Lion-heart's words. He had quite clearly angered him, and Lion-heart was not someone you wanted to infuriate. He was one of the strongest warriors in Burmecia and untouchable to most who wanted to attack him. Frato remained silent for most of the journey home.

Freya and Fratley had heard what Lion-heart had said very clearly. Although Freya found it amusing to watch Frato cower in front of his father she shared the same feeling of surprise that Fratley had. They were both stunned to hear that Frato had actually managed to encounter a red dragon and had come out unscathed.

Frato would have a lot of questions to answer when he returned home, although how many he would manage to answer when not under the glaring eye of Lion-heart would be a different matter.

Frato however, gave an evil smirk some time after Lion-heart's words on their journey. He wouldn't let his father get in his way from keeping a red dragon. No, Frato had forged a plan in his rather small and arrogant mind.

--Chapter 14: Knighthood--

The results of the exams had already been decided and the King of Burmecia was already organising the knighting ceremony. In the morning after the examination, both Frato and Fratley received a Mognet letter delivered to them by one of the Burmecian delivery moogles.

There were two letters, both in envelopes with a seal decorated with the emblem of the Burmecian Dragon Knights on the back. Their names were written in neat handwriting on the front of the envelope complete with their address.

Lion-heart had already found them and had left them on the kitchen table for the two brothers before going outside for his morning exercises. The late-rising pair eventually came into the kitchen to search for something that would stop the unbelievable force of nature that could get the two out of bed...hunger. April was already in the kitchen making breakfast for the two.

“Good morning mother.” Fratley said with a yawn whilst scratching his head.

“Morning Fratley.” April replied whilst continuing to busy herself with their breakfast.

Frato didn't say anything as he already spotted the two envelopes on the table. He approached the letter with his name written on it and picked it up slowly.

“What is this?” Frato asked his mother slowly, his voice was filled with a certain anxiousness and anticipation.

“Those arrived this morning.” April answered casually as she continued to work.

“We have mail?” Fratley asked in a pleasant surprise as he saw his letter on the table. He picked it up and gasped in shock as he saw the seal. “Frato, you know what this means don't you?”

Frato just nodded with a very excited smile on his face. They were going to get knighted. The two instantly broke the seals off their envelopes and began to read their letters.

Dear Fratley,

You are cordially invited to be knighted at the Burmecian Royal Palace on Thursday morning at 9 o'clock. You are expected to be dressed appropriately and to attend the celebration that is to follow. This letter will be required to prove you have permission to enter the castle. I sincerely hope you will attend and that you will enjoy your introduction into the Dragon Knights of Burmecia. I look forward to seeing you there.

Yours truly,

King Peter of Burmecia

It was complete with the signature of the King of Burmecia. Fratley and Frato both just stood looking at each other and back at their letters with wide smiles on their faces. In only a few days time they would be on their way to the Burmecian Royal Palace, a place only a few Burmecians had the privilege to go to. They would be knighted, and join their father in the ranks of the Burmecian army. They would be full fledged Dragon Knights.

“So you going to become knights now are you?” April asked with a simple smile as she looked at her sons who were too amazed to speak. “Great, that makes three warriors I need to worry about.” She placed their breakfast, consisting of some meat and some bread. “Here, quit acting like a pair of zombies and eat up!”

Fratley and Frato snapped out of their daydreaming, placed their letters on the side of the table and began to eat. When Frato had taken a few bites out of his bread he looked up.

“You know mother, you won't have to worry too much about us when we're in the dragon knights. We'll be fine.” Frato said trying to use the reassuring smile of his brother, although his was no where as effective.

“That’s precisely what your father says to me.” April replied with a sigh. “You try saying that once you join.”

Frato just gave a little laugh before continuing to munch on his bread. Fratley gave a smile from where he was sat as he ate his meal.

It wasn’t long before the two had finished their meals and left the table, taking their letters with them. The two put their letters in their rooms before deciding to join their father in his training session outside.

Later, Fratley decided to go and pay Freya a visit. The two frequently saw each other in the town and on some occasions in each others homes. They preferred to be by themselves though, away from the comments on how cute the pair was from their parents and the teasing and snide remarks from Frato.

Fratley walked by himself through the streets of Burmecia. The rain was moderate; the guards were marching through the city as normal, usual crowds of Burmecians were bustling through doing their daily businesses. It was just an average day to the Burmecians, well for those who weren’t dragon knight students it was.

Fratley soon reached the house of his girlfriend; he had taken Freya to her home so many times he knew the quickest route off the top of his head. Knocking on the door, Fratley waited patiently in the continuing rain which had managed to make his top quite wet.

In a matter of moments the door opened to reveal Freya, wearing a thin blue top and a navy blue skirt which reached her feet. She smiled as she saw Fratley and asked him to come in.

“Who is it Freya?” Her mother called out.

“It’s just Fratley mother.” Freya answered before motioning for Fratley to go upstairs.

Her mother didn’t bother saying anything. She didn’t mind Fratley coming round to see Freya. They were sensible children and didn’t cause any mayhem. That plus Fratley often returned the favour and allowed Freya to come to his house, at which point Frato would decide to either do an extra long training session with his father or take a rather long walk in the rain.

Freya followed Fratley into her bedroom, which only consisted of a bed, a mirror on the opposite side, a wardrobe next to the wall and a few books piled on top of a shelf next to the wardrobe. Her lance was stood on the opposite side of her wardrobe, looking ready to skew anything.

“So, what did you come to see me about?” Freya asked with a pleasant smile as she closed the door.

“Did you get mail this morning?” Fratley asked with a little grin.

“Of course, you think his majesty would forget to give me a personal invite?” Freya said looking extremely proud.”

“I knew you would do it.” Fratley said smiling. “I knew you would make it into the army. You’re very strong, even smarter and deadly serious when it comes to your training.”

Freya couldn’t help but smile at the compliment. “Thanks Fratley, but you are too.” She said returning the compliment. “It’s going to feel a little weird though being the only woman in the army though. How will everyone react?”

“They can’t complain. The army is open to anyone who lives in Burmecia.” Fratley stated. “It’s your dream, you live it, don’t let other peoples thoughts get in the way.”

“Thanks Fratley, I will. I’m going to fight for my people with all of my strength, no matter what everyone else thinks.” Freya said with a serious look on her face.

“And I’ll be by your side, fighting with you.” Fratley added.

Frato was bored stiff. Lion-heart had gone to do his patrol around the city, Fratley had left to go and see Freya. Frato had been doing quite a lot of training by himself outside, but he wanted someone to be with. Then Frato thought of somebody else, Redwind.

Frato's plan was simple. If Redwind couldn't come into Burmecia to stay with him, Frato could go and visit him in the mountains. Frato would say he was going out to do a training session or see a friend when instead he would visit Redwind. Which due to Redwind's lust for food would turn out to be a training session as Frato would have to catch and kill monsters for Redwind to devour.

This was probably the best thing he could do to stay friends with Redwind. Frato knew that Redwind wouldn't be used to being in cities like Burmecia, and the Burmecians certainly were not accustomed to see a dragon roaming in their home. Plus, Lion-heart and everyone else who would be strongly against the idea of taming and raising a dragon didn't have to know anything about it.

Maybe now would be a good chance to see if he could get out of the city to see his dragon. He walked into the living room, where April was doing some spring cleaning.

"Mother, can I go outside please?" Frato asked, trying to sound polite.

"What are going to do outside?" April asked as she cleaned a small bit of dust from the corner of room.

"Uh...I'm going round to see a friend to do some training." Frato answered. "Can I go?"

"Okay, fair enough." April answered in a casual tone. "Just don't stay there too long."

"Okay! Thanks mother!" Frato chirped happily before grabbing his lance and a small backpack and rushing to the front door. "See you soon!" Frato opened the door and was out before April could say another word.

Frato marched straight through the rain, which never bothered any Burmecian who had lived there. He headed towards the west gate of Burmecia. It was quite a walk, and it wasn't made any more pleasant by some of the stares he got from Burmecians filling the streets in front of him. Whenever Frato usually went into town he got looked at as if he was some kind of monster.

Eventually the numbers of Burmecians decreased as Frato reached the edge of the city. He saw the gate, and two guards in front of it. As he drew closer they moved their lances to block Frato's path. The two guards both looked sternly at Frato who had stopped dead in his tracks.

"Just where do you think you're going?" The first guard asked in a rather harsh tone.

"Out." Frato answered.

The two guards just laughed. "You do realise you can't leave the city through this gate without permission from his majesty, don't you?"

It was at this point Frato wished he had paid attention during the classes about Burmecian law at the Dragon Academy.

"I didn't know that..." Frato stuttered, sounding rather stupid.

The guards just gave a light smile which broke the stern looks on their faces.

"What do they teach you teenagers at Dragon Academy these days?" The second guard asked with a laugh. "Now enough adventuring, back into the city with you."

Frato just gave a quite little scowl before walking back into the city with a sulk. He would find a way to see Redwind. There had to be some way he could legally stay outside of the city boundaries to visit Redwind. He was determined to find a way.

The day of the knighthood came rather quickly. Everyone continued their usual everyday businesses, Frato trained by himself: a hobby which he rarely grew tired of. Fratley and Freya spent the few days before the knighthood with each other, often putting in a few hours of hard training together themselves.

The morning of the knighthood started at the Fratley household just like any other morning where the two brothers had to be up early: hectic. Frato and Fratley were scrambling around frantically trying to put on their suits, get something quick to eat, get washed and brush their hair. April was also flying around the house in a mad panic, no matter how valiant her efforts were to get the boys up and ready early it never worked.

Eventually the two were ready. Both Fratley and Frato looked extremely smart: they were wearing elegant black suits with belted trousers and white shirts underneath. Both of their letters were folded up neatly and tucked into their breast pocket. April had also put on what was probably her best set of clothes. She wore a long, white dress made of silk with a white tiara in her hair. She looked at both of the “to-be” Dragon Knights and gave a warm smile.

“I am so proud of you boys.” She said softly, before putting on a blue raincoat and turning to the door. “Come on then you two, we don’t want to be late.”

Fratley and Frato both put on their raincoats, Fratley’s coat being a light shade of brown whilst Frato’s was a deep blue. They followed their mother out into the rainy street and headed towards the royal palace.

Surprisingly, the morning rain was light, but the Burmecian rain changed very quickly and without warning. Very few Burmecians roamed the streets near the house, only a few guards and other Burmecians who wanted to attend the knighting ceremony could be seen.

More and more Burmecians appeared as the three drew nearer to the Royal Palace. Most of these were students that Fratley and Frato both recognised. They were all dressed at their very best, in suits and shirts or waistcoats showing from underneath their waterproofs. It was only a matter of time before the pair found Freya and her mother walking down the street. Fratley called out to Freya, who turned around to show that she was wearing a bright red, glimmering dress underneath her usual red raincoat. Freya smiled and walked up to Fratley. Her mother followed her, wearing a thick black shawl over an elegant green dress. She decided to go and talk to April.

“Hello Fratley.” Freya chirped cheerfully.

Fratley smiled back at her. “Hello.”

Frato had also noticed Freya’s presence and called out to her. “Hello Freya, coming to watch us get knighted?” Frato teased with a little grin.

Freya’s smile faded, and slowly became a scowl. She marched straight towards Frato and went into front of him, talking right into his face.

“You know as well as I do that the Dragon Academy is open to both boys and girls, so therefore the Burmecian army is also open to men and women. I passed my exam, so it is perfectly fair that I will join the army. I have a right to it!” Freya growled to Frato’s face. She continued in a slower, quieter but harsher tone. “However, I heard only the Burmecian race can join the Burmecian army. I am truly surprised that you were allowed to join.” There was a small pause before she finished. “Enjoy the ceremony.”

Freya walked slowly back towards Fratley, who was shocked at her sudden outburst. Frato just stood there for a moment, clearly hurt by Freya’s remarks, thinking quietly to himself. He then thought better of it and leered at Freya behind her back one more time before continuing to walk.

Luckily the two mothers hadn’t heard as they had walked on not noticing the three. They hadn’t gotten too far ahead either, but the three teenagers needed to catch up.

Freya and Frato both decided to ignore each other from then on. Freya talked with Fratley for the remainder of the walk while Frato scowled and sulked to himself for a few minutes before the excitement of his knighthood kicked in and cheered him up slightly.

Eventually the group reached the castle gate. Two guards were standing there keeping watch and checking everyone who came had a letter. Behind them was the palace, which was no doubt the hugest building in the city. Like everything else it was made of blue stone and grey slate. A huge stone wall surrounded it making it difficult for anyone to break in. The five of them stopped in front of the gate.

“Do you have your letters?” The guard on the left asked the group, looking particularly at the teenagers.

Fratley and Frato took their letters from out of their breast pockets and handed them to the guard. Freya took her letter out from a small pocket on the back of her dress and passed it to the other guard. The guards quickly checked the letters before opening the gate.

“Very well, you may pass.” The guard said politely.

The group quickly headed into the castle, and were directed by the guards into a huge room where several Burmecians were gathered. The room was lit by candles and a few windows on two sides of the room. There were several stone statues of Burmecians which were not to scale as well as a few portraits of important Kings and knights. There were no seats, except one for the King, who was sat on a decorated stone chair on a large platform at the front of him. The King was talking quietly to one of the servants of the castle.

Prince Puck was nowhere to be seen. Presumably his father had put him somewhere quiet so he wouldn't cause any mayhem. Although he was only three years old, Puck was very mischievous: often breaking things or causing general havoc in the castle. He wanted attention, but as his mother had died at childbirth and as his father being very busy around the castle he rarely got it and thus became bored very easily.

Frato, Freya and Fratley and their parents quickly became separated in the crowd and talked with different people for several minutes. It was hard to stay with anyone as the crowd was that big.

After several minutes, when everyone had gathered the sound of bells could be heard. The bell at the very top of the Royal Palace which signalled the time to the whole city struck nine times. When the bell started ringing, everyone quickly became silent.

After the ninth strike, the King rose from his seat and took a few steps forward on the platform.

“It is time for the knighting ceremony.” The King announced. “We are here today to acknowledge the strengths of the younger generation who have graduated through Dragon Academy. These members of the Dragon Academy are now to be knighted, and to join the ranks of our army.”

One of the former students was lead out onto the stage by a male servant. Another servant passed a rather large sword, which was silver at the handle and highly decorated. The student was told to kneel by the King as he used the sword to touch both of his shoulders.

The dragon knight stood back up and left the stage quietly as the next student came up to be knighted. The process continued with many students coming down with smiles as their parents watched them with pride. Some of the mothers were even crying tears of joy.

It was a few minutes before Frato felt a hand tap his shoulder. He turned around to see one of the male servants, who was trying to hurry him to the stage before the next knight left. Frato walked to the stage, with feelings of nervousness and excitement combining in a deadly combination. It would all be over in a short moment.

The knight left, and Frato walked onto the stage. Several Burmecians looked rather shocked to see the half-breed march onto the stage to be knighted. Some of them thought he wouldn't have been

allowed in the Dragon Knights.

“Please kneel, Frato.” The King asked in a calm tone.

Frato did as he was told and knelt in front of the King. He closed his eyes and felt the steel blade press against his shoulders.

“I now knight you: Sir Frato.” The King said in a louder voice so the audience could hear.

When the blade was lifted off and drawn back, Frato opened his eyes and stood back up.

“Let your Burmecian side be your guide.” The King said coolly.

“Thank you, your majesty.” Frato said happily, but nervously before turning to leave the stage. Frato passed the next student, whom he recognised.

Freya gave a quick glance at Frato before being ushered onto the stage by another impatient male servant. Freya walked calmly onto the stage, managing to keep any nervousness outside of her or hidden.

There were still some expressions of shock on the Burmecians, but this was more of a pleasant shock. Some of the females were watching her with quiet awe.

“Please kneel, Freya.” The King said in the same calm tone.

Fratley smiled as he watched his friend receive her knighthood. However, the servant’s annoying tap on his shoulder disturbed him as he was led quickly towards the stage.

Freya knelt before the King, who pressed his decorative blade across her shoulders.

“I now knight you: Lady Freya.” The King said in a loud, projective voice. Freya smiled to herself as she heard the words. She had done it, and she had proven everyone wrong who thought she couldn’t do it. She had become a Dragon Knight.

Freya stood up as the blade was lifted.

“Good luck in the Dragon Knights. It is a pleasure to have you with us.” The King said with a smile.

“Thank you, your highness.” Freya said politely with a small curtsy. She then turned and walked off the stage. As she descended down the steps she heard Fratley’s voice.

“Well done.”

It was now Fratley’s turn. He walked onto the stage and everyone looked at him in awe. The resemblance he shared with his father was rather amazing.

“Please kneel, Fratley.” The King commanded.

Fratley obeyed and knelt as the King’s blade touched his shoulders.

“I now knight you: Sir Fratley.” The King announced. Fratley felt proud with the fact he was following in his father’s footsteps, which was no easy task. However, Fratley was up to it; in fact, Fratley was up to the even bigger task of surpassing his father.

The sword was lifted off Fratley’s shoulders and he rose to his feet.

“I will have great expectations of you, Sir Fratley.” The King said quietly with acknowledgement. “Good luck in the Dragon Knights.”

“I thank you, your highness.” Fratley answered in a cheerful tone.

At the very back of the room, stood guard next to one of the exits, Lion-heart was watching. He was clearly pleased with watching his son’s knighthood. He smiled, and said quietly: “Well done, my son.”

--Chapter 15: Manners & Mishap--

“The guys at the palace sure know how to eat!” Frato said happily as he munched at a large chunk of meat in his hands. “This is the most succulent meat I’ve ever tasted!”

The only thing that was polite about Frato while he was eating was that by some miracle he talked when his mouth was empty. Other than that, Frato tore away at his food like some kind of rabid monster.

“Sir Frato, could you please try and eat with a little more civility?” Fratley asked in a polite tone, whilst holding a cutlet of meat in his hand. Freya was standing next to him, looking away in utter disgust.

Frato stopped eating and looked at Fratley, feeling a little hurt. He then looked around to see only a few Burmecians with slight frowns on their faces. The rest were turned away talking to friends or relatives. Frato sighed before answering.

“All right, I didn’t think everyone would make such a big deal of it.” Frato replied.

“They will Sir Frato, because we’re Dragon Knights. Fratley stated. “Try setting an example would you?”

That thought had not yet fixed completely in Frato’s mind. However, either way he was not doing himself a favour. Frato just nodded, lowered his head slightly and turned around. He walked off quietly, taking another bite from his chunk of meat, looking slightly more like a man than a beast.

The celebrations had begun, and with that came a whole banquet of food. Everyone had been moved from the stage where the knighthood had taken place and into a banquet hall further in the castle. A humongous feast had been prepared by the castle cooks on the extremely long tables in the hall which were placed near the walls. Like before, everyone was still standing. It was customary to eat with your hands in a hall like this. Everyone had stayed to enjoy the free food, which did not lack any royal taste.

The King was once again sat at the front, although this time he was at the same level as everyone else. He had his own chair and table complete with a hearty meal which consisted of the same meats as the feast, prepared especially by the castle cooks and taste tested before being served by a servant to make sure it wasn’t poisoned or drugged. Like everyone else, the King was also following the custom of the feast and eating with his hands. He took small, delicate bites from his meat whilst being kept from being completely isolated by a servant who stood next to him for any assistance and for some company.

Everything was going just fine. Burmecians were eating, drinking and talking merrily together. Only a small handful of adult Burmecians went over the top and got drunk, and were escorted by the castle guards outside of the castle. The King couldn’t be happier; however there was one small matter that needed to be dealt with.

“Has there been any sign of Puck yet?” The King said aside to the servant after swallowing his piece of meat.

“No your highness, we will inform you straight way if there is any news on the missing prince.” The servant replied. “Aside from that, is everything else alright your majesty?”

“Yes.” The King answered with a small sigh. “Everything is just fine.”

The banquet continued without much hassle but a lot of conversation. Later in the celebration, a female servant came into the banquet hall and made her way through the gigantic crowd calmly and up towards the King. She stopped and curtsied in her scruffy clothes in front of her King.

“Your majesty, we have found your son.” The servant said in a pleasant tone.

“Really?! Where was he?” The King turned and asked the servant, eyes wide with interest.

“We found him hiding in the cupboards of the castle kitchen.” The servant answered.

“Bring him to me immediately.” The King commanded in a calm tone.

“Yes, your highness.” The servant answered before turning to leave the giant banquet hall through the way she came.

A few moments later the door to the banquet hall opened yet again, this time with the guards at the door shouting “Make way for the prince!” as they pulled the doors wide.

The crowd dispersed to form a small clearing for the servant and Prince Puck to walk down. The servant walked towards the King holding Prince Puck’s hand to make sure he didn’t try to run into the crowd. The crowd nearest to the royal toddler and mischief maker started to murmur amongst themselves. The female servant eventually reached the King and stopped with the young prince.

“Here is Prince Puck your majesty.” The female servant stated.

“Please fetch my son a seat.” The King asked the male servant who was nearest to him.

The male servant quickly bowed and marched off, returning quickly a chair that was similar to the King’s, only it was much smaller and slightly less decorated. He placed the chair in between the King and the young Prince, who was on the King’s right.

“Thank you.” The King said with a slight smile. He then turned to face his son and his smile soon faded. “Sit down Puck.” The King said with a slight growl.

For once, Puck did as he was told and sat down. He then began to sulk heavily as he crossed his arms and wriggled further into his chair. His father looked over at him.

“I’ve been worrying about you all morning!” The King said with a frown. “What were you playing at?”

Puck didn’t answer; he just looked away and continued to sulk.

“Just eat something! You’ve been hiding away all morning!” The King said, keeping his voice at a surprisingly moderate level despite his slight anger. He then sighed and shook his head as he calmed himself down. “What am I going to do with you?”

The King then turned away from Puck and looked to the left of his chair. Not particularly to look at the servant standing on that side, but to look at the area where his wife would have been sitting had she not passed away giving birth to the mischievous child sitting on his right.

The King gave a heavy sigh before looking at the feast taking place in front of him.

“Life just isn’t the same without her...even now.” The King muttered quietly to himself.

“Congratulations you two; finally you have joined the ranks alongside me in the Dragon Knights!” Lion-heart beamed at his two children. “Words cannot express how much joy now fills my heart! All these years of training with me and at the academy have served you well!”

“Thank you father, but I think we have been praised enough.” Fratley replied. “We’ve only just started, and you already congratulated us for passing the test.”

“Don’t be so modest. You deserve it after all, Sir Fratley.” Lion-heart answered with a smile.

The last two words caused Fratley to pause a minute just to take in what he heard. This was the first time his father had referred to him as anything other than “Junior”.

“Well, I have to get ready for my evening patrol. However, before I go I would like to point out that while we are at home I would prefer it if we didn’t stick to formalities and just called each other by our names.” Lion-heart explained. “Okay Fratley? Okay Frato?” He looked at them in turn as they nodded. He then turned and walked towards the stairs. “But remember your titles in public!” He

seemed to look at Frato then, obviously remembering the scenario that had happened previously. With that, Lion-heart marched up the stairs to get changed.

“He’s never going to ease off me for that is he?” Frato moaned, shifting his vision to Fratley.

The knighthood celebrations had finished, and Frato and Fratley had returned home for the afternoon. Their jobs as Dragon Knights began the following morning, as the King felt that no-one would feel like working the minute straight after a huge celebration; some wouldn’t even be fit enough to work the afternoon, but that was their problem.

Fratley and Frato just wanted to relax for most of the afternoon, whereas Lion-heart had finished his morning duties and wanted to congratulate the two further. The other newly appointed dragon knights were also at home for the same reason.

“I think he will let you off, it wasn’t that long ago Frato.” Fratley reassured with a little grin. “Say, do you want to go for a walk outside?”

“A walk?” Frato repeated looking slightly confused. “What for?”

“To relax, why else?” Fratley answered. “We don’t want to strain ourselves too much before we start our jobs as Dragon Knights.”

“We don’t want to lose our fighting prowess either.” Frato retorted. Then Frato had another thought. If Fratley didn’t walk with him, who else would he walk with? “Oh, alright. I don’t really feel like training by myself again.”

“That’s a first.” Fratley said whilst getting his brown raincoat and putting it on.

Frato quickly put on his blue raincoat and followed his brother with a slight frown on his face from that comment. As the two stepped outside they noticed that the rain was fairly mild, as if representing the calm mood that had followed the celebration. The streets were also filled with Burmecians doing shopping, daily work and other everyday activities.

The two walked down casually through the street with no real destination. They turned down another alley, which was just as packed as the other, when Fratley saw something.

“Is that Freya?” Fratley asked looking into the pack of Burmecians in front of him.

“Please no...” Frato prayed to himself.

In only a few seconds, Freya had caught Fratley in her line of vision and came walking up to him. Frato hung his head as he saw her marching towards them and looked up to glare at her as she came near.

“Hello, Sir Fratley! What did you think of the party?” Freya asked merrily as she stopped in front of the two.

“It was a divine celebration, but I would prefer it if you weren’t so strict about such formalities with me.” Fratley answered.

“Nonsense! I like calling you Sir Fratley. It has a nice ring to it.” Freya insisted.

“Then at least allow me the same privilege, Lady Freya.” Fratley responded with a smile.

“You can just call me Freya, especially if we are alone.” Freya stated. “I thought you weren’t keen with these formalities.”

“Yes, very well Freya. I will refer to you by that if you so wish.” Fratley replied in a rather formal tone.

“Well Freya, I...” Frato began.

“It’s Lady Freya to you!” Freya interrupted with a slight glare.

Frato just scowled and remained silent. Fratley took a step forward and asked something to break

the tension between Freya and Frato.

“What are you doing out on the streets anyway?”

“I’m just buying a few bits and pieces for me and my mother. That’s all.” Freya answered, breaking her slight glare into a calm expression. “You?”

“We’re just taking a walk.” Fratley explained.

“Hey, perhaps you could help me with my little shopping trip?” Freya asked, her expression now lighting up.

“Sure, why not?” Fratley responded with a smile before turning to Frato. “What about you, Sir Frato?”

“Thanks, but I’d rather get myself eaten alive by a Malboro.” Frato responded in a calm but sarcastic voice. He then turned away and slumped off in his usual manner, leaving Freya scowling at him and Fratley slightly shocked and disappointed by his rude remark.

Freya and Fratley quickly disappeared into the market stalls as Frato walked alone back home.

“I’d love to see the look on their faces if they get separated into different missions as Dragon Knights.” Frato muttered to himself with a slight smile.

--Chapter 16: First Day--

The following morning came, and with it came the responsibilities of being a Dragon Knight for Fratley and Frato. However, this didn’t stop the two from sleeping heavily as usual; but this time, instead of April constantly pleading and nagging them to get out of bed they were woken by in a different and rather more disturbing way.

“Come on you two! Get up!” Lion-heart shouted in the upstairs corridor. He then marched straight into Fratley’s bedroom, which was the closest to his. He went straight over to Fratley and shook him rather violently.

“Come on Junior! Wake up!” Lion-heart said in a raised voice, straight to Fratley’s face. This caused Fratley to wake up rather startled.

Lion-heart then left Fratley’s room as Fratley rose quickly into a sitting position so he wouldn’t be hassled further to get out of bed. Lion-heart now headed straight to Frato’s room and repeated the process of shaking the sleeping half-caste awake.

“Come on! Wake up! You’ll be late for your duties!” Lion-heart half shouted straight at Frato as he shook him in his bed.

Frato almost screamed as he was shaken out of his dreams by his father. He too, quickly rose out of bed so Lion-heart wouldn’t disturb him further. Lion-heart, now seeing that both of his children were awake, left the room to get ready for today’s duties.

The two brothers quickly got dressed into their Dragon Knight uniforms which consisted of a blue battle shirt which was threaded with myhril so it would be tough to pierce; some rather baggy dark blue pants which were held up by a black leather belt.

After the two had finished getting dressed the two scurried downstairs to get their breakfast. Lion-heart was already downstairs eating a bowl of muesli. Fratley and Frato quickly did the same and made their own breakfasts (both consisting of muesli) and sat themselves down to eat.

The three sat in silence as they ate. Not one word was said. This was rather uncomfortable for both Fratley and Frato as they were already fairly tense about their first as Dragon Knights, not to mention they had wrestled out of their beds by Lion-heart.

Finally, the three finished their breakfast and cleared the table. The three then finished getting ready by getting washed, brushing their hair, brushing their teeth and all the usual things you do in the

morning to get ready for something.

The three then left the house and walked into Burmecia towards the Royal Palace. The Burmecian rain was heavy, as is symbolising that the hardship of being a Dragon Knight was already upon the young warriors.

As the trio continued to walk, Lion-heart finally said something to his children other than “WAKE UP!”.

“So today is the big day isn’t it Sirs?” Lion-heart asked with a little smile. “Your first day of working in Burmecia as a Dragon Knight.”

“Yes.” Both Fratley and Frato replied at the same time rather nervously. Well, I suppose it would be alright to be nervous walking next to someone who had shook you violently only about an hour ago just to get you out of your bed; wouldn’t you?

“You nervous?” Lion-heart asked noticing the two being rather quiet. “I was nervous on my first day in the Dragon Knights too. Don’t worry about it, you’ll be fine, trust me.”

“Thanks, Sir.” Fratley replied. “I’m just a little concerned about what impression the other knights are going to have of me.”

“Count yourself lucky!” Frato said still looking anxious. “Just think about me! What kind of impression am I going to make? I’m not even a full-blooded Burmecian!”

“I wouldn’t worry about that too much. You were knighted as a Burmecian, were you not Sir Frato?” Lion-heart responded rather thoughtfully.

“Yes I was.” Frato replied. “Though that might make other Burmecians think worse of me rather than better of me.”

There was a short moment of silence before Fratley and Lion-heart quickly changed the subject.

“Rather heavy rain today, don’t you think?” Lion-heart asked, giving a quick glance at the pelting rain.

“Sir, that isn’t even half of an understatement.” Fratley said with a light smirk.

Sir Fratley seemed to ease up a little after that. He was becoming more comfortable and less anxious as he walked with his father towards the Royal Palace.

Sir Frato however, started to straggle slightly as he fell behind the two knights and started to think.

“Will I be accepted by the Dragon Knights?” Frato thought. “Will the Burmecians accept me?”

After a small period of thinking; another thought occurred in Frato’s mind.

“Does it really matter?”

Another small period of hard thought Frato reached his rather brief conclusion.

“...Nah.”

The way Frato saw it, either the Burmecians accepted him as a Dragon Knight despite his race, or there would be trouble.

The three Burmecian knights finally reached the Royal Palace, where a group of other Burmecian Dragon Knights were gathered. There was a small notice on the door which stated where each knight was to stand guard for the day...

Sometime later, Frato found himself taking guard at one the gates, next to the person he hated more than anyone else on Gaia: Freya Crescent. For some reason which Frato was unable to figure out, the two had been put together to guard the Southern gate of Burmecia. They were not the only ones

there of course; there were two more experienced Dragon Knights on the other side of the gate.

Not that there was much to guard against, as the kingdoms of the Mist Continent were currently at peace. Very few beasts actually roamed close to the gates of Burmecia, and those that did were usually taken out by the guards very easily.

Frato found this rather disappointing. He wanted a challenge. He wanted something that was worth fighting. The monsters that roamed the rainy plains outside of Burmecia were child's play to Frato.

Frato then gave a quick glance to Freya, who returned it with a glance of her own. This caused Frato to look away again as he didn't really want to start a conversation with Freya.

Frato couldn't start a fight with her right now anyway. They were supposed to be guarding and protecting the city from any danger; not slashing each others brains out.

Frato just stood in front of the gate keeping his guard. He was nearly falling asleep with the sheer dullness of it all.

"Stay awake." Freya said sternly as she saw Frato start to doze. "You're supposed to be guarding the city."

Frato turned and glared at Freya angrily; only to have the glare returned by Freya. Frato then broke his eye-contact with Freya and looked back out onto the dull plains.

Freya was determined not to let the arrogant warrior standing next to her ruin her first day as a Dragon Knight. They had a job to do. Freya just wanted to get on with it.

Fratley had been selected to stand guard at the west gate of Burmecia. Just recently, news of a Red Dragon roaming the land there had been spread throughout the city and the Burmecians were slightly anxious about it.

Fratley had been paired with his father: Lion-heart. On the other side of the gate was Leo, who had aided Frato when he was mugged. Next to Leo, stood another experienced Dragon warrior.

The four took their positions at the gate. They waited patiently together.

After a few moments, a sound could be heard.

Boom. Boom.

It seemed quite far away for be of any threat, but then the same sound was heard again.

Boom! Boom!

It was louder than before, and quite evidently closer. The four knights started to become suspicious of the noise and held their lances slightly firmer. The sound came again.

BOOM! BOOM!

Lion-heart went into a battle stance: he put his left leg behind him, crouched slightly and pointed his lance out in front of him.

Fratley followed suit and did the same. The other two knights had also taken their place behind the two warriors as they saw what the noise was coming from.

The next sound wasn't a boom, this time it was something that was hauntingly familiar.

"RRRRRAAAA OOOOORRRR!"

Redwind was standing in front of the group, growling angrily. He had seen the same Burmecian who had wounded him in his wing: Lion-heart. As Redwind figured Lion-heart would be the greatest threat of the group of four, he dived straight at Lion-heart.

Lion-heart detected this and jumped into the air. He swung his lance into his left hand and used it to

impale the dragon in the same wing he had injured before as he landed.

Redwind screamed at the searing pain in his left wing and immediately started to thrash around. He swung his left wing in a craze, trying to remove the lance from his wing and at the same time preventing Lion-heart from regaining his weapon.

The other three warriors charged at the opening that was available in the right side of Redwind. Three lances impaled Redwind's right wing causing the dragon to scream even more. The three warriors then removed their lances to try another assault.

Then, a lash of Redwind's incredibly long and scaly tail sent the three warriors on his right flying backwards and onto the ground with a painful splat. Redwind then turned to Lion-heart to focus his assault on him once again.

Lion-heart was preparing a dragon knight ability, but Redwind didn't know which one. Redwind instead braced himself and prepared to either defend or evade Lion-heart's next attack.

Lion-heart continued to prepare and chant this skill, but then he did something unusual. He stopped in his chant and let his arms fall at ease.

Redwind then felt more agonising pain in his right wing as the three warriors on his right had evidently recovered and charged at him again.

Lion-heart was only buying time!

Redwind then decided that enough was enough, and he would rely on his ultimate move. He smacked the warriors on his right with his tail once again as they removed the lances from his wing. He then used his powerful legs to leap back as far as he could from the group.

The warriors paused for a moment, thinking that the dragon might be retreating. However, this hope was out of their minds in a few short seconds, as Redwind began to inhale as much air as he could.

The warriors charged together in hope they would reach the dragon before it could unleash the technique. They were quick enough, they reached the dragon time.

However, when they did, Redwind leapt backwards once again. He landed on his clawed feet just in time to fire the attack.

A short burst of whirling wind was fired straight from Redwind's mouth to the four warriors in front of him. He moved his head horizontally to ensure that the magical attack hit the four who were attacking him. The group of warriors were hit by the twister attack and were sent flying backwards.

Lion-heart and Fratley landed back-first onto the ground. Leo and his comrade had flipped in the air by the attack and had landed front first on the ground.

Redwind gave a startled grunt as he saw the warriors struggle to get back onto their feet and decided to turn around and stomp back into the mountains. Redwind thought it would be wiser to wait in the mountains a little longer rather than risk his life further by charging into Burmecia.

Lion-heart, Fratley, Leo and the other Dragon Knight reached their feet and breathed a sigh of relief when they saw Redwind stomp back into the mountains.

"Looks like we scared the Dragon off..." Fratley said through deep breaths.

"We can't keep our guard down though." Lion-heart stated, also through deep breaths.

The four continued to guard the gate, keeping an eye out for any monsters or the Red Dragon that had attacked them. Fortunately, the Red Dragon did not return; and the monsters that did appear were disposed of quickly.

Later that evening; after Fratley's exciting experience of fighting a Red Dragon and Frato's even more exciting experience of standing next to Freya for more than five minutes and not breaking up

into an argument with her; Fratley and Frato were eating some cooked meat and bread for their dinner.

Whilst the two were eating, Fratley decided to spark up a conversation.

“So how did you find your first day Frato?” Fratley asked in a polite tone.

“Annoying.” Frato muttered sulkily after swallowing another piece of meat.

Fratley just looked at Frato with a confused expression. Frato looked back and saw the expression and explained further.

“I had to guard the Southern gate with Freya.” Frato spat. “The only thing that kept me sane was the fact I managed to kill a few monsters in the time I spent with her.”

Fratley stifled a laugh. It wasn't recent news that Frato and Freya hated each other.

“Well, I had a slightly more enjoyable day.” Fratley started. “Other than standing guard we had to scare off the Red Dragon that had been roaming around the western mountains. It came down and attacked us for some reason...”

At the words “Red Dragon” Frato's eyes widened. One word entered Frato's mind...

“Redwind...”

--Chapter 17: A Tournament?--

The Burmecian rain continued to batter down on the city at a steady rate, which was very similar to the work pattern of the Dragon Knights for the months after the exam. The Mist Continent was at peace for the time being, so the main duties for the Dragon Knights was to simply stand guard around the city and to prevent the savage monsters roaming outside the city from entering the rainy metropolis.

This did not please Frato at all; he hated having to stand around the city doing next to nothing. He only found pleasure in standing outside the gates and finding any excuse he could to kill the monsters he saw inhabiting the land.

Freya had expected what work as a Dragon Knight would be like and she had not been disappointed. She had been split apart from Frato during the months much to her relief, which made the job much easier.

Fratley had been making quite a name for himself, after managing to scare off Redwind with the other guards he had been assigned to guard with some of the tougher Dragon Knights. These Dragon Knights were often assigned to guard and keep order in the rougher parts of the city.

Another day of work had come to an end for the three Dragon Knights and as such they began making their own way towards the castle. A few other Knights and guards were making their way there as the daily patrol had finished. Soon, more Knights would leave their homes and take their posts for the night patrol, which offered more pay but was slightly more dangerous and very dull at times.

Frato was making his way towards the castle to receive his wages for the day. He didn't receive any stares on his way to the castle, mainly because quite a lot of the Burmecians knew him now, and they didn't bother paying him much attention. He just walked casually with a slight smile on his face, as another working day had come to an end.

He reached the castle entrance, and was permitted to enter the front courtyard where several Dragon Knights were gathered talking to each other. Fratley then came rushing up to Frato with a smile across his face.

“Sir Frato, have you heard? His majesty is going to hold this year's tournament for the Dragon Knights very soon!” Fratley asked.

“A tournament?” Frato’s eyes widened with excitement as he repeated the words.

“Yes, there is a poster for it over there, along with a sign up sheet.” Fratley said pointing over to the corner of the castle’s front courtyard where several of the warriors were queuing up and signing up for the contest. “I already signed up. It should be very interesting. Are you going to sign up, Sir Frato?”

“Are you mad?! Of course I am going to sign up!” Frato replied, still with the air of joy filling his voice. “It’s about time something exciting happened!”

Frato quickly joined the queue, and his air of excitement quickly left him as he gradually became agitated at the long wait. He then began to tap his foot and he was slowly but surely getting towards the sign up sheet.

“You really are impatient aren’t you?” Frato heard a voice from behind him. He turned around to be met by the nonchalant eyes of Freya Crescent.

“So what? I just can’t stand long waits.” Frato replied with a slight scowl. “You’re entering the tournament too?”

“Of course, I want to see if all of my training has paid off.” Freya answered, looking very serious.

“To humiliate yourself, more likely.” Frato added with a slight smirk.

Freya just snorted and gave no reply. With luck their short conversation had took up their time in the queue and Frato was already signing the sheet in his rather messy handwriting. He finished quickly so as to not spend too long with Freya standing behind him, which was something Frato would never feel comfortable with.

He turned around to leave the queue completely, and deliberately barged into Freya’s left side as he passed. Freya managed to resist the barge, although Frato had nearly shoved her into the Knight standing behind her. She scowled slightly before going straight up to the sign up sheet and wrote her name with her impeccably neat handwriting.

Frato walked back to Fratley with a much more cheerful mood and a small smile on his face.

“Well Sir, shall we go home?” Frato asked his brother in a casual tone. For once, he had actually remembered someone’s title.

“Just a minute Sir Frato, I want to wait for Lady Freya.” Fratley replied in the same manner.

Frato then moved beside Fratley and turned around. He saw Freya approach him from a short distance straight towards the pair. She decided to walk in front of Frato, and before Frato could even react she smacked him right across his face.

“OW! What was that for!?” Frato shouted, no longer smiling and covering the red mark on his face with his right hand.

“You know perfectly well what that’s for!” Freya scowled back. “You ought to learn how to show a little respect!”

“Now, now, calm down you two...” Fratley stated, trying to step between the two.

Freya just stood still, regaining her once calm mood. Frato however, was trying to push past Fratley to get his grubby hands on Freya. Fratley managed to hold him back with little difficulty and said something else to him.

“Frato, calm down!”

Frato eventually stopped trying to push past Fratley and moved back growling at Freya.

“I’ll get you back Freya...” Frato leered at her.

“We’re even as far as I am concerned.” Freya replied coolly. “You don’t frighten me.”

Frato just growled once again. Fratley looked at both of them before saying anything.

“Let’s go home, shall we?” Fratley suggested, trying to cheer the two up.

“Fine...” Frato answered in another quieter growl.

Finally, the three started to make their way home. Fratley walked in between the two as usual with Freya on his right and Frato on his left. Frato growled quietly once again, but another stern look from his older brother finally put a stop to it. Frato then just decided to scowl and sulk to himself. Conversation started quickly between Fratley and Freya about their day and the upcoming tournament.

The Dragon warrior tournament was held every year in the Royal Arena, which was part of the castle. Burmecia’s toughest knights would compete to see who was the strongest in the city. Some of the richer citizens of Burmecia would pay to watch the tournament for entertainment. Families of the participants were permitted to watch for free, so April, Frato and Fratley had watched their father Lion-heart fight in the tournament several times. Lion-heart had been the winner of the tournament last year had been victorious multiple times in the stadium.

The rules for the contest were simple. To win, you either need to disarm your opponent or draw blood. The same armour and weapon was given to each contender in the interest of fair play, and no items were to be used at any stage in battle throughout the tournament.

No-one had ever been killed throughout the many years that the tournament had taken place and there were usually very few injuries. It was all a form a sport and one of the very few traditions that was kept in Burmecia.

The three knights reached Freya’s house first, which was closer to the castle but quite a way west from the brother’s home. Fratley and Freya waved each other goodbye as Frato stood with his back turned to the both of them, waiting for Fratley to leave and walk with him to their home. Fratley turned around as he saw Freya enter her home and walked with Frato. Conversation between the two quickly ensued.

“I do wish you could just get along with Lady Freya.” Fratley muttered.

“I can’t stand her.” Frato scowled. “She refuses to follow the proper role of a woman.”

“You mean you still can’t get over the fact she can fight?” Fratley asked in a calm but slightly surprised tone.

“She shouldn’t fight, that’s just it.” Frato replied, still scowling. “Men are the stronger gender, it is they who should do the fighting, and they must protect the women and children.”

“Who says women can’t join the army as well?” Fratley questioned. “If more women joined the army our forces would be much stronger.”

“Could you just imagine the state of our homes if that happened?” Frato argued back. “Who would do the housework?”

There was a small pause before Fratley replied.

“Whether women should or shouldn’t become knights is irrelevant. Your behaviour towards Lady Freya is dishonourable.” Fratley said in a stern voice. “You are supposed to respect fellow Dragon Knights.”

“I do respect fellow Dragon Knights. It’s just that I don’t think Freya should be one.” Frato answered, looking at where he was going rather than Fratley’s stern gaze.

“Well, if you think that is the case why don’t you see his majesty and argue with him?” Fratley asked with a slight smile. “After all, he was the one who knighted her in the first place. He obviously thinks women should be welcomed into the Dragon Knights.”

Frato just remained silent. He didn't want to take things that far. Thankfully, his silence only lasted a few moments as their house came into view and he opened the door.

It was time to train like they had never trained before...

--Chapter 18: The Tournament Qualifiers--

The Burmecian rain battered down hard as the warriors punished themselves in their continual training to achieve their very best fighting state for the upcoming tournament. They were all aiming for the top prize, which would be a large sum of gil, a large golden trophy with a Dragon emblem engraved on it and the title of the strongest Burmecian warrior. It was a prize all Dragon Knights dreamt of winning.

Although Dragon Knight duties were still being upheld in Burmecia, the warriors were taking all of their spare time to spar and to train. Fratley and Freya often saw each other to spar with each other and Frato remained home and trained alone or with his father.

This continued for a few weeks until one evening after the daylight guard had finished. Everyone was making their way to the front of the Royal Palace as usual for their wages. The same large crowd had gathered in the front courtyard but the poster had been removed from the corner and had been replaced with a small wooden stage: which looked more like a box than anything else. One of the male castle servants stepped onto the stage in very scruffy, wet blue robes.

"Excuse me..." The servant called out, but was drowned out by the murmuring of the Dragon Knights. The servant shook his head and then tried again. "EXCUSE ME!" He said in a much louder and clearer voice, catching the attention of most of the Dragon Knights. "His Royal Highness has asked me to convey the following..." The servant then took a second to clear his throat. "The qualifying rounds of this year's tournament will take place this Saturday at the Royal Arena. You are expected to arrive here at nine o'clock. For those of you on duty at that time you will be excused and given a replacement for the duration of the tournament. If you do not turn up and you are a participant it will count as a forfeit and you will be disqualified. That is all." The servant then took a small bow of respect to the Knights before walking off the small stage and into the Palace. Conversation soon picked up again in the group of Dragon Knights.

"Now we'll see if all our training has paid off." Fratley said with a small grin.

"And enjoy ourselves while we're at it." Frato added. "Come on, there's no point waiting around here any longer." Frato then began making his way outside of the gate.

"I'll catch up with you later." Fratley called out as Frato walked out of the gate. He then walked up to Freya, who was stood a very short distance away talking to Gray.

Gray smiled at Fratley as he slunk behind Freya, who was too busy talking to notice him. Freya finished her sentence before noticing Gray's smile and turning around to see Fratley's smiling face only inches away from hers.

"Aah! Fratley! Don't sneak up on me like that!" Freya gasped in surprise.

"I didn't sneak up on you." Fratley replied, still grinning. "You were just totally oblivious to what was happening around you."

Gray gave a little chuckle whilst Freya frowned slightly at her boyfriend. The frown disappeared off her face after a few seconds as she couldn't stay mad at Fratley for too long and she knew he was only joking with her.

"So what do you think about the tournament Fratley?" Freya asked in a slightly more cheery mood. "Are you going to win?"

"I don't know. I wouldn't think so. There are several tough Dragon Knights entering and I daresay there are several tougher than me!" Fratley replied.

“If anyone can do it out of this year’s graduates it’s going to be you Fratley.” Gray reassured Fratley. “I’m entering too; we might have to fight each other.”

“I might have to fight a lot of people I don’t want to.” Fratley answered. “But it’s only a tournament. Let’s just enjoy it.”

“You’re right Fratley.” Freya said firmly. “I think it’s time I should be heading home.”

“Me too, I need to catch up with my brother. I don’t want him getting into trouble again.” Fratley added.

“I’m going to stick around here for a little while. I’ll see you again some time.” Gray said with another smile.

Fratley and Freya then left through the castle gates and walked to each other’s homes together.

The day of the tournament finally came, and for the first time in his entire life Frato was up early. He leapt out of his bed with a smile of sheer excitement plastered on his face. He quickly got dressed into his light blue shirt and baggy dark blue pants. He didn’t have to worry about putting on any armour as that was to be provided for him at the Palace.

Frato heard some quiet footsteps and Fratley’s door creak open before hearing Fratley shriek “AAA! I’m up! I’m up! I’m up!” very quickly. Frato then heard the door shut and some more footsteps.

Lion-heart opened the door to check if Frato was awake and his eyes widened with surprise to see his adopted son already up and fully dressed.

“Well, that’s a first.” Lion-heart said calmly but slowly. “I wish you would get up like this more often!” He said before shutting the door and walking away.

The same mad morning rush ensued as the brothers got themselves ready despite Frato’s early start. Fratley dressed himself in a yellow shirt with some baggy brown trousers. The three then started making their way to the Royal Palace for the qualifying rounds.

As they approached the Palace they saw more and more warriors walking alongside them ready to try out for this year’s tournament. They entered the front gate of the Palace and passed the guards who nodded in acknowledgement as they ticked them off from their list of who to expect.

The guards pointed out the way to the arena inside the castle, and it turned out be on the western side of the palace. The arena itself was an area of flat slate in one of the palaces courtyards. The courtyard was surrounded by massive stone figures of Burmecians. A stone chair was placed at the eastern side of the arena for the judge which was sheltered by the hand of one of the humongous statues.

The royal bells sounded and were struck nine times, just like they did every morning at nine o’clock. After the ninth bell rang, the same servant who had made the announcement came walking up to the Dragon Knights in his same messy blue robes. He cleared his throat and spoke aloud to the group.

“It is time for the qualifying rounds of the tournament to take place. The first few combatants will be taken through this exit to put on their armour and to receive their weapon.” The slave explained, pointing to the opening he had just come through. “You should know the rules, the winner is the Burmecian who draws blood from his opponent first or who disarms his opponent. Forfeit is also another method of losing. You need to defeat two opponents consecutively to qualify. If you lose, you have failed to qualify and you will be sent home or back on duty. We will take care of any injuries, should they occur.”

As the servant finished, two Royal guards who were obviously not competing marched through the

entrance behind him. In-between them, the King of Burmecia walked elegantly in a thick blue shawl and a cape with short pants made of a rich material. The three of them stopped in the centre of the arena and all of the Dragon Knights saluted the King. The slave quickly turned around and kneeled in front of the King.

“You are dismissed servant.” The King said in a calm tone, and at his words the servant got up from his knees and walked around the edge of the arena and through the opening he had come through. The King then addressed the group of warriors in front of him.

“As part of the tradition of this tournament, I am to be the judge. I wish you all the best of luck, and that may the strongest knight prevail!”

The King then called out the names of the first four combatants so they could get ready and that there would be no delay between the first and second fight. The names did not have much significance to Frato, Fratley or Freya as they barely knew them.

A few minutes passed as the knights changed into their armour before the first two competitors stepped into the arena. They took their positions at the two corners of the ring and entered their battle stances. The King’s voice then called out into the arena.

“You may begin.”

The two knights charged at each other and a crash was heard as their lances were smashed together. They continued to try and beat each other, but neither showed much skill. Eventually one of the warriors drew blood from his rival and the King announced the winner of the match.

This continued as the next competitors entered and the King called out the names of the combatants for the third match. They all seemed to be recent Dragon Academy graduates and didn’t seem to have much chance of winning the tournament. The other Dragon Knights watched the match intensely to see their rivals in action.

When the fourth match had finished and the winner was declared the King announced the next competitors. This time the announcement was of interest to Fratley, Frato and Freya.

“Will Sir Gary and Lady Freya please prepare themselves for their match.” The King said clearly.

Freya calmly made her way to the back of the arena, and as she walked there she heard Fratley’s voice calling to her.

“Good luck!”

Freya smiled to herself as she went to pick up her weapon and put on her armour.

The fifth match came and passed and had turned out to be rather dull. The King announced the winner and asked the next combatants to prepare themselves. Then, Freya and Gary walked out together and took their positions before readying their lances.

“You may begin.” The King’s voice echoed through the arena.

Freya charged and swung her lance straight at Gary, who just managed to block the attack by bringing his lance forward. Freya then brought her spear back and in a flash had blocked an attack from Gary at her leg. Whilst the two lances were still clashed together, Freya used her strength to force Gary’s spear up above his head. Gary moved his spear away from Freya and had to hop backwards to avoid another swing from Freya’s lance.

Gary moved forward slightly and their two lances clashed once again in another deadlock. Freya then once again overpowered Gary and pushed him back. Gary then decided to take a leap backwards before powering up his lance in a flurry of red energy. Freya saw that her opponent was preparing a Dragon Knight ability so she charged towards him to try and stop the attack.

Gary managed to prepare the skill in time and pointed his lance at Freya before shouting “Cherry Blossom!” Beautiful red petals were fired across the arena towards Freya. Gary gave a small smile

as he saw the petals set ablaze and supposedly engulf Freya. The attack subsided, and Freya was not in sight.

Gary looked up and an expression of shock formed across his face as he saw Freya flying towards him through the air. He brought his lance in front of him just in time to block Freya's aerial attack but the pressure of her strike forced him onto one knee.

Freya brought her lance back and swung again only to be blocked once again. Gary quickly stood up before Freya pushed him backwards once more. Gary then decided to leap backwards a second time. Freya dashed forward as Gary jumped back and managed to swing at him as he landed. Gary attempted to block the strike but the force of Freya's attack managed to smash his lance out of his hands and cleanly onto the arena floor. Gary held up his hands in defeat as Freya backed off and held her lance by her side.

"Sir Gary has been disarmed. Lady Freya is the victor." The King announced.

There was a polite round of applause for the victory from the Dragon Knights as Fratley gave a little cheer. Frato clapped, but he was cursing quietly to himself. Gary shook Freya's hand to congratulate her before picking up his lance. The two went to the back of the arena to disarm themselves before rejoining the crowd. As Freya joined the crowd, she heard Fratley's voice once again.

"Well done, Freya."

--Chapter 19: Inspiration from Idols--

The tournament qualifying rounds continued to test the full strength of the Burmecians. Even with the dull matches, which were mostly from the amateurs to fighting; fresh from the Dragon Academy; there was the excitement from such brilliant and classic match-ups which made observers self-analytical of their own weaknesses. The next match-up, although in a qualifier, was predicted to be a classic just from the name of the fighters.

"Will Sir "Steel-cutter" Drago and Sir "Lion-heart" Fratley please make their way to the changing rooms, change into their armour and then actually come out and pull off the best possible match. Just so I know they are there!" The King announced in an incredibly formal, but humorous tone. This caused a bit of a chuckle to rise from the other members of the Dragon Knights. Sir "Lion-heart" and the one and only Sir Drago both chuckled at the originality of the joke before marching towards the area of the Royal Arena where the armour was provided.

Sir "Steel-cutter" Drago was another highly valued warrior of the Dragon Knights. Although he wasn't as well reputed as Lion-heart, he was still well known for his extremely powerful attacks and quite often managed to pierce through armour.

Fratley, Frato and Freya were all in awe as they watched their personal idols of fighting walk backstage and prepare themselves for what was to be a guaranteed "unmissable event". The Dragon Knights managed to pull through the complete tripe which was the "average" fight of the newcomer, now they could see the masters in action. The fight before theirs passed rather slowly and the tension was beginning to rise in the group of Dragon Knights.

The huge cheer from the small amount of Dragon Knights was more than enough to motivate the two immense warriors to come out and do their thing. Both Lion-heart and Drago came out to the ring in the loudest cheer Frato's ears were used to.

When the King announced the start of the match, the spectators were not disappointed. The two Knights went all out against each other: spear clashed against spear at unbelievable speed, the two warriors leapt and ran all around the arena and the two warriors even leapt into the air and fought in mid-air. Eventually Lion-heart summoned enough power and speed to break through Drago's defences and drew blood from his rival's right arm.

The King announced the winner and the crowd of Dragon Knights roared with applause as a mark of respect for the two warriors. Lion-heart smiled and helped his comrade up before the two fighters

shook hands. The two had mutual respect for each other and one simple match would not dampen either fighter's spirits.

The fight was a real source of inspiration for Freya, Frato and Fratley.

With the inspiration of his personal idol still fresh in his mind, Sir Fratley Jr, the very offspring of Sir "Lion-heart" Fratley himself, made his way all the way to the ring to show his full capabilities in his upcoming battle.

"This is it." Fratley thought as he made his way to the brutal arena that lay in front of him. "This is where I show my absolute best."

His opponent, who was unfortunate enough to be a true amateur from the Dragon Academy, nervously made his way to the arena. Thankfully the classic match-up from earlier had inspired the new warriors to the art of the Dragon Knight in entirely different ways.

Although his opponent had the same tactics in his mind, the curiosity and originality combined made him feel extremely nervous. Although that in itself brings out the "latent power" that people have within them.

Sir Fratley Junior and Sir Gidd both entered the ring and entered their personal battle stances. The King then announced the start of the match...

"You may begin."

The two warriors clashed their lances together with such speed the spectators didn't even catch the full force of the swing, although it was fairly obvious that Fratley had been the faster of the two. The lances were then moved apart and once again, they clashed together, before being broken apart a second time. The lances smashed together a final time, but this time the two fighters broke themselves apart and moved backwards slowly.

Both Fratley Junior and Gidd analysed each other to see if there was a weakness. They had both stopped moving backwards and had stopped.

Lion-heart, Freya and Frato were all watching the fight carefully. All of the Dragon Knights were trying to figure out what the two fighters were doing.

Fratley was the first of the two to charge forward and let loose a vicious assault on Gidd, he pulled off a clever combination of slashes to Gidd's shoulders, torso and legs. However Gidd just managed to block some of the attacks and most of Fratley's strikes hit his armour, so no blood was drawn.

Fratley leaned backwards to avoid a counter attack from Gidd aimed at his arm. Fratley stood up straight and tried to force Gidd's lance away from himself with his own, and successfully forced Gidd backwards by overpowering him. Fratley then took the opportunity to try and land another strike to Gidd's right arm. Gidd moved his arm quickly enough to avoid the strike.

Gidd then tried another counter, but Fratley blocked the strike outright with his lance. He then kept the deadlock between the two lances and forced Gidd backwards with his superior strength. Gidd then tried another tactic; he leaped high up into the air, hoping to try and catch Fratley off-guard. Fratley knew Gidd was trying to do and leaped straight after him.

Gidd reached the full height of his jump and had to block another strike from Fratley in mid-air. Gidd started to descend whilst Fratley reached the peak of his jump. Gidd let himself descend quickly before looking up and trying to predict Fratley's next move.

But Fratley was trying his best to remain suspended in mid-air, as he charged up a Dragon Knight ability. Gidd couldn't react quickly enough as Fratley had charged up the ability whilst he had descended. Fratley pointed his lance directly at Gidd and shouted "Dragon's Breath!"

A Dragon's head formed on the tip of Fratley's spear in a flurry of white energy, the Dragon head

opened and breathed out a immense ray of powerful energy, which engulfed Gidd in a small, but intense explosion.

The crowd gasped as Fratley landed, wondering about the condition of poor Gidd. When the dust settled, Gidd was laying on the floor, breathing heavily and moaning in pain. He couldn't get up, but thankfully Fratley had not unleashed the full power of the attack so it would not kill Gidd.

However, Gidd still held his lance in his hand and he wasn't bleeding, so the fight had to continue. Fratley walked up to Gidd calmly and used his lance to cut a small gash in Gidd's right arm.

The King's voice echoed throughout the arena as the intense fight was put to an end.

"Fratley Junior is the victor."

Frato's fight was soon to come, only Frato preferred staying true to what he was in battle rather than to copy someone else's style. He was impressed with both Lion-heart's and Fratley's fighting style and technique; only he didn't fully understand how his father or his brother had defeated their opponents. He thought it was because they were stronger and were more experienced in battle.

Frato preferred learning by bitter experience rather than listening to other Burmecians. In reality he knew that quite a lot of them were speaking rubbish, and not to believe it. Although, Frato was extremely arrogant and bad-tempered so he had little room to talk about it.

He was changed into his armour and had his weapon at the ready straight after the King announced he was to be in the next match. Before long he found himself in the same arena, looking at someone he knew from the Dragon Academy. He didn't know the student very well, and he couldn't remember his name, but the nervous expressions on the trembling warrior in front of him made it all too clear.

"You may begin." The King's voice called throughout the arena once again.

Frato showed no mercy at all. He brought his lance down so rapidly the student only had time to block the strike. Frato then a similar slash at the graduate's shoulder, which was also blocked. The student desperately tried to counter with a much less powerful swing at Frato's shoulder, which was blocked. Frato moved in a small sidestep to force the two into a deadlock and he pushed his opponent back by overpowering him.

The student charged towards Frato, hoping to get an opening, but was blocked again by Frato, who had focused all of his attention onto his opponent and how best to defeat him. Frato then forced himself into another deadlock and pushed his opponent back with more force than before.

His rival then realised how ruthless and aggressive Frato was being and backed off to try and formulate some form of strategy.

Frato decided not to hold back, he dashed forward as soon as he saw the graduate retreat and unleashed his own deadly combination. One slash to the leg was blocked, then a slash to the torso, which was blocked, then one to the graduates left arm, which was blocked.

Frato continued the combination and growled rather loudly at each block the student successfully made. He made another attempt to slash the same arm, before increasing the power in his strikes and slashing again at the student's torso and eventually Frato managed to hit with one of his strikes. Frato slashed his rival on an unprotected area on the students shoulder, leaving a very nasty wound. The student screamed in pain as he felt Frato's lance pierce his flesh.

"Frato has drawn blood. He is the victor." The King announced in a formal but surprised manner.

Frato let himself ease up. He had proven himself. Unfortunately the poor student in front of him had a serious wound, but Frato knew that he could recover.

Frato slunk back into the area to take off his armour and disarm himself before rejoining the crowd

of Burmecian Dragon Knights, who were murmuring to themselves about the ruthlessness the half-breed warrior had shown.

--Chapter 20: Second Round Qualifiers--

The first round of the qualifiers had finally come to an end, and the Knights were resting and recovering for their second matches. The crowd of Dragon Knights had decreased in size as defeated warriors left the arena to attend their duties and recover from their loss. The fighters who remained would now fight for the honour of a place in the tournament and a chance to show their strength in front of the rest of Burmecia.

The King of Burmecia announced the start of the first second-round qualifier and the fights began. Everyone had their attention focused on this match, which was of a higher quality than most of the previous matches. Eventually a victor was decided and the battle was drawn to a close. The King announced the winner before calling out the participants of the third match.

“Will Sir Doyle and Lady Freya please go and prepare themselves for their match.”

Freya remained calm as she strolled into the back of the arena. She heard Fratley wish her good luck as she walked past him. She was soon followed by Doyle, who had been in the Burmecian army for around one year.

The second match was just as good as the first, showing that the quality of the matches had improved now that most of the amateurs and unskilled fighters had been eliminated. It was time for the third match to begin.

Freya and Doyle entered the arena together, both looking very calm and collected and clearly in the right state of mind. They both moved so there were stood in the centre of the arena out of the range of any physical attacks. Freya put her right leg behind her and moved her lance by her left side, in an offensive battle stance. Doyle put himself in a similar position, only with his left leg and his lance on his right side, as he was right-handed.

Both of the pair heard the King’s voice as it rang throughout the arena.

“You may begin.”

The two brought their lances forward and clashed on one side of the pair, as neither had the room to attack properly. The two then brought their lances back to break the deadlock. Freya moved out of her original stance to sway towards Doyle’s left side, evading another strike from Doyle and leaving a good opening. She swung her lance with tremendous force only for her lance to clash against his armour.

Freya quickly moved her lance back in time to block another offence from Doyle, who had also moved out of his battle stance. Doyle brought his lance back and took a defensive position as he conjured up another strategy which might be effective.

Freya would not allow Doyle to get any ideas and instead performed a short leap over Doyle, just out of range of any attacks. She landed straight behind her opponent and spun round swinging her spear. Doyle hopped away from Freya just in time to evade the powerful slash.

The two glared at each other, trying to induce fear on their opponent as they figured out what they should try next. The pair were almost daring each other to attack, the tension built up in the small audience, which was soon broken as Freya made the first move.

Freya aimed for Doyle’s shoulder as she brought her lance down with power. Doyle swayed to the right to dodge the strike and swung at Freya’s legs, which lifted into the air to evade the counter.

Doyle looked up to see Freya sailing backwards through a magnificent leap, but he quickly guessed where she would land and sprinted towards the location in a flash. Freya noted Doyle’s tactic and moved her lance so it was pointing towards the ground. Doyle reached where he wanted to be and pointed his lance in the air, poised to attack Freya. Freya landed, and the two lances clashed

together as Freya had swung the second before landing. Freya's lance pushed Doyle's to the ground and the two were in a deadlock, although it had given Freya the advantage.

Doyle tried desperately to lift his lance from the ground, but Freya was overpowering him, as their lances remained in the same position. A thought then clicked in Freya's mind and she took a small step backwards before lifting her lance in a sudden burst of movement. Doyle winced as Freya had lifted the lance up towards him and pierced his shoulder. Blood was seeping slowly through the thin cut, and Doyle backed off and dropped his lance to tend his wound.

The King saw this clearly and quickly announced throughout the arena.

"Lady Freya is the victor. She now qualifies to participate in the tournament."

Doyle quickly shook Freya's hand as a gesture of respect before heading quickly back out of the arena. Freya soon followed him.

When Freya rejoined the audience Fratley was the first to offer his congratulations. Frato didn't even look in Freya's direction, as he was more concerned about watching the next match.

The tournament line-up was looking more and more prosperous as each match was proving to be very entertaining and had very worthy winners. After Sir Leo had won the fifth match (a match that Frato had been especially interested in), the Burmecian King called out the contenders for the seventh match, so they could prepare.

"Will Sir Lion-heart and Sir James please go and prepare themselves for their match."

The two warriors left the crowd to prepare, with Lion-heart looking extremely confident as a smile carved itself on his lips.

The sixth match came and passed, and another Knight qualified for the tournament. After a few moments, the two fighters walked down to the arena. Lion-heart had his lance in hand, a clear mind, and a smile across his face. He was clearly ready for battle. James was in a completely different state, his hands were shaking slightly from nervousness and his eyes were wide with anxiety.

The two took their positions in the arena, both had their lances pointing at their opponent and both were poised to attack.

"You may begin."

James was the first to attack and unleashed a furious combination, but Lion-heart was focused on his opponent and blocked all of the strikes with ease. James tried to slash Lion-heart one final time but Lion-heart did a small hop backwards, evading the attack completely.

Utilising the vital opening, Lion-heart charged forward and slashed at the young fighter's chest, causing sparks to fly off his armour. James yelped in response before jumping backwards for some breathing space.

James then decided to charge again, and Lion-heart prepared to dodge, right before James came within striking distance of Lion-heart he leapt six feet into the air and swung his lance vertically, aiming for Lion-heart's shoulder. However, his lance only hit the arena floor as his opponent had scouted the move and had rolled to the right.

James quickly lifted his lance from the arena and had to duck as Lion-heart swung for his shoulder. He turned to slash Lion-heart in what he thought to be an opening, but Lion-heart blocked the strike again, as he had perfect control of his weapon.

A deadlock began to ensue, and Lion-heart was pushing James' lance back at an alarming rate, and the difference of strength between the two was clearly evident. After pushing his opponent's lance as far as physically possible, Lion-heart then began to force his opponent backwards through the arena.

James decided to break the deadlock and leapt backwards to get some more breathing space. James then thought of something, and his lance began to glow red as he chanted a Dragon Knight ability.

Lion-heart had a similar idea, for as soon as James leapt back he too began to charge up his lance with magical energy, only his lance turned white instead of red.

James had nearly charged up the ability and was about to point his lance at Lion-heart, when he heard his opponent shout "Lancer!" from a short distance in front of him. Lion-heart was tearing across the arena towards him.

James couldn't even react, he only shrieked as Lion-heart's lance pierced his armour and a very small way into the right side of his chest. The mystical power of the attack had enabled Lion-heart to break the armour of his opponent, but Lion-heart had held back from making a lethal attack. The lance had barely pierced half an inch of flesh.

Lion-heart removed his lance and blood gushed slowly through the armour. James dropped his lance and clutched the wounded area. The King was quick to announce the winner.

"Sir Lion-heart is the victor. He now qualifies to participate in the tournament."

The knights gave a polite round of applause for the match-up, but they knew Lion-heart was capable of better. Lion-heart helped James out of the arena so that he could recover and the next match could take place.

--Chapter 21: Last of the Qualifiers--

Fratley was busy in the armoury preparing himself for his next battle. He was in the middle of putting on his chest plate when his opponent, who was also in the middle of putting on his armour, struck up a conversation.

"So we will end up fighting each other..." A familiar voice called into Fratley's ears.

Fratley looked up to see Gray, smiling nervously at him whilst trying to put on his armour. The two had talked to each other just before the tournament, and Gray mused about the fact that the two could end up fighting each other. The fact that it was now going to happen was a great coincidence.

"Yes, it seems so." Fratley replied. "At least one of us will qualify..."

"I suppose that is one good thing." Gray replied, looking slightly better and becoming a little more confident. "And I get the honour of testing my strength against a member of the lineage of Burmecia's finest warriors."

"I suppose that is a good way of looking at it. Put up a good fight."

"I will ask the same from you."

The two had finished putting on their armour, and they heard the King announce the victor of the match currently taking place. It was time for the two friends to fight each other for a place in the Royal Dragon Knight tournament.

The two made their way down to the arena and faced each other, at a distance just out of range of any lance strikes. The two then entered their personal battle stances and the King announced the start of the match.

"You may begin."

Their two lances clashed together with immense force the second after the match had started and a deadlock had begun. Fratley used his strength to try and push Gray through the arena, but Gray stepped back and swung his lance back to break the deadlock. As soon as Gray withdrew his lance he had to block another assault from Fratley.

Gray broke this second deadlock and jumped back a small distance across the arena to try and find a different way to attack. The two warriors maintained full eye contact over the distance between

them. Fratley rushed forward and swung his lance in a third attack but Gray rolled away from the strike. It was then Fratley's turn to jump back as he evaded a counter from Gray.

Gray charged at Fratley to continue his assault, but Fratley had him well scouted and leapt straight over him, managing to kick Gray in the face in mid-air. Gray grunted in pain before instinctively placing his free hand on his face. Fratley had a clean landing before turning around and making use of the opening to swing at Gray.

He was unfortunate, his lance clashed against Gray's armour, causing a loud clank of metal to be heard and a few sparks to fly. Gray yelped and moved forward before removing his hand from his face, revealing a small bruise on his forehead.

Gray scowled, but was thankful of his luck. He charged at Fratley once again; bringing his lance upward to counter any form of leap. Fratley swung his lance downwards to block the strike. Fratley then used his strength to push Gray's lance against the ground, forcing another deadlock.

A few seconds passed, and as Gray couldn't lift his lance due to Fratley's strength, Fratley decided to break the deadlock by leaping backwards. Gray lifted his lance far too high, as Fratley had leapt faster than his reaction. Fratley utilised the opening and charged towards Gray, his lance starting to glow a white colour.

"Lancer!" Fratley shouted.

Gray desperately tried to move his lance down to block the strike. He succeeded, but the physical strength of Fratley and the magical power of the Dragon Knight ability knocked Gray's lance clean out of his hands.

The lance clashed against the concrete floor of the arena, and Fratley brought his lance back and eased off. The magical power of the lance faded away.

"Sir Fratley is the victor. He now qualifies to participate in the tournament." The King announced throughout the arena.

Gray sighed in bitter defeat, before shaking Fratley's hand in a congratulatory manner. The Dragon Knights applauded the victory.

"Good match." Fratley said with a smile to Gray.

"You were a worthy winner." Gray replied, starting to smile slightly despite his defeat.

Their handshake ended, and the two left the arena and headed to the armoury.

Several matches passed before Frato was in the armoury, putting on his armour and preparing himself for his last qualifying match. Dan, who was to be his opponent, was looking over at him with eyes wide with fear as he put on his armour. Dan decided to say something to break up the slight tension building between the two.

"Uh...Frato, may I please ask that you ease off slightly in this match?" Dan stuttered, which caused Frato to glance at him with stern eyes. "It's just that I don't want to end up in the same condition as your last opponent."

Frato just grunted in response, and turned his attention back to his armour.

"Please?" Dan continued.

Frato looked back at him and frowned slightly. "I will do what I need to do to win. Wounds will be given, and blood will be spilled. If you think you can participate in a contest like this and come out with no injuries, then you may as well go home."

"I know that! It's just you went overkill in your last battle!" Dan spluttered in response. "Ease up a little, okay? This isn't life or death."

Frato stood up, as he had finished putting on his armour. He made no response; instead he just listened out for the King to announce the winner of the match currently taking place.

A few moments passed, and it was time for the two to come out and do battle. Frato marched out into the arena and took his position. Dan followed, his eyes wide with fear once again as he took his battle position.

The King's voice rang through their ears. "You may begin."

Frato was the first to attack as he charged forward and swung his lance at Dan with immense force and extreme quickness. Dan just managed to block the strike, and he had to block again as Frato took another swing at him.

Dan decided to leap back for some breathing space, but Frato charged at him as he leapt and took another swing at him. Dan blocked once again, but the two kept their lances together and a deadlock ensued. Frato shoved Dan back with his superior strength and took another swing, but Dan scouted this attack and leapt up into the air to evade the blow.

Frato looked up to keep track of his opponent and saw Dan sailing up into the air. He noticed Dan was charging up his lance with magical power, preparing a Dragon Knight ability whilst in mid-air. Frato began to charge up his lance with a mysterious red energy as a counter.

Dan was the first to charge up his ability, his lance was glowing with a white energy. He pointed his lance at Frato and shouted "Dragon's Breath!" At these words, a Dragon's head formed on the tip of his spear in a flash of white energy. The dragon's head looked at Frato and opened its mouth wide open, and fired an intense beam of white energy towards him.

Frato saw this and leaped back to evade the powerful attack. The beam slammed down into the arena floor and exploded in bright light. Dan landed soon afterwards and charged through the smoke formed from his previous attack and straight towards Frato.

Dan swung at Frato as hard as he could, but Frato had scouted this attack also and he evaded it by leaping over his opponent and across the arena. Dan turned around to see Frato land, with his lance glowing brightly with red energy. Frato pointed his lance into the air and shouted "Luna!"

A mysterious red aura filled the arena, pouring out of Frato's lance and hitting both of the warriors. The aura filled both of them with an intense rage, a burning feeling which made them want to strike at each other.

The attack took effect, and both of the warriors charged into the centre of the arena and begun slashing at each other's armour. Neither of them could control themselves. Eventually the chain of attacks ended when Frato connected a powerful strike to Dan's right shoulder, and onto his chest.

A severe cut was formed, and Dan fell backwards and sprawled out on the arena floor gasping from the pain. Blood was gushing out of the wound as the red aura left the fighters.

"Sir Frato is the victor. He now qualifies to participate in the tournament." The King announced throughout the arena.

The Dragon Knights murmured to themselves once again about the half-breed's aggression in the match as Frato turned and left the arena. One knight ran into the arena to aid Dan to the infirmary, as Dan could barely move.

The rest of the matches came and went, and the qualifying matches ended. After the last match had taken place the King rose from his seat and walked into the centre of the arena. He then began to speak:

"The tournament will commence in this arena this time next week. All of those who have qualified will need to arrive on time or they will be considered to have forfeited their match. Tickets will be

sent to families of the participants so they can watch if they wish. I look forward to seeing you there; this looks to be shaping up to be quite a tournament! Until then, I grant you farewell and good health.”

With that, the King turned and left the arena, accompanied by two Burmecian guards.

--Chapter 22: The Tournament Begins--

The early morning of the following Saturday showed several Burmecians, the majority of which were either nobles or well paid Dragon Knights, making their way towards the castle, talking excitedly to each other about the anticipation of this year’s tournament. The Dragon Knights who were participating were also heading in the same direction, nervous about their upcoming battles which would be displayed the Burmecian public. Eventually this crowd made its way into the castle, the spectators were being shown to their seats whilst the knights were ushered into the armoury so they could prepare themselves.

The armoury was occupied by the sixteen participants, amongst which Freya, Frato, Fratley and Lion-heart were to be found. Lion-heart was busy talking to Leo, who had managed to qualify for the tournament and had saved Frato from the Demon Dragons quite some time ago; Fratley was chatting pleasantly to Freya and Frato was standing quietly on his own.

The spectators eventually settled into their seats, and began to murmur and talk amongst themselves. The same servant who had announced the start of the qualifying rounds made his out into the arena. He cleared his throat as the murmuring of the audience died out.

“Ladies and gentlemen...” The servant announced in a very loud and clear voice. “I introduce to you, His majesty, King Peter of Burmecia!”

The King of Burmecia then walked out into the arena accompanied by two Burmecian guards with a warm smile on his face. The servant kneeled in front of the King as before in respect, and the King dismissed him just like at the qualifying rounds. Everyone in the audience was silent so they could listen to their ruler.

“I thank you all for attending this year’s tournament.” The King began. “I have been very excited about this tournament over the past few weeks as it gives me great pleasure to watch these tremendous athletes initialise in combat who have granted me and our great kingdom their service. I was even more excited when I watched the qualifying rounds, and I have seen that the veterans have improved their skills and that have qualified as well as some very impressive new warriors. I think it is beyond doubt that this year’s tournament will be more exciting than last years, and I hope that everyone enjoys it and that our warriors learn from this experience. Following the tradition of our ancestors, I will be the judge of this year’s tournament. Without further ado, let the tournament commence!”

The King then walked to the side of the arena, followed by the two guards to where there was a tall Burmecian statue which also had a sheltered seat forged at the bottom. He then sat down in the seat and called out the first two warriors, who entered the arena and begun their battle.

Whilst the crowd cheered and gasped at the fight currently taking place, Freya was standing in the armoury next to the passageway leading to the arena. She had already put on the armour that was provided for the participants and had her lance ready and waiting in her left hand. She was trying to compose herself and shake out the nervousness that was slowly building up inside her of the fact she would be the next one to fight in front of such a huge crowd. She knew this because the servant had informed her and her opponent when he had left the arena and entered the armoury. She was breathing deeply, thinking “You can do this, Freya. You’ll be okay.” over and over to herself. She was stopped in her train of thought by a hand that was placed on her right shoulder, causing her to turn and look.

Her vision met the calm blue eyes of Fratley. He gave a little smile, which already made Freya feel

more comfortable and relaxed.

“Feeling nervous?” Fratley asked.

“Just a little.” Freya replied.

“I suppose it’s normal.” Fratley said with a slight shrug. “But just think, you’ll be able to display your strength to all of those people in the audience.”

Freya just gave a little smile as a reply.

In the arena, the King announced the winner of the battle. It was time for the second match to begin and the King called out the combatants.

“Lady Freya, please come forward!”

Freya turned and left Fratley and walked down to the arena. There was much murmuring by the nobles and some of the knights as they were surprised Freya had managed to qualify for the tournament. Freya stood calmly at one side of the arena.

“Silence please!” The King ordered the crowd of the Burmecians, who obeyed as the murmuring was hushed. “Sir Din, please come forward!”

Din also left the armoury and walked down into the arena, whilst his friends and family gave a small cheer. He positioned himself at the opposite of the arena and the two entered their battle stances.

“Begin!”

The two warriors charged forward and their lances clashed together with immense force. They brung their lances back and there was another clash. The two warriors then did a small leap backwards and charged at each other a second time. Din swung his lance at Freya in another attack, but Freya jumped straight over Din and his lance and landed behind him. Freya then countered by swinging her lance but Din ducked to evade the attack. Din then attempted to counter with a swing but Freya jumped backwards to avoid this.

The crowd were cheering, clearly enjoying the match. It almost seemed as though they were egging the two warriors on, wanting more violence.

Din lunged towards Freya and brought his lance down in a quick slash. Freya sidestepped to avoid this and retaliated with a swing at Din’s torso. However, Din managed to move his lance to the side quick enough to block the strike. Freya swung her lance sideways, causing Din to do the same and breaking the deadlock.

The two gave a quick glare at each other, trying to induce fear in their opponent and also showing that they were equally determined to be victorious.

The two took a step back before slashing vertically and ending up in another deadlock. Freya started to push Din backwards but Din decided to break the deadlock by swinging both of their lances to the side.

Freya tried to attack Din once again, but Din jumped backwards and charged towards Freya. He swung his lance at Freya’s legs, but Freya jumped up a few feet into the air to dodge the attack. Whilst in mid-air, Freya slashed at Din in a vertical motion, but he rolled out of the way just in time. He attempted a counter attack by slashing horizontally for Freya’s chest, but missed as she ducked. Freya swung her lance sideways, managing to hit Din’s right foot and knock him off balance.

Freya took the opportunity and swung straight at Din. The attack connected with Din’s lance and sent it hurtling up into the air. Din desperately leapt up after it and caught it successfully and continued to sail up into the air.

“Continue!” The King shouted as Freya gave him a quick glance. She was checking whether she

had won, as she had disarmed Din for a split-second.

Din moved his lance into a useful position and began charging a white mystical energy in it as he continued to sail up into the air.

Freya saw her opponent charging up his lance so she retorted by charging up her lance with a red, glowing energy, but still keeping an eye on her opponent.

Din reached the peak of his jump and started to descend and he had finished charging up the Dragon Knight ability. He pointed his lance at Freya and shouted “Dragon’s Breath!” The white energy in his lance moved to the tip and formed a dragon’s head, which opened its mouth wide open and fired an intense beam of energy down at Freya.

Freya saw the attack coming and jumped out of the way. The crowd gasped as the beam hit the arena and exploded in a mass of energy.

Freya finally charged up her ability, she pointed her lance back at Din, who was falling through the air helplessly. She shouted “Cherry Blossom!”

A stream of pink petals shot out of the tip of her lance through the air. As Din fell into the petals they became engulfed in a massive flame. The crowd gasped and the attack subsided. Din hit the arena floor back first in an agonising splat and his lance clattered by the side of him. The attack had rendered him unconscious.

“Sir Din has been disarmed. Lady Freya is the victor!” The King announced.

The audience gave a rapturous applause for the match, which had been highly entertaining for them, and had a worthy winner. Freya gave Din a quick look over to see if he was alright before walking back to the armoury. A few servants rushed on to lift Din out of the arena and to the infirmary.

--Chapter 23: The Opening Battles--

The matches of the morning continued, with the crowd making such noise that it hurt the ears of the warriors slightly. Great cheers and gasps and roars of the audience were heard throughout the castle as two more fights took place in the arena. Two more winners were decided and the fifth match was about to begin.

Fratley was standing near the entrance to the arena with his lance slung over his left shoulder. He was waiting for the King to call out his name, so he could walk down and face the challenge which was to be his next opponent. He would be fine once he was in the arena, once his mind was focused on finding a way to triumph and defeat his rival. However, the waiting was extremely uncomfortable, his usually calm mind was beginning to feel anxious, and his hands were beginning to tremble slightly. He wanted to be in the arena. He wanted to face this fear. He wanted to let his anxiety turn into a will to win, he wanted to triumph using his own emotions as well as his strength and technique.

Strictly speaking, Dragon Knights were not allowed to show emotions in battle. But Fratley found they helped you in battle, and your emotions could aid you in victory. Foes would be more unsettled if you had a confident and focused look on your face rather than an unemotional mask. It would take concentration to form this “mask”.

And of course, there was the legend of the trance...

Fratley nervousness was beginning to make him uncomfortable, but then he felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned and saw Freya looking at him with her emerald green eyes and with a gracious smile on her face.

“Good luck Fratley.” Freya said in a reassuring voice. “I know you’ll win.”

Fratley smiled back, the tension within him shattered and replaced with a warm feeling in his heart,

which grew the more he looked at and thought of Freya, his one and only love.

“Thank you.”

Back in the arena, the warriors of the previous fight had left the arena and it was time to call out the warriors for the fifth fight.

“Will Sir Fratley please come forward!” The King announced throughout the arena, finally ending Fratley’s wait.

Fratley made his way down to the arena, but he was completely unprepared for the cheer he received from the crowd. Apparently they were well aware that he was the offspring of Lion-heart, one of the best warriors in the Dragon Knights. The crowd were obviously expecting a good match from him. Fratley took his place in the arena and tried to keep his mind off the humongous crowd watching him.

“Sir Damien, please come forward!”

Sir Damien came out, looking completely calm and collected despite hearing the cheers for his opponent. He had been in the Dragon Knights for at least seven years but did not show exceptional strength. He had obviously enough experience to know how to control his nerves. He marched quietly in his place in the arena and took his battle stance.

“Begin!”

Fratley dashed forward and swung at his opponent, who unlike most of the warriors did not charge or attack. Instead, Damien watched Fratley dash forward and evaded the first blow, leaving a valuable opening as Fratley swung his lance to his opposite side.. Damien utilised this opening and swung for Fratley’s open shoulder, but Fratley scouted the counter and swayed to the side to avoid a vital blow.

The two warriors glared at each other as they regained a ready battle position. This did not last long, as once again Fratley attempted another assault by swinging his lance in a clear horizontal motion at Damien’s thigh. Damien jumped back to avoid the powerful physical attack and charged forward in another counter-attack. Damien aimed for Fratley’s shoulder, but Fratley maintained perfect control of his lance from his attack and blocked the strike.

The two lances were clashed together in an intense deadlock. Both then tried to shove the other back, but neither moved. The crowd began to cheer as the warriors tried to force each other back. Fratley started to overpower Damien, and Damien was slowly backing through the arena as Fratley forced his own lance into him.

Damien finally decided to jump back to break the deadlock, as he was gaining nothing from it. As he landed he had to block yet another strike from Fratley, who had followed him across the arena in his leap. Fratley brought his lance and attacked again, and then repeated this a second time when his second strike was blocked. However, Damien was quick to scout Fratley’s attacks and blocked the third strike before pushing Fratley’s lance back and jumping forward to a clear space in the arena.

Fratley knew he had to continue with his assault. By now he had figured out Damien’s main battle tactic. He had gone onto the defensive from the start, waiting for an opening before trying to attack. However, Fratley was ensuring his attacks would not leave himself open to any attack after learning from his first mistake. If he kept this up, victory was certain.

Fratley charged once again, and tried to slash at Damien’s shoulder. Damien thought this was an opening, and swung his lance towards Fratley, only to be blocked. Fratley had swung at the shoulder in a diagonal motion towards Damien’s body, ensuring it was between the two if Damien dodged. Fratley had lifted his spear in a rather awkward fashion to block his attack.

Fratley then raised his lance slowly, forcing Damien’s lance upwards as well. The two lances were pointed in the air, with Damien desperately trying to force Fratley’s lance down to the ground but to

no avail. Then, Fratley tilted his lance, forcing Damien's lance off his own and swung at Damien's wide open shoulder in a flash. Damien gritted his teeth and gave a grunt of pain as Fratley pierced into his flesh with his spear.

The unusual deadlock ended, and Damien dropped his lance and examined the gash on his shoulder. The King clearly saw the wound and was quick to announce the result of the match.

"Sir Fratley had drawn blood from his opponent and is the victor!"

There was a great cheer from the audience as the King finished this announcement, and it was rather obvious that they had had enjoyed the battle. Fratley shook hands with his defeated opponent, who congratulated him for his victory and wished him good luck in the rest of the tournament. The two then made their way back to the armoury, as the noise from the crowd began to die down.

Fratley entered to armoury to see Freya watching him from only two feet away, with that same warm smile on her face that he had always loved.

"Well done Fratley." She said in a quiet, calm voice. "You fought like a true Dragon knight."

Fratley gave a light chuckle before running his clawed fingers through his remarkably long blonde hair. He was grateful for the compliment, but he did not want to brag to her in front of the Dragon Knights in the room, as he felt almost any of them could eliminate him from the competition.

"Thanks Freya, I wish you the best of luck in your second match." Fratley replied, regaining his usual calm composure.

"I wish the same to you." Freya said, before turning and walking to another part of the room.

"Fratley, the royal armoury is not a love shack."

Fratley gave a slight frown before turning and seeing the eyes of his adopted brother looking back at him in a rather sullen mood. Frato had decided to talk to his brother the instant Freya left.

"She was just congratulating me, Frato." Fratley said in what was nearly a snarl.

"Whatever. I just came to say well done too." Frato said with a shrug. "Heh, looks like you sure showed Damien."

"Shouldn't you be preparing for your match?" Fratley asked, trying hard to find a way to distract his brother.

Frato snarled slightly before replying.

"Of course! I should be preparing for match...when it's the last match of the opening round!" Frato spat.

"Isn't that a good thing? Most knights would love to have the last match." Fratley asked looking rather confused at this statement.

"Not for me it isn't. I want to be out there now! I want to fight!" Frato snarled before marching into a corner of the room.

Fratley didn't bother to question the matter further, but he looked around the room as if expecting someone else to come and congratulate him. His eyes located his father, Lion-heart, who was busy talking with another knight. Fratley waited, and he was sure Lion-heart caught a glimpse of him, but he was ignored. His father had not said anything to his son about the victory. Fratley eventually walked to a different area of the room, but he looked back at his father, who had finished talking but still took no notice of Fratley. Lion-heart instead decided to lean against the wall quietly.

It had been so hard to earn his father's respect. All of his life Fratley had not been referred to by his name from his father, instead being called "Junior". He had only earned that right by joining the Dragon Knights. Now, he had won what had been a rather difficult fight, but his father completely ignored him. This saddened Fratley, it felt as though his father had no admiration for him, and he

worked his hardest and tried his best. Yet that wasn't enough.

Just what would he need to do to make Lion-heart respect him?

--Chapter 24: Frato's Ruthlessness--

The first round of the Dragon Knight tournament continued, and the audience were enjoying every moment and were fully appreciating the display of skill and strength in front of them. As the matches continued, the tournament began to shape up and the crowd could figure out what great battles they would see in the next round.

Frato was sat in the armoury, still scowling over the fact that his match was still a good amount of time away. The waiting was irritating Frato more with each minute that passed. Patience had never been one of Frato's strong suits. In fact, anything that didn't involve any form of combat was not one of Frato's strong suits. Frato lived for fighting. He loved the adrenaline rush, the feeling of bringing down a foe, the power, the speed, the feeling of victory, everything. He was itching to be in that arena, feeling the unexplainable joy he felt whilst he was in battle.

After what seemed like hours, Frato finally heard the King announce the winner of the match that preceded his and possibly his next opponent. Frato stood next to the entrance of the arena, fully clad in armour and his lance looking deadly as it was held firmly in his right hand. The air of excitement flowed through Frato's blood combining the ever growing feeling of impatience and frustration.

"Good luck Frato."

Frato turned to find the source of the familiar voice and found his brother looking at him a warm smile. A smug smile formed on Frato's lips as he replied.

"Thanks Fratley, although I don't think I'll need it."

"Don't underestimate anybody in this tournament Frato." Fratley warned. "Everyone in this tournament has had more experience in battle than you and are most likely stronger than you as well."

"I don't underestimate anybody." Frato grunted.

"Will Sir Frato please come forward!" The King announced in his usual loud and clear voice.

Frato left the armoury and marched straight down into the arena without another word. He had waited for long enough. As he entered the arena, there was much murmuring in the audience about the half-breed taking part in the tournament. This seemed to infuriate Frato as well, as it still bothered him that the Burmecians still looked at him as if he was some kind of monster.

"Will Sir Kal please come forward!"

Kal walked steadily down into the arena with a small smile on his face. He had done a few years service as a member of the Burmecian army and had considerable skill, although he didn't come close to matching the likes of Lion-heart. There was a small cheer from his family and friends, whom Kal found and gave a small wave to. He took his place in the arena and looked at Frato, his smile leaving as it was slowly replaced by one of determination. Frato had the same expression on his face.

"Begin!"

There was a loud clash as the two knights swung their lances at each other. It was rather awkward, as Frato was right handed and Kal was left handed. The two moved their lances back and attacked again, only to end in the same uncomfortable deadlock. What ensued next was a push fight as the warriors tried to shove each other around the arena. Frato was evidently winning as Kal was slowly being pushed backwards.

Kal broke up the one-sided deadlock by jumping back a short distance. Frato stumbled forward

before using the momentum to rush towards Kal. There was barely any time to react as Frato unleashed a ruthless assault. Kal had to block a rush attack from Frato, then having to duck to avoid an overhead swing, before rolling to the left to evade a powerful slash.

The crowd gasped at this assault before cheering for Kal. Frato cursed quietly to himself as he found that his attacks were so easily evaded, luckily this was drowned out by the crowd so no-one could hear, but Kal saw the frustration on Frato's face and gave a slight smile of satisfaction.

Kal then launched a counter attack of his own as he lunged forward and swung at Frato, who blocked the strike with ease. Kal brought his lance back and tried a vertical slash, but Frato sidestepped and his lance hit the wet stone beneath them. Frato used the opportunity to attack and swung at Kal, who ducked in time to evade a vital strike. Frato did not relent on his offence though; he tried another attack by bringing his lance downwards in another forceful slash. Having managed to lift his lance in the short interval between the attacks Kal managed to block the strike successfully.

Another deadlock ensued, which Frato was slowly winning as Kal's lance was rather painfully being forced down towards the ground. The fact that Kal was already in an uncomfortable position as he had to twist his arms to hold his lance horizontally did not help in the slightest. Eventually, he too was being forced onto the ground as well as he had to kneel to keep a grip on his lance. Frato's lance finally pinned Kal's spear to the arena floor where it stayed for a few seconds.

The crowd were in suspense, there was some gasps of fear as the almost certain fate of Kal was to be decided. Many were wondering just what Frato would do from here.

Frato didn't let this question linger for very long. After he was certain Kal could not move his lance, he placed his right foot firmly on the lance, then his left foot took its place on Kal's spear and Frato lifted his spear off the weapon, enabling him to deal the final blow. Kal desperately tried to lift his lance to defend himself but could not shift Frato's weight in the time he had. Frato instantly brought his lance back before slashing a deep cut into Kal's right shoulder. Kal screamed in agony as the blade pierced his flesh and the audience gasped in horror. Frato didn't have to go to that extent.

Seeing the blood gushing out of his opponent caused Frato to relent and ease up for the first time, as he jumped back off Kal's lance and gave him some space. Kal was busy trying to cover the wound and reduce the bleeding.

"Sir Frato has drawn blood from his opponent and is the victor!" The King hastily announced.

There was a mix of emotions from the audience. Some were still in shock after Frato's merciless attack to finish the battle. Others were muttering to themselves about the behaviour of the half-breed and what Frato could possibly achieve with his ruthlessness, just as in the qualifying rounds with the Knights.

Frato growled to himself at this, it still irritated him. Why was his fighting style shocking the other Burmecians? Was it that big of a surprise? Frato walked back to the armoury looking down, so to avoid a glance at a member of the audience.

Meanwhile, another guard and one of the slaves entered the arena to aid Kal to the infirmary to treat his wound. When Kal was taken out of the arena, the King stood up and made another announcement.

"Silence please!" The King ordered, and although it took longer than it should have done, the crowd eventually fell quiet. "That concludes the opening round. There will a short interval before the second round will begin." With that, the King sat down again, and the crowd began to murmur and talk to themselves once again.

Frato entered the armoury and saw Fratley rushing up to him with an exasperated look on his face.

“Just what are you doing?!” Fratley asked in almost a roar. “Were you trying to kill Kal or something?!”

“Of course not!” Frato spat in response. “I was just doing what I needed to do to win!”

“You could have gone a bit easier!” Fratley reprimanded. “You nearly took his head off! You could have forced him let go of his lance, or cut a smaller wound!”

Frato didn’t have any comeback for this, nor did he know why he didn’t do that in the first place.

“You’d best be careful of what you do, Frato. People will start to think you’re out murder your opponents.”

Both Frato and Fratley turned to see the source of this new voice, and their eyes met none other than Lion-heart, who was standing a short distance behind Fratley.

“But I’m not out to murder anyone!” Frato replied angrily.

“You and I know that, but your actions in the arena don’t show that.” Lion-heart stated calmly. “You don’t need to be so merciless when taking down an opponent in this tournament Frato. I don’t butcher my opponents in my matches now do I?”

“No...” Frato answered, lowering his head. “I’m sorry father.”

“It’s not me you should be apologising to.” Lion-heart answered before turning and walking further into the armoury. Fratley soon followed suit, and Frato was left to himself. Frato gave an angry sigh, and now he was angrier with himself than anything else.

“Maybe I am a murderer...” Frato thought.

--Chapter 25: Battle of Honour--

The quarter finals of the tournament were already underway at the Royal Palace, and the crowd was enthralled by the amount of combat skills that were being presented in front of them as the two knights in the arena gave their all to try and defeat their opponent. Freya Crescent was one of them, and this was by far her most difficult match she had been in so far. Her opponent was a very experienced and skilled Dragon Knight. Their lances clashed multiple times and they were both moving swiftly through the arena, not losing concentration for a second. It was proving to be a very close match.

In the armoury, Fratley stood near the entrance looking out into the arena, watching his girlfriend give her all. He silently cheered her on and hoped that she would come out victorious.

Meanwhile, Lion-heart was busy having a conversation with Leo, who was one of his close friends and colleagues in the Dragon Knights.

“So, it seems that we are to battle each other in that arena next.” Lion-heart said calmly.

“It is an honour to be given the opportunity to challenge you, Sir Lion-heart.” Leo complimented with a smile. “I hope you will come at me with everything you have, I want a real challenge from Burmecia’s finest warrior.”

Lion-heart smiled back at his friend. “Thank-you for the compliment. I will fight you with all my strength, but I must ask that you do the same.”

“I would never dream of not doing my best against a warrior like you, Lion-heart.” Leo reassured.

The conversation between the two companions continued, and Frato was standing only a short distance from the pair, eavesdropping on their conversation.

“This is a going to be an interesting match coming up between these two.” Frato thought. “They are both exceptionally strong, and they will know what the other may try to throw at them. I suppose I’m rooting for the both of them, but I suspect that father will be the victor. Although it is going to

be worth watching...”

“Freya Crescent is the victor!” The King’s voice boomed throughout the arena and was heard even in the armoury.

Frato stomped the ground and cursed at this announcement, meanwhile Fratley was beaming proudly at his beloved whilst applauding rapturously with the crowd.

After a few moments Freya entered the armoury, and Fratley began congratulating her and embracing her before the two went to a corner of the armoury and began talking to each other.

It was time for the second match of the quarter finals.

“Will Sir Leo please come forward!” The King called, and Leo stood up and walked out of the armoury and into the arena, where the crowd were cheering loudly for him. Leo was smiling to himself, he was filled with anticipation of the epic battle that was about to commence. He took his place in the arena and waited patiently.

“Will Sir Lion-heart please come forward!” The King beckoned, and a great roar from the audience filled the arena as Sir Lion-heart Fratley walked down from the armoury and entered the arena.

Lion-heart took his place in the arena and the two knights entered their battle stances and looked into each others eyes, focusing all of their attention on each other.

“Begin!”

As soon as that one word was heard both of the fighter’s lances clashed together with immense speed and power. They both moved their lances back, and the two lances clashed together once more. The two lances came apart a second time and the two warriors took a small jump backwards.

Leo and Lion-heart stared each other down for a moment, trying to intimidate each other while at the same time trying to think what they should try next. The decision was made first by Leo, who charged across the arena with his lance pointing forwards. Lion-heart saw this and decided to take to the skies with a powerful leap. Leo came to a halt and lifted his head skyward, keeping a firm gaze on his opponent. He saw Lion-heart begin preparing a Dragon Knight technique, as white energy began to gather at the tip of his lance.

Leo began preparing a Dragon Knight technique of his own, and began charging his lance with red, fiery energy. However, he still kept an eye on Lion-heart as he prepared his attack.

Lion-heart began to descend from his jump as he pointed his lance at his opponent and unleashed his attack.

“Dragon’s Breath!” Lion-heart shouted. As he said this, a Dragon’s head formed out of the white energy on the tip of his lance. The Dragon’s head opened its mouth and let loose a gigantic beam of white energy. This attack looked more powerful than any other energy attack unleashed in the tournament so far. The beam roared down towards Leo, who jumped back to avoid the deadly blast. The beam caused an intense explosion in the arena.

Lion-heart landed soon after the explosion, and his eyes were firmly focused on his opponent. Leo had finished charging up his attack and pointed the tip of his spear towards Lion-heart.

“Cherry Blossom!” Leo shouted. Hundreds of rose petals shot out of the tip of his lance towards Lion-heart. Lion-heart quickly sidestepped out of the petals as they burst into a huge, powerful flame, which didn’t look much less powerful than Lion-heart’s attack.

Lion-heart used this opening to charge towards Leo, who was still firing his attack at open air. Lion-heart reached Leo just in time, and swung his lance for Leo’s shoulder. Leo desperately tried to sway out of the way but Lion-heart struck the vital blow. The lance pierced through Leo’s shoulder as the Cherry Blossom attack ended. Leo yelped in pain and dropped his lance in order to check the fresh cut, which blood was slowly seeping though.

Lion-heart took a few steps back and let himself ease up. The match was over.

“Sir Lion-heart has drawn blood from his opponent. He is the victor!” The King announced.

The crowd cheered and applauded as Lion-heart smiled and shook hands with his friend. Leo went to the infirmary as Lion-heart walked casually back into the armoury.

As soon as Lion-heart entered the armoury both Frato and Fratley ran up to congratulate him. Lion-heart tried to drive them away, telling them to save their congratulations until after the tournament. The pair eventually followed his wishes and left him alone.

Fratley waited by the entrance of the armoury, as his match was next. The same uncomfortable of anxiety and nervousness filled his mind once again.

“Good luck Fratley.” Freya said.

Fratley turned around to look at Freya, who was looking back at him with a reassuring smile. As before, this made him feel better.

“Thanks, I’ll probably need it.” Fratley replied, starting to smile.

The conversation was then cut short as the King called out Fratley’s name, and Fratley turned and left the armoury. Freya moved back slightly so his opponent could walk into the arena, but she kept her eye on the arena, as she was intent on watching her boyfriend’s match.

Frato sat patiently in the corner, thinking to himself. He would have gone and watched his brother’s match through the armoury entrance but could not bear to be so close to Freya, whom he despised. He continued to and wait for his name to be called out, and his match to begin.

A thought suddenly came across Frato’s mind.

“If Fratley wins his match, and I am the victor of my next match, we will fight each other in the semi-finals.” Frato thought. A smile then came across his face. “Ah, what an honour it will be to face my brother once again in combat. He will be a great challenge.”

Frato loved a challenge in combat. It seemed that the greater the challenge, the more pleasure Frato got from the fight. However, in life threatening situations fear and survival instinct would take over. Although Frato loved facing his brother and he was always challenging him to fights, but Fratley had only accepted once.

Frato savoured this thought as the match continued. Eventually, he heard the King proclaim that Fratley was the winner. Frato stood up and made his way to the entrance of the armoury, despite the fact that Freya was still there. Fratley entered the armoury, out of breath and full of fatigue. Freya congratulated him and hugged him before walking back and sitting down.

“Congratulations Fratley.” Frato said, smiling at his brother.

“Thanks Frato.” Fratley wheezed. “That was one tough match.”

“Well, I figured out that I win my next match, you and I will face off in the semi-finals.” Frato replied, still smiling at the prospect.

“Heh. That will be an interesting match.” Fratley replied.

“Indeed.”

Frato then heard what he had been waiting for. The King was calling him out into the arena. Frato walked out of the armoury, spear in hand.

“Good luck Frato.” Fratley said as Frato left the armoury.

--Chapter 26: The First Semi Final--

Frato displayed the same amount of ruthlessness in the arena in his quarter-final match as he had in

his first match. Fortunately for him, it was coming in handy, as his opponent was an extremely fierce and skilled competitor. However, Frato eventually bested him and came out the winner; leaving his opponent with a rather nasty wound, although not quite as bad as the wound Kal had suffered from the blood-thirsty half-breed.

The audience were still murmuring to each other about Frato's viciousness after the match had finished, but Frato decided to ignore it as he walked out of the arena. He was too busy savouring the prospect of battling Fratley again to care about anything else.

As with the opening around of the tournament, the King announced that there would be a short interval for the Dragon Knights to rest and recover for their next matches.

Frato entered the armoury to be greeted by his brother.

"Well congratulations Frato." Fratley said with a slight smile. "Although I do see you have not paid one bit of notice to me or our father's advice."

"I fight how I want. Live with it." Frato muttered. "I won't hold back against anyone in combat, not even if I am fighting you, Fratley."

"Really." Fratley answered, not looking too impressed with Frato's statement. "Then I suppose I will have to do the same in our match."

"It is the mark of a true warrior Fratley, never to hold back."

"It is the mark of a monster more like." Fratley answered.

"Oh shut up!" Frato snarled before walking away from Fratley and towards a corner of the room.

Fratley sighed and shook his head, then looked around the armoury. Lion-heart sat alone in the centre of the armoury, thinking to himself about the tournaments events. Then Fratley saw Freya, who was sat by herself in another corner of the armoury looking very anxious and unsettled. Fratley made his way over to her to see what was making Freya, a usually calm and collected warrior, so nervous.

"Hello Freya." Fratley said chirpily as he sat down beside her.

Freya returned the greeting and looked up at her boyfriend. She gave a rather weak smile, but the feeling of anxiety could still be seen on her face.

"What's wrong?" Fratley asked. "You're never been this nervous before a match."

Freya gave a slight sigh. "I suppose I have every right to be nervous, I'm about to have a match with Sir Lion-heart Fratley, one of Burmecia's toughest warriors."

"My father..." Fratley added. "I wouldn't worry about it. Most Dragon Knights would see it as an honour to fight him."

"I suppose..." Freya answered.

"Remember what I said before the tournament began? Let's just enjoy it. See your match as an opportunity to test your strength and to have a great battle." Fratley said, hoping to make Freya feel a little better.

"Thanks Fratley." Freya replied, who was feeling less nervous than before.

"That is the end of the interval, the semi-finals will now begin." The King announced in the arena. Freya stood up after hearing this and began to make her way to the armoury entrance. Fratley followed her.

"Will Lady Freya please come forward?" The King continued.

"Good luck Freya." Fratley said as Freya left the armoury.

Freya walked through and into the arena, with a small number of the spectators cheering for her and

many more murmuring about her once again. She took her place in the arena and waited for her opponent.

“Will Sir Lion-heart please come forward?” The King said before being drowned out in a roar for the formidable warrior.

Lion-heart entered the arena, looking calm and collected as always. He entered the arena and took up a battle stance, looking at Freya with a small smile forming on his face.

“This will be interesting...” Lion-heart thought to himself.

The King had to motion for silence as his voice could not compete with the thousands of cheers for Lion-heart in the audience. Eventually the crowd fell quiet.

“Begin!” The King yelled.

Now what occurred was a very peculiar opening for a match. Neither warrior charged towards each other, as would happen in regular matches. The Knights stared each other down instead, trying to figure out how best to unleash an effective opening attack against their foe.

“I have to catch him off-guard.” Freya thought. “I may be at a disadvantage if I attack him head on. What could I try...?”

“This is interesting. She isn’t attacking straight away, she’s being cautious about how to attack.” Lion-heart mused. “She’ll want to conserve her energy, and she won’t want to leave herself open in any way. I should prepare for a physical attack.”

Freya’s mind clicked, her eyes flared slightly and she began to dash towards Lion-heart. Lion-heart, having predicted this, moved his lance forward to block the oncoming attack. However, at the very last moment before Freya would reach Lion-heart, she leapt into the air straight over Lion-heart. Lion-heart tried to keep his gaze on her as he turned around. Freya landed and swung back at her opponent only to smash her lance against his. Neither of them lost their looks of concentration and a deadlock ensued.

Lion-heart began to use his strength for the first time in the match and began to push Freya back very slowly, Freya tried her best to try and push back, but she could not stop the fact that despite her considerable strength, she was being overpowered. After a few moments had passed, Freya decided to break the deadlock and jump back.

Lion-heart did not come after her. Instead he kept his lance in front of him, ready to block or to strike, and stared at her. Freya did the same, trying to think of another way to attack. They were back to the position they had started with.

“He’s good; I can catch most people out with that.” Freya thought. “It has become clear that I will be unable to catch him off guard, his concentration is remarkable. He hasn’t even attacked yet. This match is only going to get tougher and tougher.”

“Clever, very clever... I can’t let my guard down with her.” Lion-heart pondered. “She’s obviously trying to get past my guard, using a trick like that. Pity I know practically every trick in the book. Maybe I should show her a trick up my sleeve...”

Lion-heart then charged towards Freya, his lance outstretched, poised to penetrate. Freya took up a defensive position naturally. Then, just as he was about to reach Freya, he sidestepped round to Freya’s left side, then round to her back. Freya whirred around as he did this, keeping her eyes on him whilst maintaining her defence. Lion-heart then jumped up as he finished his sidestep, soaring straight over Freya and landing behind her. Freya did what Lion-heart had done previously and looked over and then behind herself with some difficulty. Lion-heart then landed, and quickly sidestepped to Freya’s right hand side and swung. Freya tried to follow Lion-heart with her eyes but she was too late. Lion-heart’s lance smashed against her back.

Freya gasped as she felt the pain in her spine. She fell over face-first from the power of the attack.

Thankfully, the point of the blade had not been used, and she was not bleeding. She was also still conscious, despite the pain and her lance was still firmly in her hand.

Lion-heart gave a little smile of satisfaction of the effectiveness of his attack. He stood firmly behind Freya and watched as Freya got back up onto her feet. Lion-heart knew this would become an interesting match, and he did not want to end it so hastily.

Freya turned around when she stood up and backed off slightly. She needed to rethink her strategy. Lion-heart did not advance, but merely glared at her.

“He...used my own trick against me, adding a few twists of his own...and it worked!” Freya looked at Lion-heart with burning green eyes. “Curse it! I’m not going to win this match with any mere tricks! He’s had too much experience in battle!” Freya breathed deeply. “Standing here thinking isn’t going to help much. It’s giving him time to think of counter-measures and it’s leaving me open. I need to move this match to a faster pace. Maybe a fast flurry of attacks would work...”

“Now she realises that I am not going to be subdued by any ridiculous trick.” Lion-heart stared Freya down. “Maybe now this match will begin to test me...”

Freya charged forward towards Lion-heart once again, when she reached him she swung her lance towards Lion-heart’s shoulder. Her opponent responded by swaying out of reach, but Freya then lifted her lance in an upward diagonal slash. Lion-heart used his lance to block the strike with ease, but Freya tried a third attack by bringing her lance back down and spinning and swinging her lance in a mighty horizontal slash. Lion-heart ducked to avoid this and then countered the combination by using his lance to perform an upward swing. Freya just managed to jump back to avoid the counter.

Freya barely took breath before charging once again at Lion-heart, she swung her lance down at him only for her foe to block her attack once again. This time Lion-heart forced a deadlock by pushing Freya’s lance down to his side. Freya tried to move her lance out of the deadlock but to no avail. Lion-heart decided to end the deadlock by jumping across the arena, putting a good distance between the two.

There was a great of tension both in the audience and between the two warriors. No-one knew what would happen next; however, Lion-heart had an idea. The Dragon Knight placed his lance in front of him and started to charge it with white energy, chanting the call of a Dragon Knight ability. Freya saw this, and feared what deadly power Lion-heart would unleash with his skill. She knew she had to stop it. She belted across the arena, her lance too begin to glow with white light. Freya knew she would make it in time to stop the attack; Lion-heart had made a mistake. As she drew closer, she shouted the name of her ability.

“Lancer!”

However, Freya was unprepared for this nasty surprise. When she came close, the energy from Lion-heart’s lance faded, and her opponent stopped chanting. Freya’s eyes widened with shock when she realised he had been faking a skill to lure her into attack.

Freya’s lancer skill impaled mid-air and the energy was wasted from her lance as Lion-heart leapt above her to avoid the attack. Lion-heart took the wide opening and swung his mighty lance at Freya’s shoulder.

The attack connected.

Freya yelped in pain as the lance pierced her flesh and knocked her down for the second time in the match. Blood began to seep out of the small wound in her shoulder. Lion-heart landed right next to her.

“Sir Lion-heart has drawn blood from his opponent. He is the victor!” The King announced, looking amazed by the quality of the match. The crowd roared with applause and cheers for Lion-heart and the spectacular match the two warriors had displayed.

Freya slowly got up to her feet and looked up at Lion-heart, who was smiling at her, with his hand outstretched.

Freya looked at him, and then proceeded to shake his hand. The crowd cheered even more, and Lion-heart leaned forward to say something to her.

“Thank-you for such a great match. It’s very rare for a newcomer to push me so far. I wish you the best of luck for the future, and I hope I get the privilege to challenge you again.” Lion-heart said warmly.

“Thank-you Sir Lion-heart. It would be an honour to fight you again.” Freya replied, a smile starting form on her face, despite her defeat.

Lion-heart then turned and left the arena and went back to the armoury, while Freya was confronted by a servant and escorted out of the arena and towards the infirmary to treat her shoulder wound.

Fratley, having watched the entire match, was having mixed feelings as he saw his love leave the arena and leave the competition.

--Chapter 27: Brothers--

As Lion-heart entered the armoury, Frato started showering him with congratulations and praise for his victory. However, Lion-heart did not approve of receiving this praise and like the previous time, he drove Frato away telling him to save his congratulations until afterwards.

Fratley was grateful that he didn’t have to talk to Lion-heart after he had watched him eliminate Freya from the competition. His match was next, and Lion-heart didn’t want any congratulations straight after the match.

Frato tore himself away from Lion-heart in a rather cheery mood. Everything was going right for Frato. Freya had been eliminated and he was about to face off against his brother. He walked up behind Fratley with a smile plastered over his face.

“Well Fratley, we’re up next.” Frato said excitedly.

“It seems so.” Fratley replied, not bothering to turn around.

Frato noticed that Fratley didn’t seem like his usual self and swiftly reached the conclusion that his brother’s current mood was due to Freya’s loss. He decided not to say anything else, seeing as whatever he had to say about Freya’s defeat would probably just anger Fratley, which isn’t particularly what he wanted just before he was about to fight him.

“Will Sir Fratley please come forward?” The King called out through the arena.

Fratley slumped out of the armoury and the crowd gave a deafening cheer. Fratley made his way to the arena and took his position, before lifting his head up.

Frato watched Fratley as he made his way to the arena and one thought recurred through his mind.

“He’ll get over it when we start our fight.”

“Will Sir Frato please come forward?” The King announced.

Frato came rushing into the arena, and the crowd began to murmur to themselves once again. Quickly making his way into the arena, Frato took up a battle position and stared into the eyes of his brother.

Fratley looked back, but his eyes lacked the ferocity of Frato’s. Then, his eyes flared with vigour and stared back with the same ferocity and fire.

The crowd were cheering wildly for Fratley, and eventually the King motioned for silence. The

crowd then fell silent.

“Begin!” The King shouted.

Frato charged towards Fratley, who, unlike his brother, was standing perfectly still with his lance ready to block the oncoming assault. Frato swung his lance at Fratley’s ribs, but Fratley blocked the strike easily. Frato brought his lance back and swung again, this time for Fratley’s shoulder. Fratley swayed to avoid this blow, but didn’t bother to counter. Fratley then swayed in the opposite direction to avoid a similar attack to his other shoulder.

Frato growled in frustration before attempting to hit Fratley’s arm with his spear, but Fratley ducked to narrowly avoid the attack. Frato then grinned before bringing his lance down blade first towards Fratley’s spine. Fratley was as evasive as ever, rolling out of the way of the lethal attack.

Frato glared at Fratley with anger beginning to become apparent on his semi-human face. Fratley looked up and shifted his head at his brother.

“Come on Frato. You know it’s going to take more than that to beat me.” Fratley said to his brother, making Frato even more aggravated.

“How come he didn’t attack?” Frato thought. “He had enough openings in that assault to counter my combination. What’s he up to...?”

Fratley took up a defensive position once again. Frato stared at him for a moment, thinking of any possible strategy Fratley could be using. After a few seconds, Frato charged towards Fratley once again and attempting yet another slash. Fratley blocked the slash and then blocked a second attack Frato used. Frato then decided to swing his lance from side to side at a deadly speed, which was forcing Fratley slowly across the arena. Fratley eventually stopped the attack by clashing his lance against Frato’s.

“At last!” Frato thought. “He’s taking the offensive!”

Frato’s thought was soon short-lived when Fratley left his lance up against Frato’s and then moved back into a defensive position.

Frato snarled angrily before jumping back across the arena. He stared at his brother, who was still maintaining his defensive position.

“Why is he not attacking? What is he trying to achieve? He’s not going to win if he just keeps blocking my attacks... What is he up to?” Frato mused. Then, an idea clicked in Frato’s mind.

“A stall.” Frato concluded. “But why is he stalling me? This isn’t a timed battle! And even so he hasn’t given me any wounds! Why is he trying to stall me?”

Frato looked at his brother suspiciously. Frato disliked having a one-sided battle. He wanted to either get Fratley on the offensive or connect the winning blow whilst he was being defensive. Frato thought that he wasn’t going to lure Fratley into attacking him, so instead Frato would have to force him into a position where he would be open to attack.

Frato had an idea of exactly how to do that.

Frato’s lance began to charge with powerful red energy which formed at the tip of his spear. Fratley did nothing to try and stop Frato; instead he just kept his defence and smiled. Frato had finished charging his attack and pointed his lance at Fratley.

“Cherry Blossom!” Frato roared. Rose petals were blasted out of the tip of Frato’s lance straight towards Fratley. They were soon engulfed by an intense flame which burned them to cinders. Fratley was also supposedly engulfed in the flames. As the last of the attack left Frato’s lance he began tearing across the arena towards Fratley’s location, keeping an eye out for any signs of Fratley.

The attack subsided, but Fratley had quite evidently dodged it as he was out of the range of the

attack. Frato spotted him and charged towards him to attack. Frato tried to impale Fratley only to be dodged, as Fratley had still kept his eye on Frato.

“Curse you!” Frato yelled. He pulled his lance back and took a few steps backwards. “Why are you being so defensive!? Why are you trying to stall me?!”

“Do you really think I’m going to tell you my strategy?” Fratley answered calmly, maintaining his defence and keeping his gaze firmly on Frato.

Frato roared with anger and swung his lance fiercely at Fratley, who blocked the strike with a little difficulty. Frato moved back and swung again at Fratley’s other side, only to have Fratley block that strike as well.

Frato jumped back, and tore across in the arena towards Fratley before leaping clear over his brother. He landed behind Fratley and sidestepped before swinging at his brother in yet another attack. However, Fratley had scouted his brother’s movements and managed to block this unusual strike as well. Frato scowled angrily before jumping back across the arena once again.

Sweat covering his body, Frato decided to try another attack. His lance began to charge with a bright white energy. Fratley did as he did before and prepared to dodge. Frato tore across the arena, his lance brimming with spiritual energy. As he drew closer to Fratley, Frato screamed “Lancer!” and brought his lance back to attack.

Fratley leapt into the air to dodge the attack, and Frato had to stop himself and discharge his energy into the air. He focused his eyes on his brother, sailing through the air elegantly, and a smile came to his lips. He began to charge his lance with white energy once again, only more of it seemed to forming at the tip of his spear. Fratley landed from his extremely high jump, and Frato’s attack was ready.

Frato pointed his lance at his brother, and the energy at the end of his lance had formed a mysterious Dragon’s head.

“Try and dodge this, brother.” Frato sneered. “Dragon’s breath!”

The Dragon’s head opened its mouth and fired an intense magical beam of energy towards Fratley. Fratley barely managed to avoid the powerful ray, which exploded at the side of the arena.

Frato cursed at the failed attack and glared his brother. For some reason Frato found himself breathing rather heavily, and that his body ached slightly. The expense of energy Frato had used during the match was finally starting to take its toll.

Fratley noted this and maintained his defence, waiting for Frato to attack so he could finally end the long, gruelling match. As he predicted, Frato came charging towards him, hoping to break his defence and get the finishing blow in. Frato attempted to impale Fratley as he reached him, but Fratley swayed to the side, dodging the strike.

For the first time, Fratley countered and swung at Frato. Frato ducked to narrowly avoid a defeat. Fratley tried a different attack, only to be blocked by Frato.

A deadlock ensued, and the crowd started cheering for Fratley. Frato’s tiredness played a major role in the outcome as Frato didn’t have enough energy to overpower his brother. Fratley pushed Frato back and then altered the lock so he was forcing Frato down onto his knees. Frato looked up at his brother, standing over him, pushing him down with fear in his eyes.

Fratley broke the deadlock and swung at Frato’s shoulder, and Frato was knocked onto the floor from the strike, as blood began to seep very slowly out of his arm.

“Sir Fratley has drawn blood from his opponent. He is the victor!” The King announced as he saw blood coming from Frato’s arm.

Fratley helped his brother up to his feet, and Frato staggered back slightly.

“You...you...” Frato stammered.

“When I was watching your fights Frato, I noticed that you used up a lot of your energy on wasted movement and various attacks on your opponent. I thought I would teach you to conserve your energy more during your battles.” Fratley explained. “If you are facing a tough opponent, you need to conserve and keep your energy so that you don’t exhaust yourself too quickly. You need to rethink your strategy.”

“I bet I know what you’re saving your energy for.” Frato said with a grin. “I wouldn’t blame you; you’ll need every ounce of strength in your body if you’re going to stand a chance against our father.”

Fratley nodded, and then proceeded to shake Frato’s hand.

“I don’t care how long it takes, or what I have to do achieve it; but someday, I will defeat you Fratley.” Frato vowed as he shook hands with his brother.

“I’ll gladly accept your challenge.” Fratley answered before making his way to the armoury.

Frato was confronted by two slaves, who despite Frato’s wound and exhaustion, seemed quite intimidated by the half-breed. Frato snorted before strolling towards the infirmary, the two servants trailing behind him.

Fratley entered the armoury, and he was confronted by his father, Lion-heart. The two looked at each other, with the cool calm eyes of Lion-heart staring into the fierce, determined eyes of his son, his blood. Both warriors had their pride, and both would be fighting for a purpose.

--Chapter 28: The Final--

The King ordered for a short break as soon the semi-finals had finished to be fair on the participants, particularly Fratley who had just come out of his match. However, the crowd were getting restless; they couldn’t wait to see this spectacle of a match. For what was likely to be the first time, they would see a father and son face off for the title of Burmecia’s strongest. However, this wasn’t just any father and son. They were the Fratley family, one of the most well respected warrior families in Burmecian lineage.

Back in the armoury, there was a tense silence between the two knights. Both were mulling over their thoughts, mentally preparing themselves whilst also resting their bodies.

“Well...” Lion-heart said with a smile forming, causing Fratley to look up and the tense silence to be broken. “Now I’ll see just how strong you’ve become.”

Fratley just looked away again. He wasn’t in much of a mood to talk to his father right now. He was more focused on conjuring up some form of strategy to defeat his father.

Lion-heart looked a little rejected at the lack of a response from his son. He then saw the look of concentration on Fratley’s face and was reminded of himself when he was in his youth: focused, determined, unwilling to back down from any foe; although, to be honest, not much had changed since then except his strength.

The King’s voice was heard in the armoury by the two Dragon Knights and throughout the entire arena. “Ladies and Gentlemen, at long avail the final shall commence!”

The crowd roared with cheers after hearing the announcement. This was the battle they had been waiting for.

Inside the armoury, the two knights stood up and walked towards the armoury entrance. When the two were at the doorway, Fratley decided to say something.

“I want you to promise me something.”

“Yes?” Lion-heart answered.

“Don’t you dare hold back on me just because I’m your son.” Fratley spoke in a deadly serious tone.

“I would not think of it.” Lion-heart replied. “Provided you give me your all, I want to see what you can really do.”

“I’ll be going at you with nothing less.” Fratley warned.

“Will Sir Lion-heart please come forward?” The King called out through the arena.

Lion-heart left the armoury and made his way to the arena. The crowd’s roars and chants were almost deafening. Lion-heart entered the arena and took his position. The King had to make a motion for silence as his voice could not compete with the loud chants of his subjects. The audience quickly quietened down.

“Will Sir Fratley please come forward?” The King finally called out.

Fratley also left the now empty armoury and walked towards the arena, with his eyes sharply focused on his opponent, and the look determination had not yet faded from his face. Fratley entered the arena and his eyes met those of his father, which were sharing the same fire and determination as his.

Once again the King had to make a motion for silence so he could announce the start of the match. The audience quickly quietened down, as they were extremely eager to watch the incredible match.

The two Dragon Knights entered battle positions, not breaking their ferocious stare-down.

“I will avenge you Freya...” Fratley thought as he stared into the eyes of Lion-heart.

“Begin!” The King shouted.

The two warriors did not move, but merely continued their stare down. Both were planning a strategy to attack.

After a brief moment Fratley decided to try an attack. He charged towards Lion-heart with his lance pointed out, ready to skewer. Lion-heart took up a defensive position, ready to block the strike. Just before Fratley reached his father, he decided to roll to the side before taking a very quick leap over Lion-heart. Lion-heart kept a firm gaze on his opponent and turned around, whilst keeping his defence. Fratley landed at the other side of Lion-heart and sidestepped to his side at lightning speed. Lion-heart quickly turned to block the oncoming strike but he was too slow, and Fratley’s lance connected to his side and knocked him down onto the arena floor. Fortunately for Lion-heart, Fratley had hit his armour, and so had not drawn blood.

Fratley stood and watched Lion-heart get up to his feet, just as Lion-heart had done with Freya. Lion-heart stared into the eyes of his son, scowling slightly.

“How did I get caught out with that old trick?!” Lion-heart thought.

Fratley just gave a little smile at his father’s scowls. He put up his lance into a defensive position as Lion-heart focused on Fratley once again.

Soon enough, Lion-heart tried to strike Fratley, only to be blocked. As Lion-heart moved his lance, Fratley tried a quick counter, but Lion-heart blocked this. Fratley moved his lance back and this time Lion-heart tried to counter with a strike. Fratley blocked this and the two exchanged strikes, each of them blocking the other. After a couple more strikes, the two leapt back together and put up a defensive position to try to think of a different strategy.

“I think I’ve underestimated him.” Lion-heart thought. “He blocked every single one of my strikes with ease.”

The crowd were cheering wildly. This is what they came to see. As the two fighters pondered their next move, they began to chant.

“Lion-heart!! Lion-heart!!”

A small smile formed on the warrior’s face as he heard his name being chanted. However, his sensitive ears could also hear another name being chanted by the crowd.

“Iron-tail!! Iron-tail!!”

The smile changed into a look of confusion.

“What the!?! Iron-tail!?! Where did that name come from?!” Lion-heart thought.

Looking across to the other side of the arena, Lion-heart saw a similar look of confusion on his son’s face. Fratley pressed his memory to see whether he had heard the name before. He had heard the name “Iron-tail” once or twice when he was the other Dragon Knights during his missions, but he hadn’t realised they had been referring to him. Evidently, the name had spread like wildfire.

Nevertheless, Fratley could not let this new title bother him at the moment. He had to focus on his match.

As Fratley returned his attention to his father, he saw that Lion-heart had begun charging up a Dragon knight ability. Fratley quickly took note and began charging up his own energy into his spear. White energy flowed in both of the warrior’s lances, and after a few moments all the necessary energy had been built up.

Lion-heart pointed his lance at Fratley, and Fratley pointed his spear at his father.

“Dragon’s Breath!” The two shouted.

At the same time, the energy in the knight’s lances formed the shape of a dragon’s head which looked slightly different on both of the lances. The two dragon heads bellowed out an intense ray of energy at each other. The two beams met in the centre of the arena and caused a tremendous explosion of energy, which was much larger than normal and blasted both Lion-heart and Fratley back. Some of the crowd gasped, others screamed at the result of the two attacks. As the dust from the blast settled a large black burn covered most of the arena, and at the very centre was a small hole where the arena had been blasted away.

Both Fratley and Lion-heart were at the edge of the arena, slowly getting up to their feet. However, Fratley’s lance had been blasted out of his hands from the explosion, and was at Fratley’s side. Fratley was looking at the King, disheartened.

The King acknowledged this and began to make an announcement.

“Sir Lion-heart has disarmed his opponent. He is the...”

“Wait!!”

The King turned and looked at Lion-heart, stunned by his interruption.

“I’m bleeding.” Lion-heart stated, holding up his arm, which had a small cut, unnoticed by the King. “I got hit by a piece of debris.”

“Very well. Noting that due to the disarming of Fratley and that Fratley has also drawn blood from Lion-heart at the same time the match shall continue.” The King announced.

The crowd cheered wildly. This had been a great match, and it still wasn’t over!

Fratley quickly picked up his lance before turning to face Lion-heart, with a slight look of shock on his face.

“Father...you could have been called the victor right then...why?” Fratley asked in a soft voice.

“I am going to win this match.” Lion-heart answered firmly. “It’s just I wouldn’t be able to live with

the fact that I won by fooling his majesty and therefore winning dishonestly.”

Fratley smiled at his father. He admired his conscience and good-heartedness.

“Besides, this fight has become very interesting. You’ve become a great challenge.” Lion-heart smirked, whist lifting his lance ready to attack.

“You too.” Fratley replied, whilst getting into his own battle position.

Lion-heart rushed to Fratley and began another attempt at a physical attack. Fratley blocked the strikes, and then countered with his own flurry of attacks. Lion-heart blocked and dodged these strikes, before decided to jump back to avoid any further slashes.

Fratley then decided to take to the sky in a magnificent leap into the air, forcing his father to look skyward. Lion-heart followed, and leapt after him to try and counter him in mid-air. He swung at Fratley near the peak of his jump, but Fratley somehow blocked the strike with his spear.

Fratley landed first, and began to charge his lance with a white energy whilst keeping a firm eye on Lion-heart at the same time. Lion-heart landed, although he had started charging his lance a similar white energy whilst in mid-air.

The two finished charging their lances with energy and tore across the arena towards each other.

“Lancer!!” The two knights shouted.

The sound of a clean slash was heard faintly throughout the arena. A deadly hush filled the crowd.

The energy had been discharged and the two warriors stopped their charge, although they had a fair distance between them. Fratley turned to Lion-heart and held up his lance in a defensive position. Lion-heart also turned to face Fratley and put up his lance in defence. However, Lion-heart noticed something, and gasped in disbelief.

Blood was trickling down from the back of his right hand and down his arm.

“Sir ‘Iron-tail’ Fratley has drawn blood from his opponent and is therefore the winner and the new champion of Burmecia!” The King announced proudly.

Lion-heart’s lance fell out of his hands and his face filled with shock. He couldn’t take it in. It was over. He had been defeated by his own son! Outdone by his own flesh and blood!

“I don’t believe it...” Fratley gasped. “I did it!”

The crowd were giving a standing ovation. It had been a classic match.

Lion-heart made his way slowly across the arena to Fratley, and then held out his hand for a congratulatory handshake.

Fratley began to shake his father’s hand, but decided that it wasn’t enough and hugged his father instead. Lion-heart hugged back, but shortly broke apart from it.

“I’m proud of you son.” Lion-heart said proudly. “But don’t let this victory go to your head. Continue to grow stronger, as there are far more powerful warriors in the world than me.”

“Thank you father.” Fratley replied, smiling at his father’s blessing. “And don’t worry, I will continue to train.”

The King arose from his seat, and made his way towards the pair followed by the two guards either side of him. Also making their way towards the knights were three servants, all carrying various things.

“Firstly, I must congratulate you both for such a spectacular match. It was a shame someone had to lose.” The King began his speech. “Now before I give Sir Iron-tail his prize I will award the runner-up prize to Lion-heart.”

One of the servants handed the King a small, silver trophy and a bag of gil.

“For being a finalist, you win this runner-up trophy and 2500 gil.” The King stated as he handed the two in turn to Lion-heart and shaking his free hand. The crowd applauded as he received his prize.

Another servant handed the King a large, golden trophy and a larger bag of gil.

The King then turned to Fratley. “To Sir Iron-tail Fratley, for winning this tournament you have won this golden trophy, which has been passed down for generations; a large sum of 5000 gil and the title of Burmecia’s strongest knight. Congratulations!” The King handed Fratley his prizes and managed to shake his hand. The crowd gave a louder applause.

“I must say farewell to you now, as this is the end of this year’s tournament. I hope to see you all next year, for who knows what the future tournaments may hold!” The King announced, and shortly left the arena and back to the castle.

Fratley and Lion-heart then left the arena together, heading towards the infirmary. The crowd began to disperse and leave the stadium, talking all about the spectacle they had just witnessed.

--Chapter 29: A New Challenge--

The buzz from the Dragon Knight tournament took a long time to wear down. Fratley had even become fed up of hearing how it had been such a great fight between himself and his father. It was as if he didn’t already know; yet he had actually taken part in that battle, he had to make the decisions of what tactic to employ next. Yet despite the fact he had lived through the battle, his friends and various other Burmecians were giving him constant reminders of it.

Although, Fratley had only really achieved one thing from the fight with his father; he had memorised what his father had said at the end of the battle.

“I’m proud of you son; but don’t let this victory go to your head. Continue to grow stronger, as there are far more powerful warriors in the world than me.”

It was true that Fratley had won the battle with Lion-heart, but Fratley couldn’t help but wonder just what his father had been referring to by “far more powerful warriors”. What kind of challenges awaited beyond the gates of Burmecia? What kind of fighters would he have to square off against? How would he train to be strong enough to compete against these warriors?

One thing was clear; he wouldn’t get any stronger by sitting comfortably in the eternal rain of his home. He would have to leave Burmecia. He would have to travel to face these strong opponents.

Fratley decided not to leave Burmecia immediately, for many reasons. He needed to save up some money so he could buy some food and supplies so he could survive outside Burmecia for a long period of time. Besides, he had no idea of where he was going, or just who or what he was going to face. The idea of facing dragons in the mountains around Burmecia came up in Fratley’s mind, but he wanted to travel further. He wanted to learn something from his journey.

In any case, Fratley needed money, and he had plenty of time to think about his next challenge whilst he was patrolling the city with a fellow Dragon Knight. It wasn’t long before a conversation sparked up to break the dull silence.

“Congratulations on winning the tournament Iron-tail.” Leo began. “It was quite a feat to win the tournament at such a young age. I’m pretty sure you’re one of the youngest champions Burmecia has ever had.”

“Thanks Leo.” Fratley said in a dull voice. This must have been the hundredth time today...

“Some of the Dragon Knights think you’d even be a match for Alexandria’s General Beatrix.” Leo continued.

“Who?” Fratley asked with much more interest.

“Beatrix, I can’t believe you haven’t heard of her.” Leo asked surprised. “There are a lot of rumours flying around about her. She’s been causing a great stir in Alexandria recently, rising through the ranks and causing a female uproar. They say she’s one of the most formidable opponents on the Mist continent, and that she slaughtered one hundred knights by herself, without rest.”

Fratley’s eyes widened at this information. That was some record, and no doubt she could one day become a major threat for Burmecia. She would be a challenge, a challenge worth leaving the gates of Burmecia for. If he could defeat her, he would vanquish this imposing threat and could return to Burmecia knowing it would be safe. If he was defeated, he would at least know what he was up against and be ready for her should Burmecia ever be attacked.

“Sir Leo...” Fratley began, feeling a little unsure. “I haven’t told anyone yet, but I am planning to leave Burmecia sometime soon.”

“You what?” Leo replied, not quite believing what he just heard.

“You heard me.” Fratley stated calmly.

“You’re not planning on challenging Beatrix are you?!” Leo asked, still not believing what his comrade was saying.

“That idea had come into my mind.” Fratley answered, still managing somehow to keep his composure.

“Fratley, even if you do survive the attacks from foreign monsters and long exposure to the mist; I hear that Alexandria’s security has become very tight recently. It would be a wasted journey.” Leo argued.

“I’ll find some way.” Fratley replied, determined.

“I still think it’s a bad idea.” Leo answered, calming down slightly. “I wouldn’t think anyone would want to come with you.”

“I’m going alone.” Fratley answered. “I need to test my own strength, without any interference or concern for anyone else’s safety.

“That’s insane.” Leo answered, his eyes widening with fear at the very idea. “You’ll need some allies if you want to survive.”

“I can look after myself.” Fratley stated, keeping his seriously determined tone.

Leo shook his head. It was quite clear that Iron-tail had kept the bravery and courage of his father, and that no matter what he would say he would not back down. Normally Leo would have seen this as a great strength, but now...

“Well, I see you’ve made up your mind.” Leo stated. “But you are still young. Please reconsider about staying home, not just for me but for all the others who care about you. Think of your father Lion-heart, think of your mother April and your brother Frato, and let’s not forget about Freya...”

As soon as Fratley heard that name, his look of determination softened. He knew he would have to tell Freya at some point. The thought of upsetting her posed by far the toughest thing he would ever have to do in his life. In battle, feelings such as guilt and sadness would not hold you back; they could not overwhelm you into submission. However, he would have to fight these feelings; he was doing this for Freya in some way after all. He didn’t have to worry about her right now, for he had his duty to focus on, and besides she wouldn’t be the first person he would see after his duty either. He still had to tell his family...

“You’re what!?” Lion-heart exclaimed, after hearing Fratley’s plan.

"I didn't think it would surprise you..." Fratley answered. "You're the one who said I needed to get stronger."

"I said you needed to get stronger, I didn't say you had to get yourself killed." Lion-heart answered, his eyes starting to fill with concern. "No-one has trekked across the Mist Continent by themselves and lived to tell the tale, and what makes you think they'll let a Burmecian in Alexandria?"

"I'm going to send a Mognet letter before I get there, so I'll know whether I'm welcome or not." Fratley answered truthfully.

Lion-heart shook his head as April entered the room to see what the commotion was about.

"What is all the fuss about?" April asked politely.

"I'm planning to leave Burmecia." Fratley answered. "So I can travel to Alexandria and test my strength against their General."

"And he expects to get there on foot, by himself." Lion-heart added.

"Are you insane!?" April exclaimed, raising her voice. "And I suppose you think I'm going to let my son wander out and kill himself?"

"No..." Fratley answered, starting to feel uneasy in his mother's gaze. "But I can look after myself. I'm one of the strongest knights in Burmecia, I can handle any monster that crosses my path on the plains."

"It doesn't matter how strong or how tough you are, you will never be immune to the effects of the mist." April warned.

"I am aware of the mist and I am looking for a way that will keep me out of it for most of the way. Trust me mother, I'll be fine." Fratley replied warmly.

"You're still going to need to learn some basic survival techniques before you leave." Lion-heart pointed out. "I suppose I'm going to have to teach you some."

"Lion-heart! You're not supposed to encourage him!" April scolded.

"It's not as if we can stop him, he's old enough to leave home." Lion-heart retorted. "Besides, if he really is leaving, I want his last thoughts of us to be pleasant ones."

April just sighed and shook her head in response.

His parents had given a slightly better response than what he expected, but he was surprised that he had shocked his father with his decision. However, he still had to tell more people about his plans. There was one person in particular he would have to tell, and he was not looking forward to it.

"You're leaving Burmecia?!" Freya gasped, not believing what she had just heard.

"Yes." Fratley replied calmly. "There are opponents that I can only face by journeying across the world."

"But Fratley..." Freya began, still in disbelief and shock at what Fratley was saying but at the same time trying to compose herself so she could reply. "There are monsters outside of those gates. It's dangerous out there; I don't want to lose you..."

"I know of the dangers that lie outside the gates of Burmecia." Fratley replied, he too beginning to feel uncomfortable at what he was saying to his love. "However, I need to grow stronger; I need to be able to protect our home from any threat."

"Fratley..." Freya started, but could not think of anything she could reply with. Fratley had made his decision, and she respected this decision. However, the feeling that she would not see Fratley again was something that was inevitably consuming her from within.

“Please don’t make this harder than it already is Freya.” Fratley said softly. “I’m not leaving just yet, and I plan on seeing you as much as I can before I go.”

Freya attempted to pull herself together after hearing this, and she looked into her boyfriend’s eyes.

“Fratley...you’d better come back. I can’t live without you.” Freya said in a serious tone.

“I’m definitely coming back Freya, for I can say the same about you.” Fratley responded.

“Do you promise me?” Freya asked, her eyes widening slightly.

“I promise you that I will return.” Fratley gave his word.

--Chapter 30: Secret Meetings--

The following days seemed to pass slowly for Fratley, probably due to the fact that he was constantly being advised not to leave Burmecia and that he was walking out into almost certain death. Fratley did not let these constant thoughts daunt him. He had faith in his own strength; he knew how to survive outside of the gates of Burmecia. This journey would not be the last thing he did in his life.

However, Fratley still needed to ask for the King’s permission to leave Burmecia. He had been thinking about how he should persuade the King to allow himself to leave his home. His reasons were solid, and respected his honour as a Dragon Knight.

Fratley began to make his way to the royal palace of Burmecia. He had looked at the timetables for the Dragon knight duties and he knew he was not required to be on duty until the afternoon. He had plenty of time to seek the King’s permission to leave. There were not many Burmecians out on the streets in the morning rain, only the Dragon knights and soldiers who were on duty keeping order and a few civilians who were doing early shopping from the few stores that were open.

Fratley eventually reached the royal palace which overlooked all of the Burmecian homes. He approached the front gate of the castle where a few Dragon knights were looking over the timetables and where two more dragon knights were guarding the castle from intrusion. When the two knights saw that Fratley was approaching the gate they crossed their spears to block his path.

“I wish to see his majesty.” Fratley stated.

The two knights looked at each other briefly, before shifting their gazes back at Fratley.

“Who are you and why do you wish to meet our King?” The knight on the left asked, looking quite suspicious.

“My name is Sir Fratley, I am also known around the Dragon Knights as ‘Iron-tail’.” Fratley answered. “I wish to ask for permission to leave Burmecia.”

“You’re Sir Iron-tail Fratley??” The guard on the left gasped in disbelief. “I heard about your victory in the tournament; unfortunately I couldn’t go and watch the matches, much as I would have liked as I was put on duty.”

The knight on the opposite side just laughed heartily. “You unlucky sod, you missed a brilliant match!”

Fratley had a warm smile forming on his lips from these hearty comments, yet still wanted to get in the castle and talk to the King.

“Can I go and talk to his majesty?” Fratley asked politely, after the two knights had finished laughing about the comments they had just said. “Please...with a little sugar and lemon put on top?”

“You have lemon on your pleases Sir Fratley?” The guard on the right replied as he opened the gate.

“That is strange....”

Fratley chuckled at the comment, shortly before entering the Burmecian royal palace. There were not many guards wandering around the palace at the current time, mainly because others were sleeping and a few were even in the battle arena that was used for the tournament training vigorously.

Making his way to the throne room, Fratley passed a few more guards, most of which did not pay him any attention. They knew him as Sir "Iron-tail" Fratley already, mostly from his performance in the tournament, but didn't want to say anything.

Fratley reached the door which lead into the throne room, where there was a single slave dressed in rather silky clothes which suited him well.

"The King is busy talking to his consultant. He shouldn't be too long." The slave stated casually but quietly.

"Oh, right." Fratley answered in a similar manner.

Fratley stood still and waited patiently for a minute or two. Then, the door opened slightly.

A young Burmecian male fell clumsily out of the door, shortly before the door was shut firm again. The male stood up and looked at Fratley with a rather indignant expression on his face. He brushed back his fairly messy ginger hair shortly before speaking.

'Fancy me-!! '

"Shhh!" Fratley shushed him.

"Fancy meeting you here." Prince Puck began again in a much quieter voice.

"In trouble again eh, Puck?" Fratley replied.

"Yeah, but what are you doing here?" Puck asked, pressing Fratley in a combat of speech.

"Asking to see if I can leave Burmecia." Fratley replied, he then continued. "I must journey across the Mist Continent to find out more information about other towns, whilst increasing my strength by taking out monsters methodically."

"Run that by me again, only using the coloured version with pictures this time." Puck replied with some sarcasm.

Fratley sighed, before trying once again. "I am planning to travel to Alexandria, to test my strength against General Beatrix, a formidable opponent from a distant land. Whilst on the way there, I may grow stronger by training against the monsters on this continent with my lance."

"Cool." Puck answered with a short grin.

"However, I'm finding it difficult explaining this to other Burmecians. Yet I came here to ask your dad so I can go." Fratley added.

Puck chuckled. "I think he'll let you go somehow, Fratley!"

Fratley smiled, and conveniently the door opened to reveal none other than his majesty himself, dressed elegantly in a silk blue shirt, cotton blue shorts and a nice blue cape that just made him look really good.

"I heard pretty much all of that conversation Fratley..." The King said calmly with a warm smile across his mouth, which had fur around it for some reason. "I had the odd comment with my consultant adviser just to see if it would be a good idea to let you go."

"Really?" Fratley asked seriously.

"Yes. Of course you may enter and discuss it further with me, out of the range of a certain ginger haired Prince..." The King cast a quick glance at his son. "Enter."

The King held the door open so Fratley could enter, and then shut it again, leaving Puck outside.

“That’s just typical...” Puck scowled before walking away to find something else to do.

The meeting with the King had been a complete success. He had given Fratley official permission to leave Burmecia; Fratley now had a piece of parchment which would easily confirm this to any Burmecian guard in visual range. Fratley knew the meeting had been a success as soon as he entered, and indeed left, his majesty’s throne room. Although it was also really upper class and Fratley just wanted to see what the room looked like in working order. That, plus his royal highness was a very friendly Burmecian who had a very efficient way of handling matters.

However, Fratley would need to tell Freya that his meeting with the King had been a success. He had the letter; he would need to show her. He could also tell Lion-heart and April again, but they were already well-aware of Fratley’s plans, even if slightly worried about them. Fratley might also need to show Frato, although when he told Frato of his plans the last time Frato suggested that he should try leaping over the Burmecian wall at nightfall, only to end up being caught by the Burmecian guards on night patrol and forced back into Burmecia, a tactic which would achieve nothing but prison for him.

Well, tonight would be different. Fratley would finish his duty as a Dragon Knight at a set time which we really don’t need to know and would make his way to Freya’s home with a little something known as a gift. He knew Freya loved him, he knew she loved him with all of her heart. It would break his own heart if he left without spending as much time as he could with her. He was making the most of the time he had.

Fratley knocked on the door to Freya’s house, and waited patiently outside in the light Burmecian rain.

The door opened.

Freya’s father...stood in the door-way...wearing an extremely unusual combination of “casual clothes”. Her father had that stare, the stare that makes you feel as if you are doing something drastically wrong when your initial ethic is good.

“May I see Freya please?” Fratley asked politely, whilst looking very casually at the weird clothes of Freya’s dad.

Her father smiled, and walked a few steps into the house, looking up, and shouted:

“FREYA! FRATLEY IS HERE TO SEE YOU!”

A brief silent moment passed, with only the noise of what was undoubtedly Freya Crescent upstairs running around doing her various activities. Fratley’s Burmecian ears could identify the specific combination of Freya “getting ready”.

“Hello Fratley...” Freya cooed from the top of the staircase.

“He-llo Freya...” Fratley cooed back, in an even better seductive voice.

Freya then appeared on the top of the staircase, wearing an extremely attractive white silk dress, which matched the colour of her hair and showed her extremely attractive Burmecian figure.

“Hey there...” Freya continued to coo in her seductive voice. “What have you been up to...”

Fratley held quite plainly his document, received from the King this morning. “I got the official document which states I can leave Burmecia today.”

“Oh...” Freya answered, still in this seductive voice. “That’s a shame...”

“Tell me about it.” Fratley answered, smiling at Freya’s heavenly figure.

“Maybe you could enter my bedroom of pleasure and we can discuss things of a more interesting nature...” Freya continued to use her sensual voice.

“O-kay...” Fratley answered.

“OI!” Freya’s dad shouted from the living room, catching both of the romantic pair’s attention. “No love-making in my house! Is that clear!?”

“Oh, lemon!” Fratley cursed.

--Chapter 31: Farewell--

A few days had past, and the day that Fratley would depart was drawing ever closer. Freya began insisting on seeing her love more and more often. Fratley relented to Freya’s requests and met up with her more frequently. He wanted to share some peaceful moments with the one he loved before he left his home.

Fratley had been saving up his money earned from his duties and he finally decided he had enough to leave. He was going to leave Burmecia the following morning. This would be the last day in his home for a long while.

As he did not have any duties for the day, Fratley decided to arrange a meeting with Freya. She was conveniently off-duty until the afternoon.

After a hearty breakfast, Fratley began making his way to the old fountain, a favourite meeting place of the two Burmecians. He arrived to find Freya sitting quietly, smiling at her beloved with her gentle green eyes. She was wearing her favourite red raincoat and brown leggings, and had a beautiful red ribbon tied elegantly in her hair.

Fratley sat beside her, returning the smile and starting a conversation.

“Good morning Freya.” He greeted.

“Good morning Fratley.” Freya answered. “So what did you want to see me about?” She inquired keeping her pleasant smile.

“You know I have been planning on leaving Burmecia for some time now...” Fratley began, his smile faded and replaced with a look of seriousness. “And I feel I have saved enough gil, and I will be leaving promptly tomorrow morning.”

Freya’s heart sank. She was dreading this day, tomorrow the man she cared the most about would be leaving her to face untold danger.

“I wanted to give you something before I left.” Fratley finished, struggling to maintain his serious look after seeing Freya’s happy face fill with sorrow and her ears falling against her skull.

“What is it?” Freya asked, trying desperately to compose herself in front of Fratley.

Fratley fumbled into his pockets for a few moments before responding.

“This...” He replied, and he held out a small, brightly coloured yellow ribbon. “My father told me that Burmecian knights give their wives and girlfriends a ribbon to remember them by before they go out to war.”

Freya frowned slightly. “Do you think I’m going to sit around mourning over a silly little ribbon?”

“Please Freya...for me?” Fratley asked whilst holding the ribbon against Freya’s tender hands.

Freya sighed, and took the ribbon from Fratley. She then moved her tail in front of her.

“Okay Fratley, I’ll wear your ribbon for you.” She answered as she began tying the ribbon onto her tail. “But I want you to do something for me in return.” She finished tying the ribbon, which had made a beautiful bow on her tail. She then started untying the red ribbon in her hair. Her white hair fell loosely onto her shoulders, and she handed the ribbon to Fratley.

“But men don’t wear ribbons Freya.” Fratley answered.

“Just like women don’t join the Dragon Knights?” Freya responded.

Fratley sighed, he knew Freya well enough to know that he would not be able to convince her that he shouldn't wear the ribbon. That and he knew she had felt just as awkward putting on her ribbon as he did.

"Okay Freya, I'll wear your ribbon...just for you." Fratley said, admitting defeat as he tied the red ribbon onto his tail. It fitted rather neatly and suited him well.

Freya smiled as she watched Fratley put on the red ribbon. For her, this was just another sign that Fratley felt the same way as her about the roles of men and women. Now, both of them had a token of the one they loved, something that they would always keep. Something that would ensure that they would never be apart, and that they would never forget each other.

The day seemed to flutter away; Fratley's last moments in Burmecia were slowly ticking away. After spending the majority of the afternoon with Freya, Fratley managed to pull himself away to go home and spend some time with his family.

Fratley made his way to the garden, where sure enough he found his brother practising various motions with his lance. Ever since the tournament had ended, Frato spent practically all of his time off-duty training vigorously, either alone or with his father. Frato was driving himself to become stronger, his main goal being to defeat both Fratley and Lion-heart at the next tournament.

"Hello Frato." Fratley greeted his brother.

Frato stopped swinging his lance and turned towards his brother with a smile.

"Ah, Fratley. Nice to see you. Want to spar?" Frato offered.

"No thanks Frato, I just want to talk to you." Fratley answered politely.

Frato seemed a little hurt at Fratley's refusal to his offer, but replied positively. "What do you want to talk about?"

"Well, you know I have been planning to leave Burmecia for quite a while now, and I feel that I have enough gil and supplies to see me through on my journey." Fratley stated.

Frato's eyes widened and his ears dropped slightly. "No..." Frato stated. "Fratley, you can't leave...not now."

"Frato, I explained it to you before." Fratley answered. "I must leave, I must find out the dangers that may be awaiting our Kingdom, and I must know if I am strong enough to overcome them."

Frato sighed. "If we work together, we can overcome any danger that faces our kingdom. You alone may not."

"There are some dangers that must be faced alone." Fratley replied. "Some which would need me to be strong enough to overcome by myself."

"Like what?" Frato pressed.

"General Beatrix of Alexandria." Fratley answered. "It is said she slaughtered one-hundred knights by herself."

"That's just a rumour!" Frato growled. "No-one is that powerful!" Frato refused to believe there was any female in the world who could fight, let alone be far stronger than he was.

"Maybe so, but it is not one we should overlook." Fratley retorted. "When I finish my journey, we will at least know what we may be up against."

Frato hung his head. He knew he couldn't persuade Fratley to give up his ridiculous journey. His brother was leaving, whether he liked it or not.

"Fratley, I want you to promise me two things." Frato asked, whilst lifting his head back up. "First,

I want you to come back, as soon as possible. Second, I want you to become stronger on your journey, and provide me with a worthy challenge when you get back. I want a rematch from our tournament bout.” Frato finished.

Fratley smiled at Frato’s comments. “I promise.”

The day had finally arrived. The rain was heavy, and the streets were bare of any early-morning bustle. Everything was set; Fratley had gathered together some food, water, medical supplies, money, clothes and his trusty spear. The majority of his travel gear was safely packed into a small leather backpack.

It was early in the morning, the sun had barely risen. Fratley was planning on waking early so he could get a good start on his journey. He had planned to get to Gizamaluke’s grotto before the day ended.

Fratley quickly dressed himself into a black vest with a brown leather travel jacket and some brown leather trousers with several pockets. He put on his backpack and made his way downstairs.

Upon getting to the bottom of the stairs Fratley found a surprise waiting for him. Lion-heart, April and Frato were all stood fully dressed in front of the door waiting for him.

“You never were good at getting up early.” Lion-heart said with a smile. “You weren’t thinking of leaving us without saying goodbye now, were you?”

“Fratley, every time you went to the Dragon Academy, every time you left to attend your duties as a Dragon Knight, I always worried about you. Now, you’re leaving Burmecia and journeying to foreign lands. I don’t think I can take it!” April said, trying to keep a brave face, but with the sadness and worry breaking through her expression.

“Mother...” Fratley began, “You don’t have to worry about me. I always came back in one piece, I always came back with a smile, and it will be no different with this journey. I’m a grown man.”

“And not just any man, the strongest warrior in Burmecia today.” Lion-heart added.

Fratley smiled, feeling slightly more secure with his father’s backing. He turned and looked at Frato, who took a step closer to him.

“Fratley, you’ve stuck up for me and looked after me all through my life. You’ve always been there for me when I needed it and now you’re leaving us.” Frato said, looking slightly dejected. “I’m going to miss you.”

“I’m going to miss you too, but we should have faith in our inner strength.” Fratley answered.

Frato gave a slight smile before stepping back. Lion-heart decided to speak.

“I’m proud of you son. Not only have you excelled your father in strength but you show courage which I never knew was in you. When you return, I hope you will have even more wonders to amaze me.” Lion-heart spoke warmly.

“Thank-you father. I must take my leave now. Farewell to all of you.” Fratley replied, making his way to the door of the house.

His family began saying their goodbyes as he finally made his way onto the street. He marched forward towards the southern gate of Burmecia without looking back. He continued to walk, and as he was only a stone’s throw away from the gate, he heard someone’s voice calling his name.

“Fratley!! Please don’t leave!!”

Fratley turned to see the owner of the voice, who turned out to be none other than Freya. She had rushed to the gate in a desperate attempt to try and talk to him.

“You don’t have to do this Fratley! What is there outside of these gates that is concerning you so

much?" Freya asked him, eyes filled with concern.

Fratley sighed before replying to his love. "Beatrix..." he said with a solemn breath.

"Beatrix?" Freya answered, confused with the unknown name.

"Yes...Beatrix." Fratley repeated. "I hear there are many fierce warriors out in the world, some more powerful than even I... Beatrix of Alexandria, in particular. They say her swordsmanship is the best in the land."

"Sir Fratley, do you still insist on going on your journey?" Freya asked, her eyes pleading him to reconsider staying home, staying with her.

"Yes... Please understand, Freya." Fratley began to explain. "Right now, Burmecia is at peace, while other nations are slowly but surely gaining power. I don't know if my spear alone is enough to protect Burmecia..." Fratley cast a glance at his formidable weapon. "...which is precisely why I must go out into the world."

"Sir Fratley...I don't think I can live on my own... not without you." Freya stated, looking defeated.

"Freya, you're going to be fine." Fratley said reassuringly. "Trust your strength... and have faith in your destiny. Once I complete my journey around the world, I will return to Burmecia."

"Then promise me, one more time, that you will return." Freya insisted.

"I promise." Fratley gave his word once again.

With that, Fratley turned away and made his way to the castle gates. As he walked away, his sensitive ears heard Freya sniffing, and then sobbing, before he could hear her break down in a flood of tears. His heart ached, and he dare not look back, for he knew his heart would not let him leave if he did. He showed the guards the King's written permission and they opened the gate for him slowly. Before he went through, Fratley called out to Freya in a soft voice.

"Farewell Freya, you will always be with me in my heart."

--Chapter 32: Gizamaluke's Grotto--

As I left through the protective gates of my home, I felt a great sadness in my heart. I was harshly reminded of the things I am leaving behind. My family gave me their goodbyes, each wishing me luck and showing me their sorrow for my departure. My greatest sadness comes from leaving Freya, who gave me her farewell at the gate and begged me not to leave Burmecia. I feel that leaving her was the toughest thing I have had to endure as a Dragon Knight so far.

As I walked further away from my home I could feel the rain slowly fading away, taking with it the reminiscence of home. However, memories and thoughts of home still burn strong in my mind, and they inspire me to continue my journey, for I do this for the benefit of Burmecia.

The misty plains outside of Burmecia are home to many vicious beasts, although none of them were a match for my blade. I slew down many of the blood-thirsty monsters, and I knew I had to stay alert to avoid attack from these creatures. One thing I have discovered so far is that the mist seems to hide these creatures from your sight, and that it is easy to fall victim to a surprise attack from anywhere. Thankfully my ears can sense these creatures well before they come into view and more importantly, before they can sense me.

I had hoped to reach Gizamaluke's Grotto before nightfall, but the longer I travelled through the mist the less likely I thought I would achieve this. I could see the sun falling in the sky and I began to lose hope of attaining this target. I pressed on, the sun descending and I drew closer to the mountains which bore home to the grotto. As the sun was barely over the horizon I found myself right in front of the grotto entrance. The guards there had caught wind of my arrival and welcomed me into the grotto.

The grotto itself is a rather intriguing place; it is filled with architecture similar to that of Burmecia. The place is filled with water pools and bells, and reminded me very much of home. Burmecian guards and watchmen all inhabit the area, guarding the place from any attack from monsters.

I also saw the great Master Gizamaluke himself; this massive water dragon was much larger and fearsome than I imagined. He welcomed me into the grotto as I entered; to think, a dragon which could speak! I have never thought such things could exist. This just proves I have much to learn on my journey.

I was guided to a guest chamber, built for the many travellers who passed through the grotto. Finally I can permit myself to rest after the first stage of my journey.

Fratley had decided to keep a journal of his journey across the Mist Continent. He knew that Freya, Frato and Lion-heart would be asking him all about his travels when he returned home. He would have something to show them, he would have written proof of his epic journey. The pages of his journal would become written memories that would let him relive the excitement of the journey, and he hoped to share that experience with those closest to him.

The following morning came, and Fratley forced himself awake, he knew that it would be a similar rush if he was to make it to a safe place before nightfall. The next step of the journey would involve travelling to Lindblum, but Fratley had figured it would be too much to try and get there in a day. Although there were few places of shelter between the grotto and Lindblum and one of which would take Fratley out of his way. Fratley was reluctant to spending a night on the plains, as he knew he would be easy prey for monsters.

This problem was stirring around Fratley as he went down into the grotto's canteen for breakfast. He hastily ate the breads and meats available before leaving to get his things and leave the grotto. However, as he made his way out of his rooms one the guards began to call his name.

"Sir Fratley!" The guard called, running towards him. "Sir Fratley!"

Fratley turned towards the guard, looking slightly confused as to what he wanted.

"Sir Fratley, Master Gizamaluke requests an audience with you." The Burmecian guard informed.

Fratley looked confused. Surely the dragon knew he had to leave as quickly as possible if he were to have a chance of reaching shelter before nightfall. Not wanting to cause trouble, Fratley followed the guard to Gizamaluke's chamber.

As Fratley entered the room, he immediately saw the great water-dragon floating just above a large pool of water looking at him. Gizamaluke was a massive, serpent-like, scaly blue dragon with large, black wings. Fratley looked at the dragon and could have sworn that the dragon was smiling at him.

"Sir Fratley..." The giant sea-serpent hissed. "What an honour it is to meet you."

"I must say that it is a pleasure to meet you." Fratley replied, almost feeling nervous in the great dragon's presence. He never thought he would be holding a conversation with a dragon.

"I hear you are travelling to test your strength." The dragon stated, his fork like tongue flickering as he spoke.

"Yes, I wish to fight General Beatrix of Alexandria." Fratley replied.

"General Beatrix... I have heard of her strength." Gizamaluke hissed. "I wish you good luck on your journey, and that the holy spirit of Burmecia will help you to your goal."

"Thank you." Fratley answered politely, grateful for the dragon's blessing.

"I also have a piece of advice for you." Gizamaluke continued. "Never underestimate an opponent, no matter what it is. Misjudging a foe's strength only leads to defeat." The dragon paused for a brief moment before speaking again. "You must be leaving now. You will be hoping to reach shelter

before the darkness comes, am I right?"

"Yes, although I have one question." Fratley replied.

Gizamaluke remained silent, waiting to hear the question.

"Is there a moogle in this grotto who could send a letter for me?" Fratley inquired.

"Yes...the guard will escort you there." Gizamaluke responded.

"Thank-you. I will keep your words in mind." Fratley said.

"Farewell." Gizamaluke hissed softly.

Fratley turned to the guard, who escorted him out of the chamber and through some of the passageways to another room. Opening the door, Fratley stepped into the room when he heard a very distinct sound.

"Kupo!" A moogle chirped with delight before flying up to the startled Burmecian. "Hello there!"

"Greetings." Fratley stuttered. "I wish to send a letter to someone."

"A letter? Sure thing kupo!" The moogle replied happily before grabbing some parchment and a pen and passing it to Fratley.

Fratley walked up to a nearby table and sat at it to write his letter:

To General Beatrix of Alexandria

Greetings, I am Sir Iron-Tail Fratley from the realm of Burmecia. I am currently travelling on my way to Alexandria, and I wish to challenge you to a battle. Not to the death of course, I merely wish to test my own strength. It would be honour to face off against you, I have heard of the many tales of your strength.

Please reply soon.

Yours truly,

Sir Iron-Tail Fratley

Fratley re-read what he had written and then rolled up the parchment before passing it to the moogle, who was eagerly waiting to take the letter.

"I'll ensure this reaches Alexandria faster than you can say kupo, kupo!" The moogle boasted before flying full speed out of the room and out of the grotto.

"I must be moving on." Fratley mused to himself and left the room hastily. The guard escorted him to his room, where Fratley grabbed his things and nearly ran to the southern exit of the grotto.

The guards wished him luck as they opened the doors for him with their magical bells which acted as keys to unlock the doors. In almost no time at all, Fratley found himself in the misty plains once again.

I never seem to get used to travelling through these misty plains. My vision is hindered and it is very difficult to navigate through. Thankfully I can just see enough to know I am heading in the right direction, plus the map that I bought back home is proving to be extremely useful.

The absence of rain is a rather peculiar feeling, for the first time in my life I am able to see the sun. The monsters here are different to the ones that plagued the area between Burmecia and the grotto, but they are no match for my spear.

As I travelled on, the plains seemed to be getting marshier, and my feet were beginning to sink into the ground. I trudged on though; I am determined not to give up. As the day began to grow late I discovered a gigantic swamp, which had wooden construction and I suspected their may be a civilisation here. My hopes grew as I journeyed on into the marsh...

--Chapter 33: Qu's Marsh--

Fratley walked cautiously into the marsh, still keeping alert for any monsters. Soon, his sight was blinded by extremely tall dunes which towered over him. His ears detected no monsters in the maze of dunes, which was thankful as it would have proven extremely difficult to attack or defend himself. He used his lance to cut away the grossly overgrown grass and eventually he stumbled into the open.

The view in the actual marsh stunned Fratley. There was a small pool in the centre of the clearing with many different coloured frogs hopping in the water. Around the small pond was where the real eye-catching sight was. Mysterious creatures with flower-like eyes, gigantic tongues and complete chef's outfits patrolled the area around the water, all of them eyeing the frogs in the centre, waiting for an opportunity to catch one.

A small croaking sound caught Fratley's attention, he looked and saw one of the frogs hop out of the water towards him. The next thing he heard was large footsteps bounding towards him. Fratley was then nearly knocked over as one of the creatures pushed past him in a run and dived onto the frog. Fortunately for the frog, it hopped away just in time to avoid being caught in the creature's grasp. The creature rose back up, and muttered to itself.

"Aw, it get away..."

"May I help you?" Fratley stuttered, still shocked after what had just transpired.

The creature turned and looked at Fratley with a nonchalant expression. Well, it was hard for Fratley to depict any emotion from the creature's face.

"Who you?" The creature asked, its tongue rolling and flapping over its body as it spoke.

"My name is Sir Iron-Tail Fratley, a Dragon Knight from Burmecia. I am on a journey to Alexandria and I am seeking shelter for the night." Fratley answered in a formal tone. "And who are you?"

"I Quilan." The creature replied. "You have yummy-yummies?"

Fratley made an odd expression; he didn't know what to make of the question. This was unnoticed by Quilan, who merely stared at him with interest waiting for a response.

"Yummy-yummies?" Fratley repeated, confused.

"Yummy-yummies!" Quilan repeated once again loudly whilst bouncing up and down. "Food!"

"Oh." Fratley responded, moving back slightly in defence whilst realising what Quilan wanted.

"Yes, I have some food."

"You give me some?" Quilan asked trying to muster a polite tone as he stood still again and eyed Fratley with interest.

Fratley paused a moment before replying, he knew he would need to make his supplies last until he reached Lindblum. Yet he dare not think of what Quilan might do if he didn't offer it any food. He quickly reached the conclusion that it would not hurt to give up a small portion of food.

"Okay." Fratley replied, reaching into his backpack whilst Quilan jumped up and down in delight. Fratley took out a small piece of bread, and he noticed the creature begin to dribble. "Here."

Quilan grabbed the piece of bread and sniffed it briefly, before consuming it in a matter of seconds. Quilan sighed with content before speaking again.

"Thanks." Quilan said gratefully.

"You're welcome." Fratley stated. "Do you know where I may find some shelter?"

"Shelter?" Quilan repeated, before thinking for a moment. "You see master! He know what to do!"

“Okay, where may I find this master?” Fratley inquired.

“I show you!” Quilan replied happily, eager to help Fratley after having the small snack.

Quilan lead Fratley away from the frog inhabited pond through some more marsh towards a wooden shack deep in the swamp. Evidently, this was where the main settlement lay, as Fratley could make out various small wooden shelters which looked poorly built. They were heading for the nearest building, which looked the better kept shack of the group. The two crossed a small wooden path and up a very small flight of wooden stairs into the shack.

As the two entered, Fratley noticed the presence of another one of these strange creatures. However, it stood out in its red apron compared to the others. The creature eyed Fratley suspiciously from behind the table it was stood behind as Quilan waddled up to greet it.

“Master, I find this man near the pool.” Quilan began. “He called Fratley. He friendly, and he want shelter.”

The creature kept his gaze on Fratley, and paused for a moment before responding.

“I Quale of the Qu clan.” Quale introduced himself. “You can stay in this shack tonight. You get long grass for your bed. We prepare feast.”

Fratley felt a little insulted at having to sleep on a pile of grass, but looking at the tribe he didn't think they would care much for decent bed construction, nor did they look like they would make a proper bed last for very long. In any case, he had some shelter for the night, which was far better than sleeping out on the plains and something he could take consolation for.

“Thank you.” Fratley replied politely, before turning to leave the shack.

It wasn't long before Fratley had cut up a large pile of long grass with his lance. In only a few minutes, Fratley had such a large pile he felt he had more than enough to make a comfortable bed for the night. He took the large pile of grass to the shack and decided to spend the remaining time looking around the marsh.

It had become evident to Fratley that the Qus mainly spent their time hunting down and eating frogs. Fratley never saw them do anything else, no talking, no training in combat, no trade, the entire society circled around hunting frogs.

An awful thought then entered Fratley's mind, if these Qus, or whatever they were, were preparing a meal for him and their favourite meal was frogs, they might try to feed him the same thing. Fratley shuddered for a moment, but then realised there wasn't anything he could do. He didn't want to upset them or make them angry, and he only had just enough food for his journey tomorrow.

After his short walk around the swamp, Fratley made his way back to the shack where Quale had spoken to him. As he entered, he found that his fear had come true. A large table was set up, filled with plates of frogs cooked in different ways and a large variation of salads and breads.

Both Quale, Quilan and a few other Qus were stood around the table, many of them drooling over the feast lay out in front of them. Quale made what appeared to be smile from the end of the room.

“Ah Fratley! Welcome!” Quale said merrily motioning for Fratley to come to the table.

Fratley slowly made his way to the banquet table, looking at his hosts who were all eyeing him with interest. When Fratley stood at the table, Quale spoke again.

“Let the feast begin!” Quale announced.

At that very instant, all of the Qus at the table began ramming any food within reach into their mouths and chewing noisily. Fratley paused for a brief moment, disgusted with their table etiquette, before realising that he should begin eating if he was to get any food. He quickly grabbed a piece of bread and began munching it. Thankfully, Fratley managed to consume a variety of non-frog foods, all of which had been prepared very well, to satisfy his hunger. He did wish that there had been a

better selection of meat on the table. However, he was grateful that his hosts hadn't took note of the fact he had not eaten any of the frogs on the table, they were too busy stuffing themselves they didn't pay any attention to Fratley at all.

The feast ended almost as quickly as it begun, with the Qus leaving the table one by one when they had stuffed themselves full or there was no more food left at the table, mainly the latter. One or two of them stayed to clean up the table with Quale, as they were the chefs who had prepared the meal. Fratley aided them in cleaning away after he had finished, which was a considerable amount of time after the other Qus.

After everything had been put away, everyone noticed that the sun had begun to set, and it was beginning to get dark. The Qus quickly retired to their so-called beds without bothering to change or performing any other acts of hygiene. Fratley usually would have took off most of his clothes but he thought that seeing his bed consisted of a pile of long grass in a room where the wind could easily blow through the window he decided just to take of his jacket and use it for cover.

I woke up after a rather restless sleep to be greeted to breakfast: consisting largely of frogs. Unfortunately I did not have the same good fortune as yesterday evening, all of the breads were quickly consumed by me and my hosts and they barely filled my appetite. Not wanting to leave on an empty stomach, I had no choice but to eat some frogs, which I only just managed to stomach. I'm still trying to rid my memory of the taste.

I bid farewell to my unusual hosts. The Qus are a very strange race indeed, yet they prove to me that there can be a life free from war or combat, shallow as it may be. I leave the marsh and feel dry land beneath my feet once again. Misty plains fill this part of the journey as well. As always I try to keep alert, trying to detect monsters with my ears rather than my eyes.

I could see my next destination long before I was anywhere near it. Although through the mist all I could make was what seemed like a large, man-made hill. Airships flew into the city, but they looked liked flies from where I was standing. This made it much easier to tell where I was going.

Lindblum, the grand metropolis of the Mist Continent, was to be the next stop on my journey.

--Chapter 34: Lindblum--

As I drew closer to the city of Lindblum, I found that it was much larger than I ever imagined. I entered the city through the "Dragon's Gate" and found myself in a massive bustling metropolis. The city is so large, I feel like an ant compared to the massive buildings and walls that surround me. The streets are filled with activity, filled with crowds of humans and demi-humans each doing their daily business.

The first thing on my mind was to find an inn; usually this wouldn't prove too much trouble, although in this city I found it was easy to get lost. I found myself asking for directions off some of the locals. I eventually found my way to one of the many inns in the city. For the first time on this journey I had do dig into my savings and pay a small fee to stay for the night and for some food. At long last, I can permit myself to rest after a long journey.

For three days Fratley had been travelling now, and he made enormous progress. Fratley was fairly proud of himself for the journey he had made, but he knew it would be a long way before his journey would end.

The next part of the journey in Fratley's plan involved getting an airship ride. It was too mountainous around the area to go by foot and Fratley knew that a chocobo wouldn't able to trek over the mountains in his path. He would travel by air to Alexandria, or the nearby village Dali, whichever was cheaper.

After breakfast, Fratley decided to explore Lindblum and see what the great city had to offer, although his main idea was finding where we could purchase an airship ride. Amazingly, the city streets were even more crowded than they had been the previous evening when Fratley first arrived.

Thousands of citizens from places all around Gaia walked on the streets doing business with each other and trading goods. Fratley even managed the spot the odd Burmecian wandering through the city.

After much exploring and a few instances of stopping to ask for directions, Fratley eventually found an air-cab terminal which would take him almost directly to an area where he could ask for an airship ride. He hopped onto the air-cab in the brief interval that the doors opened and joined a rather large crowd of businessmen. He wasn't surprised; the cab was heading for the Industrial District, where he heard that the factories and major businesses of Lindblum were to be found.

Fratley was forced to stand in the crowded and cramped air-cab and he took hold of one of the support bars inside. The doors shut firmly, and Fratley could clearly hear the engines of the air-cab starting up. A jolt nearly sent Fratley flying into someone next to him as the air-cab shot away with a surprisingly fast speed. Fratley clung to the support bar and regained his balance; he wasn't used to this kind of transport.

Everyone else in the cab didn't look fazed; they were clearly used to the movement of the air-cab after using it day after day.

After a minute or so of movement, the air-cab jolted to a halt, nearly sending Fratley sailing into the wall of the cab. The doors swung open and Fratley leapt out of the doors as fast as he could, desperate to get off the wretched air-cab. The majority of the other passengers of the air-cab soon followed him.

"Just how am I going to survive on an airship if I can barely stand a mere air-cab?" Fratley thought to himself as he walked away. He rid his mind of such a thought and focused on finding said airship to take him to his next destination.

After taking some time to look around the district, Fratley saw there were a vast amount of airships owned by the local businesses, many of which were undertaking frequent deliveries to neighbouring lands. Almost certainly there would be one or two making shipments to either Alexandria or Dali, the only question was persuading the owners of the ships to permit him to ride with their delivery. Fratley decided to ask around to see if it were possible. He was directed towards a business which often let their airships be used for taking nobles to foreign towns and cities.

"So you're interesting in getting an airship ride to the Alexandrian Kingdom..." The businessmen said merrily whilst rubbing his hand through his slick black hair.

"Yes." Fratley replied affirmatively.

"Are you sure you've got the money for it?" The businessmen asked looking slightly concerned.

"How much is it?" Fratley inquired.

"Well, our fare to Treno is 8500 gil, the fare to Dali is 9000 gil, and it will cost you 10000 gil if you want to go to Alexandria directly." The businessmen answered firmly.

"T-Ten thousand gil!!!" Fratley repeated in shock, his face twisted with horror. "And nine thousand just to go to Dali!?"

"Yes." The businessmen stated.

Fratley's ears fell and he made a heavy sigh. He didn't even have half of the amount required to pay for an airship ride for any one of those destinations. He never thought it would be so expensive.

"I'm sorry, I can't afford that." Fratley said glumly. "I shall just leave now." With that, Fratley turned and left the building.

Fratley didn't know what to do, he had originally planned to get an airship ride to Dali or Alexandria and walk the rest of the way. However, he had nowhere near the amount of gil necessary to purchase an airship ride. After thinking for a while, Fratley found that he had two choices, he

could backtrack back into the Burmecian kingdom and travel through North Gate to Alexandria, or he could get a job here and save up the money needed to go on his desired airship ride.

After much consideration, Fratley decided to do the second of the two options. He didn't want to undo all of the work he had done so far and put three days travel to waste. He also thought that if he entered the Burmecian Kingdom again he would be incredibly tempted to return home, and Freya would almost certainly prevent him from leaving again.

During the remaining part of the day, Fratley managed to rent some cheap lodgings where he could stay until he had earned the money he needed and set off to find some form of work. He eventually managed to join the guards in helping to protect the city from local monsters outside the gates. This was ideal for Fratley as it let him get some good training and experience. Not only that, but it paid out some decent gil, enough to keep Fratley going and still leave a fair amount to save for the airship ride.

On the fifth morning since Fratley's arrival, a knock on the door stirred Fratley from his sleep. He quickly rose from his bed and pulled on some clothes to cover himself and answered the door.

He found himself staring at nothing, until he felt something tug at the bottom of his trousers. He looked down to see a moogles looking back at him with a smile, and a letter in the grip of its paw.

"I have a letter for you kupo!" The moogles chirped merrily before lifting itself off the ground with its tiny wings.

"Thank-you." Fratley said before taking the letter out of the moogles's grasp and opening it. As he expected, it was a reply to the letter he sent to General Beatrix.

To Sir Iron-Tail Fratley of Burmecia

I am honoured by your challenge, and that you are making such an effort to travel to our great nation to face me. However, I do not see any reason as to why we should fight, and that my duties to protect the Royal Family would interfere with any time to set aside to fight you. Although I would not want you to waste such a journey, nor do I wish to be impolite. I will see if I can get some time to face you, and I will accept your challenge. I have also heard many tales about your strength; it will be interesting to see if they are true.

Yours truly,

General Beatrix

Fratley decided to get a piece of parchment and a quill and write a suitable response.

To General Beatrix of Alexandria

I am extremely glad that you have decided to accept my challenge. However, my journey has come to a halt for the time-being as I need to earn enough money to pay to travel to Alexandria by air. I will inform you through moogles when I am able to proceed with the rest of my journey, and I hope you can have patience until my arrival.

Yours truly,

Sir Iron-Tail Fratley

Fratley then rolled up the parchment and tied it together before passing it to the moogles.

"Send this reply back to General Beatrix as soon as possible." Fratley stated to the moogles.

"Sure thing kupo!" The moogles answered happily before turning and flying out of the door.

Fratley watched the moogles leave before getting ready for another day of guarding the city gates. As

every day passed, Fratley would get more gil, and get closer to the dream of finishing his journey. He knew it would take quite a long time to earn the money he needed.

--Chapter 35: Festival of the Hunt--

Eight months had passed since Fratley had first arrived in Lindblum, each day filled with the hard work of slaying monsters that strayed too close to the city and occasionally patrolling the inside of the city and stopping thieves and other criminals. Thanks to that he nearly had enough money to buy the airship ticket he so desperately wanted. He wanted more money than he needed for the ticket though, for he knew he would need to pay to stay at inns and for buying more supplies at Dali and Alexandria.

Fratley got up and dressed himself before continuing his usual routine, consisting of feeding himself and making his way to the place where he was to stand post at, usually around the city gates. However, today had a difference as he spotted several flyers dotted around the city advertising something which caught his interest.

FESTIVAL OF THE HUNT!

Think you have what it takes to become the Master Hunter? See how you fare against the monsters that are let loose throughout the city! The stronger the beast you slay, the greater your score! The hunter with the greatest score at the end of the time limit wins the title of Master Hunter and a prize of their choosing. For those interested, please sign up at the registration booth located at the entrance of the Grand Castle.

“This must be Lindblum’s equivalent of the Dragon Knight tournament.” Fratley mused to himself. “I suppose I should enter, it would be a good test of my training and if I win, I could get that airship ticket I need.”

Fratley continued to go to his post, where news of the festival had already taken some affect as Fratley was ordered to capture monsters and place them in cages rather than kill them so they could be used in the festival.

Fratley’s day of work finished and he proceeded to get an air-cab to the Grand Castle, where he signed up to enter the contest. He decided to choose the airship ticket for his prize; he hoped that it wasn’t too much to ask for.

A few more days passed and eventually the day of the festival arrived. Fratley had already witnessed a taste of what he was up against; having caught a lot of the monsters he was going to be up against. He knew there wouldn’t be anything that would prove too much trouble for him and he fancied his chances of winning the contest. However, he knew better than to grow too confident and he had no idea of what the other participants were like.

As Fratley made his way to the castle for instructions, he noticed citizens being lead by the city guards up to the rooftops and safe, secluded places where they would be away from the reach of any monster. He also spotted other hunters making their way to the castle.

A short amount of time later, Fratley was at the castle entrance gathered with other hunters, many of which were strong bandits and bounty hunters, all hoping to claim the top prize.

After everyone had gathered at the entrance to the castle, an old man with a long grey beard appeared upon a balcony above them. It was Master Artania, the adviser and right hand man of Regent Cid, ruler of Lindblum. A hush filled the room as he began to speak.

“Greetings hunters.” Master Artania began. “I am glad that so many of you wish to participate in this year’s festival. The rules are simple. You have 30 minutes to find and kill as many monsters that are roaming the city. On each monster there is a wooden tag with a number on it. That is the number of points you receive for killing that monster. The stronger the beast, the higher the score you receive. You must collect as many tags as you can in the time limit. The winner is the hunter with the most points at the end of the festival. There is also one super-strong beast that will give an

enormous score to the one who manages to kill it.” Master Artania then made a stern look. “Also, attempting to hurt or kill any of your fellow hunters will result in a disqualification and a possible punishment by law.” He paused, shortly before smiling and continuing. “I wish you all the best of luck. The guards will escort you to your starting positions.”

Various guards then came and lead the eager hunters to random places in the city. Fratley was lead to somewhere in the Theatre District, an area he wasn't too familiar with. He would be keen to get to another district, but he knew that would take precious time.

Fratley's ears picked up the loud boom of a cannon being fired, and he could hear monsters growling and running from around him. He knew this signified the beginning of the festival. Tactics would play a key part into Fratley's score, this area was new, and so he knew no good locations nearby to scout monsters or to be safe from being ambushed. Using the air-cabs to get to a district he did know would waste precious time, and every second counted. He needed a strategy to have a hope of victory.

Fratley thought for a moment, before the growl of a Fang some distance behind him caught his attention. He turned around, before approaching slowly to the location of the source of the noise. Sure enough, a Fang was prowling around, looking for any unwary hunters. By some luck, it hadn't noticed Fratley's approach just yet. It turned and caught a glimpse of Fratley, but before it could react Fratley had already slashed at its neck and seen to the creature's demise. The Fang fell, dead. Blood began pouring profusely from its neck due to the near decapitation. Fratley quickly checked it's body and found what he was looking for, a small wooden tag was attached the fiend's leg, labelled with a small piece of parchment with a number fifteen written on it.

“Fifteen points from the word go.” Fratley thought happily to himself. Then, something dawned on him. He had detected the monster from the noise it made, just like he had to when travelling on the plains. If he relied on sound rather than sight, he would have a big advantage over the other hunters as to detecting monsters thanks to his Burmecian ears, which were naturally better than those of a human.

Fratley left the monster and began exploring the district, with his lance ready to strike and his ears trying to detect any movement, growl or roar from a nearby monster. It wasn't long before Fratley found another monster, which he made light work of. About a minute later, Fratley made a third kill for more points.

“I only wish it was easier to make my way around.” Fratley mused to himself, before glancing skyward.

Yet another idea hit Fratley, as he saw the rooftops of the buildings in his gaze. “Why hadn't I thought of it before?” Fratley asked himself before putting another natural advantage to use and taking a giant leap onto the top of a nearby rooftop.

Leaping across the rooftops as if they are skips in a park, Fratley cast looks at the areas below the rooftops between jumps whilst still keeping his ears in good use. He found he was finding and killing monsters at a much faster rate by jumping across the rooftops. Also, by doing this he was practically immune to ambush attacks from monsters and could even catch them off-guard very easily. It wasn't long before Fratley racked up an impressive collection of number tags.

Scouting the other rooftops, Fratley couldn't see anyone else using the rooftops like he was. Evidently there were no other Burmecians who were in the contest, which wasn't much of a surprise to Fratley; nearly all of the few Burmecians he saw in Lindblum were there for trade. Fratley thought there would be no-one who could beat him; he had what would seem an unfair advantage against the other hunters. However, Fratley pressed on, he knew he needed all the points he could get and he had been keen to find the super-strong beast that Artania had mentioned. He wanted a good challenge from this festival, something he hadn't got from the monsters he had slain so far.

After fifteen minutes or so, Fratley began to hear something different to the regular growls or chirps from the enemies he had slain so far. He began hearing roars and stomps, and he was almost certain that this was from the monster he was searching for. Yet, something seemed familiar about these roars, it was as if Fratley had faced the monster before, but Fratley couldn't recall exactly what it was. As he drew closer, it began to become more evident, and Fratley realised what it was.

"It couldn't be..." Fratley thought, but his idea was proved wrong as he saw the beast on the street below him gliding across the ground.

A slightly larger than normal Ironite was gliding through the streets, growling and desperately trying to find a way back to its original habitat.

Fratley had enough experiences with Ironites to know exactly how to slay the beast. He took aim, and threw his spear at the dragon's skull, the lance hit the beast exactly where he targeted and the beast was severely weakened and blood began to pour out of its skull. The monster screamed with pain and staggered for a moment before collapsing to the ground.

Fratley jumped down from the rooftop and retrieved his lance from the creature's skull. He searched the Ironite's body for the tag he needed, and once again found it on the creature's leg. As he examined the tag, an expression shock filled Fratley's face. This Ironite had given him one-hundred points.

"This can't be...!" Fratley thought to himself. "This is the super-strong monster!? A creature which I had to face as a student in my first real battle?!"

To Fratley, an Ironite was hardly considered "super-strong"; there were many dragons that surrounded Burmecia which were far more powerful than a mere Ironite. Fratley had faced one or two them in his days as a Dragon Knight. Although many of the other contestants were just bandits, and many did not have the basic training as a knight, and an Ironite would prove a formidable foe to the untrained or unskilled.

Fratley hadn't moved far away from the Ironite before the firing of a cannon caught his attention. Shortly afterwards, he could also hear the marching of the guards into the city. The time limit had expired, the competition was over.

--Chapter 36: Airship Ride--

Fratley quickly found a guard and was taken back to the entrance of the Grand Castle. There, many hunters were handing in their tags to frantic castle guards who were desperate to count them and record the score as quickly as possible. Fratley was then startled by a voice beside him.

"Sir, could you please show me the tags that you have collected?" A guard asked politely, it was the same guard who had just escorted him to the palace.

"Oh, of course." Fratley replied, before fumbling in his pockets for the massive stash of tags he had. "Here you are."

The guard was shocked by the giant collection of tags and began adding them up using a piece of parchment for his calculation. It took a while for the guard to add up the total; once he did the guard could hardly believe it.

"Sir, y-you have scored 175 points..." The guard stated in disbelief. "What is your name?"

"Sir Iron-tail Fratley of Burmecia." Fratley answered.

The guard nodded in response, before heading back to the group of guards and confirming Fratley's score. The guards entered the castle, leaving the group of hunters to mingle and rest after their long trial. The hunters boasted and talked amongst themselves for a few moments before the Regent of Lindblum presented himself, escorted by Master Artania and a collection of guards. A hush quickly filled the group of hunters. Master Artania addressed the crowd first.

“As part of the tradition, the Regent is to give the winner his or her prize in person.” Master Artania stated. “Presenting his honour, Regent Cid Fabool the ninth.”

“Greetings hunters.” Regent Cid began. “This year’s festival was an amazing spectacle to watch, and the winning score this year was one of our highest scores to date. With a score of one hundred and seventy five points, the winner of this year’s Festival of the Hunt is Sir “Iron-tail” Fratley from Burmecia!”

There was a round of applause from the audience, and Fratley was ushered up to meet the Regent to claim his prize.

“I am honoured that you have travelled such a way to enter this competition.” Cid began. “Your high score is truly a sign of your skill. You have earned the title of this year’s Master Hunter and the prize of your choice, a ticket to allow you to travel to the city of Alexandria by one of our top-class airships. Here, you deserve it.” With that, Cid handed over the Master Hunter title, which was a golden relic almost similar to a cup. Along with that he passed over the airship ticket that Fratley was so desperately after.

“Thank-you very much.” Fratley said courteously with a little bow of respect. “Now I may continue my journey through the continent.”

“Good luck to you.” Cid blessed. “Now, a feast is being prepared in the banquet hall of the castle, if you will follow the guards they will show you the way.”

Once Cid had finished he and Master Artania made their way back into the castle, soon the guards were making sure the crowd of hunters made their way to the massive banquet hall and that they didn’t lead astray.

The hunters were welcomed with an enormous feast of various meats and delicacies which filled the long, vast tables in the hall. All of the hunters were eager for a meal after the long trial of the hunt, the appetizing scents of the food tantalised them and increased their hunger.

The Regent was at the front of the hall, accompanied by his wife Hilda and Master Artania. When the entire group had entered the hall and the guards had taken their posts the Regent spoke.

“Let the feast begin.”

Immediately after this statement had been made the hunters began to gorge themselves on the selection of food around them. Fratley started eating as well, although with more etiquette than a lot of the others in the room. He was grateful for the free meal, although his mind was more focused on the journey ahead. He knew he would have to inform Beatrix that he would arrive in Alexandria and that it would not be long before he faced her in battle.

His train of thought was continually disrupted by fellow hunters congratulating him and asking him how he obtained such a high score.

Eventually the feast came to an end and the group of people began to make their way out of the castle, and many servants entered the hall to clear everything away. Fratley was one of the first to leave the hall, as his appetite was quickly satisfied by the large amount of food and he had quickly become bored with the congratulations and being continually asked about how he won the contest. He also had other things on his mind, mainly the journey ahead.

Fratley made his way back to his lodgings after leaving the castle. He decided to wait until tomorrow to use his airship ticket, as it would give him enough time to pack his things and rest up from the events of the festival.

However, the first thing Fratley decided to do was to look for a moogle. He knew that one was kept in one of the inns he had stayed at when he first arrived at Lindblum. After a little search in the inn, Fratley managed to find the moogle in one of the spare rooms. As he entered, the moogle chirped happily and flew towards him to greet him.

“Hello there, kupo! Can I help you kupo?” The moogles squeaked happily.

“Yes, I would like to send another letter to General Beatrix.” Fratley stated in a fairly formal manner.

“Sure thing kupo!” The moogles replied before flying to a nearby desk and picking up some parchment and a quill before returning to the Burmecian.

Fratley took the quill and parchment and began to write.

To General Beatrix of Alexandria

You will recall I wrote to you saying I would have to stay in Lindblum and earn enough money to purchase an airship ride to Alexandria before I could face you. Now, after winning the Festival of the Hunt I have managed to win the airship ticket I need. I will leave Lindblum tomorrow and come to Alexandria. I hope you will inform me of a time where we could fight each other in private and not interfere with your duties as a General as soon as possible.

Yours truly,

Sir Iron-Tail Fratley

Fratley rolled up his finished letter and tied it up before passing it to the moogles who were eagerly waiting to deliver the letter. The moogles picked it up and started flapping their set of small wings.

“Thank-you. You’ve been a great help to me.” Fratley blessed the moogles.

“Think nothing of it kupo!” The moogles answered merrily before flying out of the room.

Fratley left the inn shortly afterwards and continued his way towards his lodgings. Today would be the last day they would be home to him. When he got there, he started packing up his things ready for tomorrow. He spent the rest of the day resting up for the journey ahead.

The following morning came quickly and Fratley rose early, got dressed and ate some breakfast. He picked up all of his belongings and locked up the small set of rooms he had been living in for nearly a year. After returning the key to the landlord he had rented his temporary home from he set off towards the Industrial District where he would get his airship ride.

After a short air-cab ride, which Fratley had gotten used to after using them daily during his long stay in Lindblum, Fratley quickly found the airship business he had been pointed to during his last visit in the district. He was greeted by the same businessman he had met last time.

“Back again eh?” The businessman asked with a grin. “I heard about you winning the festival. Congratulations, that was quite a feat. You brought your ticket?”

Fratley smiled back before flashing his ticket. “Of course.”

“Right this way sir.” The businessman stated leading Fratley to a small group of nobles who were huddled around a fairly impressive airship.

Fratley had never seen an airship this close before, and he was in awe. The airship had a large, round blue hull and a sizable cab beneath it, with plenty of room for the group of nobles.

The door at the bottom of the airship opened, and a ladder was placed down from the door of the airship so that the passengers could climb up into the airship. The nobles climbed up the ladder a few at a time, but Fratley had the instinct to jump straight into the airship, not bothering with the ladder.

When everyone had climbed aboard and the crew aboard the ship had checked everyone’s tickets, the door of the airship was closed. Most of the crew went to the driving cabin of the vehicle and the passengers were led by one of the crew into an area with seats and plenty of windows to look outside.

Many of the nobles took a seat, but Fratley decided to walk towards one of the windows of the

cabin. Many of the nobles looked rather uncomfortable in the presence of the Burmecian who was blocking part of their view, whether that was because he was a Burmecian or that he was wearing scruffy travelling gear compared to their elegant garments was uncertain. Fratley avoided their icy stares and turned his focus to the window.

Fratley's sensitive ears picked up the sound of the loud roar of the engines which were starting up. The propellers of the airship were spinning and all of a sudden a jolt of the airship caused Fratley to lose his balance. When he managed to steady himself, he watched curiously as the ground beneath him became more distant and difficult to see, and was eventually completely covered by the mist that surrounded Lindblum, which was slowly moving away in his view.

The journey had begun once again.

--Chapter 37: Alexandria--

Fratley spent his time on the airship focusing his mind for the challenge he was about to face whilst watching the misty sky in front of him. Occasionally he was snapped out of his thought train by jolts in the airship from air turbulence. He paid no attention to the awful looks of the nobles around him; he sealed his mind almost completely from anything around him.

Eventually, something did catch his attention; he noticed that the airship had begun to descend in the sky. The misty floor laid out in his view began to rise. After about fifty minutes of sailing through the skies they were closing in on their destination. It wasn't long before an announcement was made by one of the crew members to inform everyone that were about to reach their destination and to ready themselves for landing.

The airship descended, and in the mist began to reveal the surrounding mountains and villages of the land. If anyone was able to look out of the front of the airship, they would be able to pick out the castle of Alexandria and the rest of the city.

Fratley ear's heard the engines begin to slow down to a stop, and the airship ceased to move. Looking outside he could see a notably small docking area compared to the vast airship dock at Lindblum.

The door of the airship was opened, and the crew ensured a safe exit for their passengers who left by the safe ladder, all of course except for Fratley, who stuck with his habit of jumping.

The group of nobles were greeted by a small handful of Alexandrian soldiers who were quick to escort them outside of the small dock. As the group was lead to the way out of the dock, Fratley was eager to get the attention of one of the guards. It was not until he was actually at the exit when he was able to talk to one of the guards.

"I must ask you to leave the docks, Sir." One of the guards stated, eyeing Fratley suspiciously.

"I wish to ask a request of you." Fratley answered, trying to be polite.

The guard merely continued looking at him with the same expression, not wanting to trust the Burmecian for a moment.

"I would appreciate it if you were to inform General Beatrix that Sir Fratley has arrived." Fratley continued, maintaining his formal tone.

"Very well." The guard answered, before motioning him to the door.

"Thank-you." Fratley said kindly before leaving the dock.

Fratley found himself in a sparse street, not far away from Alexandria castle, which was looming over in the near-distance and was the first thing to catch Fratley's attention. He decided to look around, knowing he would need to find an inn and somewhere to eat. Fratley was fascinated with the streets of Alexandria, although they weren't as busy as those of Lindblum, they were filled with unusual looking locals, including a family that resembled hippos.

However, Fratley did feel uncomfortable at the fact there was a pair of Alexandrian guards never far from sight, and he found he almost always had their undivided attention. It was as if they were waiting for him to try something. This made Fratley all the more eager to find the inn he was looking for.

He was able to find a nearby inn fairly quickly and managed to get a bed for the night. Conveniently there was a bar only a stones throw away from the inn Fratley was to stay at. Fratley got something to eat there and quickly turned in for the night.

Fratley woke up fairly early the following morning and began to dress himself when he heard something at the door of his small room.

“You awake, kupo?” A voice called at the door.

Fratley opened the door and was greeted by a moogle, who flew into the room and stood proud on Fratley’s bed. It presented not one, but two letters to Fratley.

“I’ve got some mail for you kupo” The moogle chirped.

Fratley picked up the two letters from the moogle and unrolled the first one. As he expected, it was a reply from Beatrix.

To Sir Iron-Tail Fratley of Burmecia

I am glad to see that you are able to finish your journey to our city. I am afraid my duties as a General take up practically all of my day, even though I have less to do during this time of peace between the nations of the Mist Continent. I would be able to accept your challenge early in the morning, before I have to report to her majesty for duty. You can meet me in the courtyard of Alexandria castle at half past seven in the morning. This will give us enough time and plenty of room to fight. I will order my guards to permit you to enter the castle at that time.

Yours truly,

General Beatrix

Fratley smiled to himself as he rolled the letter back up and placed it back on a small wooden table next to his bed. Although it was too late to go and face her now as it was already eight o’clock, he would certainly be able to meet her the following morning. He turned his attention onto his second letter, which he had not been expecting.

He unrolled the second letter and immediately recognised the handwriting. This letter had been written by Freya, who he had not thought to write to during his journey, despite the fact he still thought about her and missed her dearly.

To my dearest Fratley,

Word has reached Burmecia that you have won the Festival of the Hunt in Lindblum. When I heard the news I was relieved to hear you were still alive and doing well. Ever since you left I have been worrying about you so and I have not stopped thinking about you. Where have you been? Why haven’t you written to me?

I have been eagerly awaiting your return to Burmecia over the past months; only as the time passed I have heard more rumours about your death out on the plains. I have never believed them; I have always had faith in you.

I love you Fratley, and I will never forget you, no matter what happens.

Please come home soon.

Love,

Freya

An overwhelming sense of guilt filled Fratley as he finished reading the letter. Freya had been worrying about him so much, and he hadn't even bothered to send a little letter telling her he was okay; a little note telling her he loved her. He had missed her too, but he thought he have been back home by now, he hadn't meant to be away this long.

"Are you going to write a reply kupo?" The moogle inquired.

Fratley shook his head. He figured that after he had duelled with Beatrix tomorrow he would begin the journey home; it would only take a few days to reach Burmecia. Freya would receive the letter just to see him come through the gates of Burmecia immediately afterwards. He didn't need to waste time writing a letter.

"Okay then. Bye kupo!" The moogle chirped shortly before flying out of the room.

Fratley stored the two letters somewhere safe in his travel bag and left the inn to get something to eat from one of the local cafes. He spent the day exploring the town and buying some supplies for his journey home.

The following morning came, and although the sun had not yet fully risen Fratley had risen from his bed. He quickly dressed himself and a small portion of the food he had the previous day so he was not hungry during his fight. He left the inn quietly before making his way to the castle, only of the only things he knew how to get to thanks to its gigantic structure.

Just as Beatrix promised, the guards permitted Fratley to enter the front gate leading to the castle. However, this did not stop them from giving him icy stares. They were not keen on the idea of having a Burmecian wander into the castle.

Fratley walked through the gate quickly, wanting to avoid the looks he was getting from the guards. As he passed through the gate he was greeted by a massive moat blocking his path into the castle. Another guard was waiting for him on a small row boat to take him to the courtyard.

Fratley climbed into the boat and the Alexandrian shoved off and began rowing the boat towards the castle. Thankfully the guard was too busy with the boat to give Fratley much notice; although whenever the guard did give Fratley a glance there was not a friendly expression on her face. Fratley was curious as to why all of the Alexandrians were so suspicious and hateful of him. Did they hold this grudge just because he was Burmecian?

Fratley turned his attention to the castle, and watched as the courtyard and other dock came closer into view. The ship was pulled up to the dock and Fratley quickly leapt off the boat. He stepped further into the courtyard and heard a voice call out to him from his right.

"So you've finally arrived."

Fratley turned and saw the General, the one whom he had heard so much about. Wearing her usual brown leather leggings and white blouse, she looked at him with interest with her one eye.

"I've been looking forward to meeting you; I have been craving a challenge for quite some time." Beatrix continued, shortly before drawing her famous Save the Queen sword. "Let's see how good you are."

"Now I'll see just why you are so well-known and feared." Fratley said with a little smile, whilst readying his lance. "Let's fight!"

--Chapter 38: Face-off--

The two warriors charged towards each other, and the clashing of metal could be heard throughout the courtyard as Fratley and Beatrix blocked each others strikes. Fratley found he was struggling to keep up with Beatrix's flurry of slashes, but he was still keeping his ground and trying for a decent counter. Eventually, Fratley realised he wasn't going to get an advantage this way and broke apart from Beatrix by taking a quick leap back across the courtyard.

Fratley tried to gather some energy for a Dragon Knight ability, but found he didn't have the time; Beatrix was already tearing across the courtyard towards him. Beatrix took a swing, only to hit air as Fratley leapt just above her head and out of her range. As he hovered above her, he took a swing at her with his lance, Beatrix ducked to evade the blow, but the lance just caught her back and caused a minor scratch.

Fratley landed and had to jump back immediately to avoid another swing from Beatrix. He decided to try and prepare another Dragon Knight skill.

"Interesting..." Beatrix thought. "He actually managed to catch me out. This looks like this is going to be first real challenge I've had for a long while."

Beatrix saw Fratley gathering energy for his attack and ran forward to prevent him from unleashing it. Fratley scouted her and leapt into the air to avoid her whilst still gathering the energy. Beatrix then decided to try a special technique of her own and began focusing on a spell whilst keeping her eye on Fratley.

Fratley finished charging up his attack and pointed his lance at Beatrix.

"Cherry Blossom!" Fratley chanted, and a stream of rose petals shot down on Beatrix, before being engulfed in a massive flame. Fratley watched to see what damage he had done, but when the dust settled he was startled at what he saw.

A blue bubble had surrounded Beatrix and blocked the attack from doing much damage. Evidently Beatrix had used her attack too. The white magic of shell had left Beatrix virtually untouched.

Fratley cursed as he landed back on the ground, she was as tough as he had been told. Beatrix charged towards him once again and Fratley took up a defensive stance. Another round of slashing and blocking began and once again Fratley struggled to keep up with Beatrix's strikes.

Once again, Fratley leapt back to break up the little tussle and the two warriors stared at each other for a brief moment whilst thinking of their next tactic. Fratley began gathering energy, and he lance began to glow an eerie white colour. Beatrix responded by preparing another white magic spell.

Fratley finished powering up his attack and charged towards Beatrix with his lance pointing out ready to skewer. As he approached Beatrix he saw her cast her magic attack.

All of a sudden, a black shroud covered Fratley's eyes and he could no longer see. He unleashed his lancer attack but it missed completely as Beatrix easily dodged the blind man's attack.

Fratley's ears pricked for a second, as he tried to deduce Beatrix's location. He heard Beatrix advance towards his left, and he jumped back to the right in time to avoid an attack. Beatrix tried another attack, approaching Fratley from the front, but Fratley stepped back and swung his lance in an arc in front of him to try and hit her. Beatrix blocked the strike and a deadlock ensued. Fratley decided a physical confrontation would not give him any advantage with the ailment Beatrix had inflicted on him and broke the deadlock with another leap backwards.

"Impressive." Beatrix thought. "Most people never manage to last longer than one or two strikes after I blind them with that spell. He's accustomed to using his other senses. However, I think it's time to decide this match."

Fratley was about to prepare another Dragon Knight ability to try and finish his formidable opponent and end the fight. That was until he heard Beatrix focusing up some form of attack. He didn't think it was a magic spell, but before he could get any ideas on what it was he heard the attack being unleashed. He instinctively lowered his head and took up a defensive stance. A flash of blue light filled his eyes and tremendous amount of pain filled his head and upper body as quickly as the flash came and went. Fratley collapsed to the ground, defeated.

A look of concern filled Beatrix's face as she saw the attack take affect. She had aimed the attack for Fratley's chest, but Fratley's movement had caused the attack to hit parts of his head as well as

some areas of his chest. Luckily she had held back on the attack, as she didn't want to kill the Burmecian, but she still feared for his safety.

Beatrix rushed up to check the wounded warrior and was relieved to see his chest still rising and falling. He was still alive. He was clearly much tougher than she had realised, most normal men would have died after taking that attack like that.

However, that was not the end of her concerns. Fratley needed some medical care and rest, and she knew that the Queen would not think kindly of his presence in the castle. Thinking quickly, she lifted his body and walked towards the moat, where the Alexandrian guard still had the boat, after watching the fight with great interest. Beatrix placed Fratley into the boat and turned to the guard.

"Take us across." Beatrix ordered.

"Yes ma'am." The guard replied with a quick salute and began rowing the boat across the moat.

Beatrix looked at the fallen warrior as the boat travelled across towards the castle gate. Her mind was filled with one resolution - she was going to ensure that Fratley survived, that he recovered and was able to fight her again. She did not want to take his life, not now. He had not committed any crimes against Alexandria and he only wanted to test his strength. Besides, he had been the first real challenge she had had for a long time. If she let him live, she would have all the more reason to train.

Fratley woke up to a cold feeling around his chest and his head. He found that a cold, damp cloth had been placed onto his chest and a smaller one had been placed on his head. He rose up to a sitting position, which caught the attention of someone else in the room.

"Oh! You're awake!" Fratley heard someone exclaim. "Please, try not to move too much, you need to rest."

Fratley looked around and saw a particularly small man with an extremely long nose and big, thick rimmed glasses. He was wearing a large top-hat and a jacket. The man rushed over to Fratley's bedside and tried to force him to lie down. Fratley let himself fall back into the bed and turned to look at the man.

"What happened?" Fratley asked. "Where am I?"

"You are in the inn of Alexandria in a room you rented yourself." The doctor answered. "From what I was told you were hit with a very powerful attack in your upper-body."

Fratley thought for a moment, shortly before asking the doctor another question.

"Who are you?"

"I am Dr. Tot. I am a tutor to the young Princess Garnet and one of Alexandria's finest doctors." Dr. Tot replied. "I believe I wasn't told your name. Who are you?"

Fratley thought for a brief moment, and ended up racking his brain to search for his name. He couldn't find it, his mind was blank. The long pause caused Dr. Tot's face to fill with concern; clearly his patient was more badly injured than he first thought. Although it wouldn't be too surprising, a devastating blow such as that could have easily damaged his brain.

"Never mind." Dr. Tot said to break the tense silence. "Well, you need some rest, so I will take my leave. Do you need anything?"

Fratley shook his head and Dr. Tot nodded and left Fratley alone in the room. Fratley's mind was so full of questions, but no answers. Who was he? Why was he here? What had happened to put him in this condition? The more Fratley thought about it, the more uncomfortable he felt. He was racking his brain for something which wasn't there. Fratley kept thinking, and eventually his eyes closed and he was soon asleep.

The morning came and Fratley woke up, his mind still the same as it had been the day before. Nothing had come back to him. He groaned slightly as he sat up in his bed. A knock was then heard at the door. Fratley prompted the guest to come in, and Dr. Tot made his way into the room.

“Good morning!” Dr. Tot chirped. “Are you feeling any better?”

“Yeah, my chest and head feel much better, although I still don’t remember anything.” Fratley answered.

“I’m afraid there isn’t much I can do about your memory loss. Not much is known about the mind and there are no real treatments I could give you.” Dr. Tot said apologetically. “Your memories may gradually return over time, although it could be years before your memory fully returns, you might not even get your full memory back.”

“But what should I do?” Fratley asked, pleading.

“Well, the first thing you should do is leave here.” Tot began. “If Queen Brahne finds out there is a Burmecian running around Alexandria she’ll hang you. It might be better for your condition if you were to meet someone who knows you. They might help jog your memory.”

“Where would I find someone who knows me?” Fratley questioned.

“The obvious place to look would be Burmecia, seeing as you are a Burmecian.” Tot replied.

“Although it would be difficult to travel between nations, blood-thirsty monsters roam the lands outside and the mist can have strange effects on people. You probably won’t be able to survive long, seeing as you’ve probably forgotten how to wield your weapon effectively. I think the best place to go would be Dali. It’s not far south from Alexandria. It’s a quiet area, where the locals may not be too bothered about your presence. You could stay there until you remember more about yourself.”

“How will I get there?” Fratley pondered.

“You can rent a chocobo near the city gates; they’ll get you to Dali. I’ll see you out of the city.” Dr. Tot answered affirmatively.

“Thank-you.” Fratley blessed.

--Chapter 39: Freya’s Journey--

Dr. Tot kept to his word and ensured that Fratley managed to leave Alexandria safely with a rented chocobo. He had managed to get to Dali before nightfall and he was able to get a room for the night at the local inn. Just as Dr. Tot said, the locals did not seem bothered by his presence in the village, although he was given many curious glances as no-one in the village had seen a Burmecian before.

Fratley woke up the next morning and quickly dressed himself and had some breakfast at the local bar. He decided to try and find some employment as he figured it would probably be a while before his memory would return and he would need time to train himself to face some of the monsters on the plains. He was able to enlist for work and secured a job working on one of the local farms. Each day he would work on the farm and in his spare time he would train with his spear in one of the fields, trying to remember his former fighting style.

Life in the rainy city continued as it usually did. Fratley’s departure had only really meant that there was one less Dragon Knight patrolling the city streets, even though many of the citizens were discussing rumours about what happened to him.

Frato had continued his usual routine of doing his duties as a Dragon Knight and vigorous training when he was off-duty. He had missed his brother after he left, Fratley was Frato’s closest companion, yet Frato had practically learned to live without his brother’s company ever since Fratley started dating with Freya at every opportunity. The main reason Frato wanted Fratley to return was so he could have his rematch and show off the fruits of his training.

Frato decided to have a break after one intense session of training one afternoon and went back into the house and got himself a drink. He gulped the glass of water down before making his way upstairs to go to his bedroom. After reaching the top stair, something caught Frato's attention. He heard a faint sound, someone was sobbing. He followed the sound towards Fratley's vacant bedroom, which had been left untouched after his departure. He opened the bedroom and was fairly surprised at what he saw.

Freya was sat on the bed, looking at one of Fratley's left possessions, weeping softly to herself. She looked over at Frato and rubbed her eyes quickly and tried to console herself, determined not to let him see her cry.

"What are you doing here?" Frato asked in a rather sharp voice.

"I was... I was just...." Freya started in a soft, sad voice.

"You just came here to wallow in self-pity." Frato answered for her. "You're pathetic."

Freya scowled at him. "You wouldn't know what I'm going through."

"I wouldn't know about that." Frato answered. "But I know that you're going to have to stop moping around and get on with your life. I had to learn how to live mainly to myself, why can't you do the same?"

"I just miss Fratley too much. I need him by my side." Freya replied in a sad tone once again. She stood up and looked at Frato in the eyes. "But for once, you are right. I can't wallow around in sadness. I'm going to find him and bring him home."

Frato snorted. "Whatever. Do what you want, I don't care."

"Well, first I shall take my leave." Freya replied and made her way past Frato who merely watched in almost a sneer.

Freya was now burning with a new intention; she would find her boyfriend who had been away from Burmecia for two years now. She made her way to the royal palace to receive the King's permission to leave the rainy city. She managed to persuade the King to allow her to leave; despite the fact he sincerely doubted Fratley was still alive. Freya had insisted that his absence was putting her off her duties and that she would bring back the Burmecian army's biggest asset. The word of Freya's upcoming departure began to spread through the town very quickly.

Freya began to pack up her things and decided that the next day would be the start of her journey, the beginning of the search for her love.

The following morning came and Freya woke up and dressed herself and quickly ate a light breakfast before grabbing her things and making her way to the southern gates of the city. As she made her way through the morning rain she was surprised to see someone stood at the gates, waiting for her.

Frato was stood firmly in the light morning rain, watching her approach. He walked up to her and stopped a small distance in front of her.

"Frato?" Freya stated in a confused expression. "What are you doing here?"

"I might ask you the same question." Frato replied nonchalantly.

"I have to find Sir Fratley." Freya stated. "I can't live without him by my side."

"Rather melodramatic don't you think?" Frato snorted. "You don't have to do this Freya."

"But I want to." Freya answered defiantly. "I need to. I must prove to myself he is still alive and well."

"And what if he isn't?" Frato pressed. "What if he was killed by some mighty dragon? What if he was executed by some blood-thirsty nation?"

“I refuse to believe that Sir Fratley is dead until I see proof of his death with my own eyes.” Freya replied.

“Even if it would mean that you shared the same fate? This is ludicrous.” Frato scoffed. “Burmecia needs warriors to protect its gates Freya. We may be at peace with the rest of the continent at the moment but that won’t last forever. When the time of war comes we’ll need you here, not chasing Fratley’s tail somewhere a hundred miles away!”

“I will honour my vows as a Dragon Knight if Burmecia is in danger.” Freya said calmly. “Although I thought you hated the idea of me fighting in the army, yet you are implying that you want me here fighting with you in times of war?”

Frato remained silent, and there was a brief pause before Freya continued.

“In any case, you’re not going to persuade me otherwise. I’m leaving.” Freya finished.

Frato could tell that Freya would hold that statement to be true. She had the same look of determination that Fratley had before he left Burmecia on his travels. There would be nothing that Frato could do to stop her from leaving the city to search for her love.

“Fine.” Frato seethed. “Just promise me one thing.”

“What is it?” Freya asked.

“Just be sure to come back. I don’t care whether you find him or not.” Frato answered. “I was the one who gave you the idea to do this and I’d feel terrible if I thought I was responsible for your death on the plains.”

“I promise.” Freya gave her word. “I will return alive, and with Sir Fratley by my side.”

Frato nodded and moved away, allowing Freya to pass through towards the gates. Freya showed her written permission from the King and the guards opened the gates, allowing her to leave Burmecia and go out onto the plains. Freya passed through the gates and looked back at the city she was leaving behind. She looked at Frato, who was watching her in his usual expression. She managed to tear herself away and begin her travels.

Freya headed towards Lindblum, seeing as she had heard Fratley had won the festival of the hunt there just over a year ago. Even if he wasn’t there, someone would be bound to know where he had headed off to, and it would be easy to find a mode of transport to get there.

After spending the night in Lindblum’s many inns and having some breakfast at one of the local restaurants, Freya decided to look around to see if she could find some information about her boyfriend. After asking around, she discovered that Fratley had decided to take an airship ride to Alexandria as his prize in the festival. This did not surprise her as she knew he had left Burmecia to face Beatrix, which would mean he would have to go to Alexandria.

What did surprise her was the price of airship tickets as she made the same discovery as Fratley in that she couldn’t hope to afford one. Just like Fratley, she was not going to give up on her journey. She would find another way to travel to Alexandria.

Freya decided to rent a small house in the Theatre district and spent her evening in one of Lindblum’s bars. The bar was fairly crowded, with many people ordering meals and drinks. Freya went up to the counter and ordered something to eat. Her investigation in Lindblum had built up her appetite.

After receiving a plate of hot food, Freya took a seat at a nearby table and began to eat. She was about halfway through her meal when a voice called from behind her.

“Hey.”

Freya turned and saw a young, blonde haired teenage boy smiling at her. The youth decided to take the seat opposite her, much to Freya's discomfort, and began to talk to her.

"I hear you just moved into the area." The youth said in a warm voice.

"Yes." Freya replied coldly. "But I won't be staying for very long."

"Oh, why's that?" The teenager asked curiously.

"None of your business." Freya spat in response.

"Well, I thought I'd come and introduce myself, seeing as I'm one of your new neighbours." The youth began. "My name is Zidane, what's yours?"

"Freya." Freya answered whilst concentrating on her meal. She was eager to get the young man away from her.

"It's not often we get a pretty Burmecian like yourself in Lindblum." Zidane started, looking into Freya's eyes. "How about you and I go out together sometime?"

Freya looked up and glared daggers at Zidane. "I have a boyfriend." Freya answered in a growl.

"Oh well, can't blame me for trying." Zidane said light-heartedly. "So, what brings you to Lindblum?"

"Why can't you just leave me in peace?" Freya asked angrily.

Zidane just gave a cheeky grin. He then gave a response. "I'm just trying to be friendly. So come on, tell me."

Freya gave an angry sigh before replying. "If you must know, I am out searching for my boyfriend, Sir Iron-Tail Fratley. He left Burmecia to go and face Alexandria's General Beatrix. He hasn't returned after two years."

Zidane listened intently to Freya's short speech, and then decided to answer her. "That sounds sad. Well, I'm sure you'll find him."

"I'm sure I will."

--Chapter 40: Lost Memories--

Freya decided to stay in Lindblum for a while and earn some savings for her journey out of Lindblum doing the same job as Fratley: guarding the city gates from monster attack. She had also become quite good friends with Zidane, who had become a particularly good neighbour who always offered good conversation and advice.

In the meantime Fratley continued his pattern of doing farm-work and training with his lance. It had been over two years since he had woken up in that inn room in Alexandria and his training had progressed quite far; he was beginning to feel confident that he could survive on the plains. He even managed to recall one or two Dragon Knight skills from his training in the academy, although nothing else had returned to his memory.

During one of his days of labour in the fields he heard someone shout out behind him.

"Hey Fratley!"

Fratley did not recognise the voice, and did not know anyone in the village with the name Fratley. He decided to ignore it and continued his work. The voice shouted out again, this time much louder.

"Hey Fratley!! It's me!!"

Once again Fratley ignored the call and continued to toil at the field he was ploughing. Then, he felt someone tug at the bottom of his pants from behind him. He turned around and was greeted by a small Burmecian child with an orange helmet and a similar colour set of overalls.

“Hi Fratley! Long time no see?” The child greeted.

“Do I know you?” Fratley asked, not recognising the child.

“Of course you do!” Puck replied, looking hurt at Fratley’s failure to recognise him. “It’s me Puck! We’ve met a few times at Burmecia’s royal palace don’t you remember?”

“I’m afraid I don’t.” Fratley answered truthfully whilst scratching his head.

Puck looked at him for a moment, before enthusiastically asking the question. “So what’ve you been up to Fratley?”

“Fratley?” Fratley repeated, looking confused. “Is that what my name is?”

Puck eyes widened with shock beneath his large orange helmet. “What happened to ya Fratley? You seem to have forgotten everything!”

There was an awkward pause as the two Burmecians looked at each other. Puck had a look of pity for Fratley, who was looking back at him with a confused look, trying to recall any long-lost memories of him.

The tense silence was broken by the farmer, who yelled at Fratley for dawdling and to get on with his task of ploughing the field. Fratley apologised and started ploughing again, whilst telling Puck that it probably wasn’t a good time to talk.

Fratley finished his duties on the fields and returned to his lodgings where Puck was eagerly waiting for him. Fratley invited the young Burmecian into his small rented house and the two picked up their conversation again.

“So just what happened to you Fratley?” Puck asked as he sat down onto a chair in such a way that the back was facing his front and his legs were wrapped partly around it. “You must have had one hell of a bump to the head to lose your memory like that.”

“I don’t know what caused my amnesia.” Fratley began. “All I remember is waking up in a bed in an Alexandrian inn. A man called Doctor Tot looked after me and told me I should leave Alexandria. I did so using a chocobo and some of his help. I’ve been living and working here since then, it’s been about two years since I first came here.”

“To think you’ve been here all this time.” Puck mused to himself. “Rumours of your death have been flying around Burmecia only a few months after you left.”

There was a small pause before Puck’s eyes flashed with horror.

“Oh god, what is Freya going to say when she sees you like this?” Puck said sounding quite scared.

“Freya?” Fratley repeated in confusion. “Who’s Freya?”

“She’s your girlfriend.” Puck answered. “And she’ll fall apart when she finds you like this. She’s searching for you as we speak. We’ve got to get outta here before she comes here looking for you!”

“How do you know she will come here? This is a very quiet village, very few people come here.” Fratley stated. “Besides, why should I want to avoid her? Meeting her could help restore my memory.”

Puck looked indignantly at Fratley. “She left Burmecia a couple of months ago to look for you. She will be searching for information about where you are and when she finds there is a Burmecian living in Dali she will come here as fast as possible. She’ll get upset when she sees you’ve lost your memory and forgotten her. You don’t want to upset her, do you Fratley?”

“No...” Fratley said, not really thinking. He didn’t even know the woman, although he didn’t really like the idea of upsetting someone if he could avoid it. Especially seeing as she had obviously been an old friend. “But just where am I going to go? If she’s searching the land for me it will only be a matter of time before we meet.”

Puck gave a slightly irritated sigh before thinking for a moment, his tail wagging slightly as he pressed his brain for an idea.

“I know! I can be a lookout!” Puck suggested. “I could go to Alexandria, seeing as she’ll likely go there first, seeing as there have been a few rumours of you being there going around. I could make sure she doesn’t come here or warn you before she arrives!”

“Alexandria?” Fratley repeated, sounding alarmed. He recalled what Dr. Tot had said to him whilst he was there. “Puck, if you go there, the guards will be on your back and you will be in danger. Besides, I think it’s unfair not to let her know.”

“Fratley, I’ve been surviving fine all by myself for the past couple of months. I know how to stay out of danger. Plus I think the Alexandrians have more to worry about than a Burmecian child walking in their streets.” Puck answered looking slightly ticked off by Fratley’s concerns of his safety. He’d had enough of that at home.

“But what is wrong with letting her know about my memory loss?” Fratley asked again. “Sure it will upset her, but she’ll only get angry if she finds out we’ve been hiding it from her.”

Puck looked up at Fratley, but didn’t say anything. He couldn’t think of a decent response. Fratley had a point, Freya would probably be mad at him if she knew he was lying about finding Fratley, although Puck could not bring himself up to breaking the news of Fratley’s amnesia to her.

“Fine, do what you want.” Puck spat. “I’m going to Alexandria anyway. Don’t think I’ll tell Freya where you are or what’s happened to you though. I don’t want to break her heart.”

“Puck, I...” Fratley began, but he was unable to finish his sentence as Puck cut him short.

“Goodbye Fratley!” Puck shouted, storming towards the door and slamming it as he passed through.

Fratley slumped into a nearby chair. He wasn’t sure what he was angrier with, Puck or his own memory. When he found Puck he had hoped he could bring back some memories of his past life, but that hope had been dissolved now.

Fratley looked through the village to see if he could find Puck again, but to no avail, evidently Puck had left the village as soon as he left Fratley’s house. Feeling down-hearted, Fratley returned to his home. It wasn’t long before he retired for the night.

Fratley found himself in a massive crowd of Burmecians, none of which he could recognise. In front of him there was a raised platform. The sounds of the crowd fell silent and the sound of a bell ringing could be heard. Fratley had no idea about what was going on.

The bell stopped ringing, and a Burmecian in elegant blue robes walked onto the platform.

“It is time for the knighting ceremony.” The robed Burmecian announced. “We are here today to acknowledge the strengths of the younger generation who have graduated through Dragon Academy. These members of the Dragon Academy are now to be knighted, and to join the ranks of our army.”

Fratley watched as one by one Burmecians came to the stage and were knighted with a sword wielded by the robed Burmecian. He still could not figure out just what was going on. He didn’t recognise any of the Burmecians that were being knighted.

Then, a rather unusual Burmecian walked to the stage. His fur was short and light, he had five fingers and his tail and ears were shorter than a usual Burmecian. Fratley watched as “Sir Frato” was knighted, but he could not recognise him. Only his appearance stuck out in Fratley’s mind.

Next, to Fratley’s surprise, a woman walked onto the platform wearing a beautiful red dress. She knelt in front of the robed Burmecian and had the blade passed across her soldiers.

Fratley watched eagerly, wanting to know the identity of the mysterious female knight, but he was distracted as he felt someone tap his shoulder. He turned and saw a Burmecian servant who was

pointing him to the stairs leading to the platform. Fratley looked confused for a moment and he was pushed towards the stage. The servant began leading him to the stairs leading to the stage.

Fratley's attention was still on the woman as he was lead to the stage, the name of her sending a surge of emotion through him.

"I now knight you: Lady Freya." The robed Burmecian announced.

"She's Freya?" Fratley thought, trying to register the information in his brain. "She's Lady Freya?"

He stared at her as she walked off the stage, but he couldn't talk to her, or get her attention as he was currently be forced onto the stage by the servant behind him, and the Burmecian on the stage was waiting for him to come for his knighthood.

Fratley stepped onto the stage cautiously, wondering just what was going on. He stopped in front of the Burmecian, who spoke clearly to him.

"Please kneel, Fratley."

Fratley obeyed and knelt, he felt the Burmecian's blade touch his shoulders.

"I now knight you: Sir Fratley." The Burmecian announced. The sword was lifted off Fratley's shoulders and he rose to his feet. Fratley then heard the Burmecian speak in a quieter voice closer to his ears. "I will have great expectations of you, Sir Fratley. Good luck in the Dragon Knights."

"Dragon Knights?" Fratley thought, wondering what they were. He didn't have time to ask, he was led of the stage and as he walked off, darkness surrounded him.

Fratley's eyes flickered open and he rose from his bed. He wondered just what that dream had been about. Had it been a past memory? Or was it just a strange dream? He had never seen Freya before, but the only way he could be sure was either to meet her or ask someone who knew her.

Puck obviously knew Freya, but he hadn't been in the dream at all. Fratley was keen to tell him about the dream that eh had, wondering whether it was a past memory and just what it meant. Unfortunately, Puck had already left Dali the previous night and Fratley did not want to return to Alexandria.

No-one in Dali would be able to decipher his dream for him; many didn't even know where Burmecia was.

Fratley kept replaying the dream in his mind, trying to make out just what it was. Who was the Burmecian who was knighting them? Who was the strange man with five fingers but with fur and a tail? Who was Freya? Had that knighting ceremony taken place before? What did it mean?

If it was a memory, then perhaps he has slowly recovering from his memory loss. Yet Fratley wanted to learn more about himself. He needed to know just who he was and what he had done.

"What can I do?" Fratley asked himself. "Where can I go?"

Fratley sincerely hoped he would get his memory back, but only time would dictate whether he would.