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## **“End Game”**

By Kellan Meigh

### Chapter 11 – “The Unthinkable”

Victoria made an effort to get Torvald to eat something but he seemed too weak at the moment to chew his food. She slowly sat down on the log that her hubby was leaning against, shaking her head in disgust. He was dying and there was nothing she could do about it, nothing at all.

Chewing a piece of that critter that she had speared and cooked, she thought about just how nasty it actually tasted. Maybe that was why Torvald wouldn't eat it. It had a terrible, metallic off-taste and her lips tingled from eating the flesh of that oversized rodent.

She threw the remainder of the flesh into the fire, depressed by all of this. She had tried to call Denise and Hrist again this morning, hoping one of them would show up. Just like it was earlier, neither one appeared by her request.

That little creature that had been observing them for some time was still sitting across the clearing from the tigress, watching her intently. It was female, obviously, wearing only a loincloth for clothing. She wore numerous bracelets about her wrists and ankles along with a necklace made from teeth of some kind.

The femme was small, not much over three feet tall and she was bipedal. She also carried a spear that was slightly longer than she was tall. Her build and ruddy coloration reminded Victoria of a small Annie Latrans.

“Hey you!” Victoria bid. “You can come to the fire. I won't hurt you,” she offered up, motioning for the small femme to approach her. The little femme cocked her head, looking between the tigress, the fire and the meat that was still unconsumed. “It's okay, I won't hurt you.” she reiterated.

The small female approached the fire carefully, holding her spear in front of her. It took a little bit but the small fur was finally standing by the fire, taking a moment to warm herself. She then took a small portion of the meat and began to eat it.

“Vicki,” the tigress offered up, tapping her chest. “Tor, she added, patting her hubby.

“I am Lin,” the little femme offered up. “Is Tor injured?” she questioned.

“Um, yes, he is,” Victoria replied, stunned that she could understand the small creature's language. It was not that far off from Halst in her estimations.

“May I look?” Lin questioned.

“Yes, go ahead. I fear he's dying.” the tigress replied.

Lin approached the stallion, checking his temperature and pulse. She listened to his chest, then looked at his wounds carefully. She sat down by the huge fur and made her observation; “You are most likely opposite agents from the agent that injured him. Bad mojo. Just doesn't mix.”

“We are Agents, or at least we used to be. I'm pretty sure we've been abandoned by the Gods.”

Lin looked at her strangely. “Agents? Abandoned? No, not likely. One God, yes. All Gods, no.”

“But we were . . .” Lin interrupted her.

“You worry much. I will return in two spans of time,” she stated, holding her hands up to the sun to indicate two hand-widths of movement of the sun across the sky. The small femme went into the forest, then returned quickly with a paw-full of some thick, squishy leaves. She gave them to Victoria, then took one and squeezed it. The spongy leaf gave up an amber liquid. “Put this in his mouth and on his wounds. It will help until I return with others.”

Before the tigress could ask more questions, the small femme was gone. Concerned the small vulpine might not come back, she examined the leaves again. The tigress thought she recognized the leaves and she knew where that plant grew.

Squeezing a leaf, she tried her best to aim it at her hubby's mouth. It took a bit but eventually he did receive a small dose of the liquid. It made him stir and wipe at his mouth as if the potion tasted terrible.

“What . . . what was that?” he wheezed out ever-so-quietly.

“It's supposed to be good for you.” Victoria replied. “No complaints Mister, just drink.” she ordered.

“Nasty,” he suggested between mouthfuls of that sap, grimacing as she gave him the contents of two leaves.

“Shhh!” she told him, taking another leaf and squeezing its sap out into her palm. She then transferred the goo to his worst injury, eliciting a response from the stallion.

“Ow!” he blurted out, seeming to be somewhat alert now. “That stuff burns!” he added.

“Don't be moving around!” she instructed, painting his other torso wound for him. “Tor, are you still having trouble breathing?” she asked.

“Um, yeah, I am. Still feels like some fur is standing on my chest.” he replied, sounding like he was out of breath.

“Well, you just be still until help arrives,” she instructed, sitting down by him and holding his paw in hers. “Some little fur said she would return, hopefully bringing help with her.”

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Mala grimaced as she tried in vain to locate the Immortal Couple's whereabouts with her abilities. She had woken up just in time to see Victoria shouting for help and then observe the pair vanish from sight. What really bothered her was the fact that they had disappeared, clothes and all but the tracking bracelets did not. Victoria's band was on the floor and Tor's was still laying on the bed. Neither one had been unlocked, too.

“Judge Talmadge, I can't track what I can't find!” Cami stated, knowing she should have been awake to intervene in some manner.

“I know that, it's just I have to think the Malefic Council had something to do with this.” he retorted. “Gah, I didn't see this coming!” he mused.

Mala shook her head as she realized what would have to be done. “Judge Talmadge, I'll get The Consortium's top agents on this. They couldn't have gone far, if you ask me. Torvald was in bad shape.”

“That's what I'm worried about.” the law fur brought up. “The Malefic Council would heal him up, making him obligated to them. That is what I *do not* want to see happen!”

“Very well, then. I'll go arrange for a small contingent of agents to go search for them.” the blue and white femme stated.

“I'll be waiting for some news, Mrs. O'Kendranal,” the canid told her right before he stepped through a temporary portal to his office.

“We are so screwed,” Cami stated, getting her firearms together.

“No, don't go panicking so quickly.” Mala told her. “Just calm down and come with me. You're a trained soldier so I can use your help.”

“We don't even have a clue where they went!” the wolverine pointed out.

“Look, you're worrying too much. I have two agents in mind that will know where to find them.” Mala retorted.

Cami waited patiently while the the blue and white femme got her bearings and transported them to the Consortium's home world. She knew this would be difficult at best and impossible at worst. Cami just hoped that she wouldn't be held personally accountable for the disappearance. That would mean jail time for her, something she didn't want to give a try, ever.

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The brindle canid driving the vehicle was paying attention to the small femme sitting in the rim of the spare tire strapped to the hood, careful to follow her paw movements that indicated which way to go. His passenger seated beside him, however was hanging on for dear life.

“Vadiu, will you tell me why I had to ride with you?” Hrist asked, getting a better grip on the dash-mounted grab bar.

The driver actually took his eyes off the road for a moment to reply. “I guess you could have rode Stridshest but it was easier to ride with me rather than try to follow me through the forest.”

“My mount would be able to follow this wreck anywhere!”

“You might be right, Valkyrie but I think this makes more sense.” the brindle-colored canid put forth. “I relied on light armored vehicles like this when I was a soldier. An AM General LAV could always get me and my squad in and out in a hurry.”

“I will not argue this vehicle's speed or its agility,” the femme equine offered up. “What I do disagree with is the lack of attention you're giving the trail right now.”

“I'm sure I could drive this road blindfolded,” Vadiu retorted. “This path is quite familiar to me.” he added, dodging a rather large boulder on the edge of the trail without so much as looking back to check his progress.

“Were you watching, Hon? You missed the turn back there!” Lin shouted from her perch.

“Yes, Lin, I know. My vehicle won't fit down that path so I need to go around to the pond trail.”

“I can fit my wagon down that path!” the small femme suggested.

“I will not refute that, Lin. My vehicle, however is much larger than yours.” Vadiu pointed out.

Hrist was still unnerved by her acquaintance' driving. “Vadiu, will you please slow down? Either that or let me drive?”

“I didn't think Valkyries used automobiles for everyday transportation,” the canid mused.

“My friend Wilhelmine taught me how to drive her miniature van.” Hrist offered up.

“I think you mean mini-van.”

“Okay, I meant mini-van.” Hrist agreed. “I'm very good at it, I have been told.”

“Have you ever ran into something?” he asked.

“Only the door to Wilhelmine's stable for her van.”

“Ah . . . her garage door.” Vadiu said with a smile. “I guess we're even. I ran a heavy armored personnel carrier into the wall of a mosque, quite by accident. Forgot which way the gear selector functioned.”

“That is how I damaged Wilhelmine's van.” Hrist admitted. “Um, Lin, how much further? I am getting car-sick, I think. My stomach is feeling a bit unsettled.”

“Maybe one span of time?” the small femme replied.

“She means about one-half hour,” the canid translated while he shifted the vehicle into a lower range to climb a slight grade. “Would you like me to stop for a moment?”

“No, keep going. I will be fine,” Hrist stated, swallowing hard to keep her lunch down. “We must find Torvald and Victoria before it is too late.”

Hrist was a Valkyrie, a minor goddess, a disa but this situation was really unnerving her. Aslaug had taken on this 'project' by herself and now it was obvious that she really needed to give some attention to Torvald and Victoria's situation, at least enough to make sure they didn't become Dark Agents.

She knew this was how it happened; the Malefic Council would make things rough for the Immortal Couple, then offer to help out. They would then turn them against all that was good, possibly even their family and the unthinkable, turn them against one another.

There had been some murmuring that *The Almighty* was pissed off that Torvald and Victoria were still together after all of these years and he even felt like Torvald had taken the tigress away from his church. That was stupid thinking, in her estimation. Torvald encouraged Victoria to attend church and he even went with her from time to time. Why *The Almighty* would allow this to happen, she didn't know. All she knew was the fact that she would love to kick his sorry behind to oblivion and back for allowing this to transpire.

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Torvald was still breathing hard but he seemed to be doing better after that sap had been administered to him. His wounds weren't bleeding as much and that goo seemed to have relaxed him a bit. He was currently sitting up a little better while he waited for his mate to return with some water for his thirst, something the tigress seemed concerned with. His rest was interrupted by a black feline approaching him, smiling. The panther, if that was what he was, squatted down near the huge stallion, seeming concerned.

“Torvald, you don't seem to be doing so well.” he proffered up. “Um, your wounds are still bleeding and you're still having trouble breathing. Gah, I wish I could do something for you but I'm sure you wouldn't be interested.” he mused.

“Who are you?” Tor asked.

“The name's Ingvar.” the large cat stated. “Um, I don't suppose you've heard of me, huh?”

“Can't say as I have.” the stallion replied.

Ingvar tasted the leftover meat that was still warm and immediately made a sour face. “Hmm, pretty nasty stuff your mate hunted up. Would you like some fresh jerky instead?”

“What are you here for? What is it you want?” Tor asked in a clipped tone.

Ingvar waved a dismissing paw at him. “You have me all wrong, berserker. I don't like to see you like this any more than your mate does. I don't suppose Odin offered to help you out, did he?”

“No he did not. By this line of talk, you probably already know we've most likely been abandoned.”

The dark cat smiled as he looked up at Torvald. “See, there you go with your false information. You

haven't been abandoned, my friend. You still have many friends that will stand beside you. You just don't know it yet."

It was clear Torvald was being agitated by this line of discussion. "Now hold on!" the stallion wheezed out. "We have been unable to call our mission assistant Denise, Hrist or any fur else for that matter. If that's not abandoned, I don't know what is!"

Ingvar shook his head, grimacing slightly. "You're getting yourself all worked up for nothing, Torvald. Try to calm yourself while I lay this out for you." Mr. Gamel sat down on the log next to the stallion and made himself comfy. "You might have been forsaken by WhiteChrist's father, but you are still being watched and assisted. How do you think you and your mate got here?" he asked, sweeping his paw to indicate this planet.

"I have no idea how we got here." the equine replied.

"I wish I could claim responsibility for it but I can't. You will learn who it was soon enough." Ingvar pointed out. "You might have heard that I work for The Malefic Council but to be honest about it, I can't say I'm totally aligned with them."

"Oh?" That interested the huge fur to some degree. "So, who do you align yourself with?"

"Um. Just a few minor fallen deities for the most part. Rumjal is our ad-hoc leader at the moment." the cat replied. "Rumjal is another that, well, we're using the Council. You see, Surt wants full control and Lucifer won't relinquish his small piece. We don't agree with total annihilation or making thoughtless zombies out of the furs of the mortal worlds. What we want is for beings everywhere to see the Gods for what they are; uncaring omnipotent horse's petards that are totally uninterested in what goes on across the known parallel worlds."

"You're pretty sure the Gods don't care?" Tor questioned. "I for one have been the recipient of their kindness. I have to admit, though, it looks pretty bad for them at the moment."

"It does look bad for them, Torvald. I know you most likely won't die from this but you will be sick for some time to come." Mr. Gamel laid forth for Tor's consideration. "Why don't you think about it for a bit? I'm sure you'll see that we would welcome you to our ranks with open arms. I can guarantee you that we want the two of you on our side in the worst ways possible and we would heal you up right away because we do take care of our own."

Victoria walked into the clearing about that time with a large leaf that functioned quite well as a bucket. She slowed a bit, then went over to her hubby to give him some water.

"Um, who are you exactly?" she asked the feline sitting with her hubby.

"The name's Ingvar." he replied. "I just dropped by to chat with the two of you." he added.

That seemed to put Victoria on guard. "So, where are we? Care to share that information with us?"

Mr. Gamel smiled and nodded. "You're on IS-34988. Nice little planet, if you ask me. I think you might have met an inhabitant, too. Small femme, ruddy colored, name of Lin?"

"I have met her." the tigress admitted. "Now tell me who you really are, Sir. I have a gut feeling you're

aligned with The Malefic Council.”

“I have had some dealings with them,” Ingvar offered up. “I was just telling Torvald that I'm aligned with a group that's just out to set things right. We only want to show the beings of the known parallel worlds that the Gods are just uncaring omnipotent horse's behinds.”

The tigress seemed to mull this over. “You know that we've most likely been abandoned, don't you?”

Ingvar nodded. “I was just telling your hubby that we would stand beside the two of you without question. You have many beings that would call you friend and stand up for you.”

This line of talk seemed to upset the tigress. “You know, you do make a good case for us taking up sides with your group. I dunno, though. I . . . I really would have to think about it. You're asking us to turn our backs on the Gods that we used to serve.”

“It's not like the Gods haven't turned their backs on the two of you. We would help out your hubby's condition, heal him up.” Mr. Gamel put on the table for consideration.

“No, I'll have to talk this over with Torvald.” she finally put forth.

“I concur with her thinking, Ingvar. We need to talk this over before we agree.” the stallion added.

The dark cat nodded. “Well, you two talk it over. I'll get an answer from you when you're back on your own home world.”

“Okay, we'll . . .” Victoria stopped talking, noting Ingvar wasn't sitting where he was just moments ago. The Immortal Couple looked around the clearing to see that the panther was long gone.

“Well?” Tor questioned.

“Gah! I hate what's happening to us right now!” Victoria spat out. “I guess we'll have to weigh the pros and cons of the situation.”

“I can see a lot of cons right off the bat,” her hubby brought up.

“Gah, there is one big pro, Hon. You're dying, Tor. They would heal you which is something I can't do. I'm not ready to be alone for eternity but I hate the fact that we would have to switch sides to get you fixed up.” she offered up.

“Let's give it some thought,” Tor finally suggested. “I need to rest a bit, too. I'm feeling short of breath again.”

Victoria helped her husband to get comfortable and she applied some more of that sap to his wounds. This was bothering her to no end, the thought that they would be forced over to the Dark Side. She looked at her hubby, who appeared to be struggling just a bit to get his breath and she shook her head in disgust. This was very likely to be the turning point in their careers, one that might not be in their best interests. If it meant that her mate, her best friend, her lover wouldn't die, maybe that was worth it.

Then again, maybe it wasn't worth a king's ransom. Only time would tell.

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Morgan Sleight noticed the two rhinos coming in the door to the diner where he was enjoying his lunch, keeping an eye on them while they scanned the room. Just as he had thought, they came over to his table and sat down across from him.

“What do you want?” he asked, not looking up from his meal.

“We thought we might work together, seeings how we're looking for the same fur,” Randy offered up.

“You make it sound simple,” Morgan countered, setting his fork on his plate. “You don't have a clue who or what your quarry is, do you?”

“His name is Ingvar Gamel and he's . . .” The badger interrupted Jessie with an annoyed look on his muzzle.

“Ingvar Gamel is a Dark Agent, you two buffoons!” the detective pointed out rather tersely. “He would kick both of your behinds with no problems.”

“Um, a Dark Agent?” Randall mused.

“Yeah, just what I said.” Morgan shot back. “You two wouldn't have a hope in Hades of walking away from an encounter with him.”

That statement irked Jessie, to the point he shared his thoughts. “We have dealt with numerous bad furs before. You don't seem to understand that we . . .” Morgan put up a paw to stop him.

“Dudes, you just don't get it, do you?” the badger put forth. “A Dark Agent wouldn't die from anything you would be packing legally or illegally. He would just use his immortality to his advantage and mop the sidewalks with you in the process. Comprende?”

Randall decided to pipe up with his thoughts. “Listen, Morgan, we could arm up . . .”

“You could arm up with a small thermo-nuclear device and he would still walk away. You just don't get it, do you? He is fucking immortal, you dim-wits!” Morgan said in an exasperated tone.

Jessie started to voice his opinion. “Well, maybe we could . . .” Morgan stopped him and took a card out of his pocket, placing it on the table.

“Listen, that's my number on this planet.” he informed them. “If you happen to find Ingvar, don't approach him, just call me. I'll come to your location and take care of him. I want his hide alive.”

Randall started to say something about that idea but the badger got up without saying another word and went to pay for his meal. He gave the waitress a huge tip, then left without so much as acknowledging them.

“Well, what do we do, Randall?” the younger agent mused.

The older agent made his thoughts known. “If Ingvar is as as powerful as Morgan says he is, we'll stay out of his way.”



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The feline angel walked into the clearing, shaking his head at the situation. Two of his 'Comrades In Arms' were in a bad situation and *The Almighty* seemed to care not. He smiled when the tigress noticed his presence.

“Victoria, Torvald, I just came by to . . .” He stopped talking when the femme warrior sprang to her feet, looking very pissed off. Before he could say a word, she brought her fire-hardened spear to bear and read him the riot act, long version.

“Michael, so help me, I will try my damndest to kill you if you so much as pretend to be sincere about our situation! Your boss has turned his back on us and left us to fend for ourselves! Now go, go before I destroy you or die trying!!”

“Victoria, I was only . . .” she glared at him which made him shudder; Heaven hath no fury like Victoria scorned.

“You just shut the Hades up!” she screamed. “Tor is dying, you winged moron and we can't go to see Eyr! Our only hope now is a little femme named Lin that went for help. Now go before you and I both regret it.”

“You couldn't kill me any more than I could destroy you.” he offered up in his defense.

“Michael, please leave.” Victoria asked in a level tone. “I am so pissed off about this situation that I'm almost willing to join Ingvar just to get Tor healed.”

“Don't do that, please? You don't understand what could happen if you did.” the angel put forth.

“Look, you don't understand because you have no soul, no free will. You don't understand love and commitment. You can't comprehend why it pains me to see my hubby this way.” the tigress put forth. “I wonder if that's why your boss doesn't like Uriel because I think he has a soul. At least he would leave if I asked him to.”

“I will leave, if that's what you want.” the seraph stated.

“That is exactly what I want.” she confirmed, crossing her arms and scowling at the feline angel.

“I will leave then. I'm sorry for what has happened to make you feel this way.” the Archangel told her.

“Just go, please?” she begged.

Michael nodded and left, actually feeling something inside that approached sadness. He could sense the outpouring of emotion from the tigress but there was nothing he could do about their situation. Well, nothing that he could do that wouldn't get him into very hot water with the boss. Giving some thought to it, maybe Gabriel might have an idea or two about what could be done.

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Axel looked at the kitchen with trepidation because this appeared very wrong to him. There was a

hospital bed in the family room that had blood on the sheets, there was food out on the counter and there was no fur around.

“Madelyn, there is something going on here.” he told his mate. “A gallon jug of milk left out until it was warm, the sack of flour sitting open on the counter and no sign of Mom or Dad.”

“What do you think happened?” she asked.

“I don't know but I'm going to look around to see if I can tell what's transpired here.”

Axel and Madelyn went into the back yard and looked around to see a chair with some remnants of ropes laying around it. Walking up the hill to the upper patio, they found the blood stains on the walk and his father's Ruger Redhawk laying in the bushes.

“Hon, this looks bad. Maybe Wilhelmine might be able to shed some light on this?” the femme zebra asked.

“You're right, let me call Willi Marie.” Axel replied. He took out his cellphone and dialed her number, still scanning their surroundings for clues while it rang. He was hoping that this was just something simple but all of the signs pointed to something bad. Something very, very bad.

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Michael Wilson and Douglas Muir were sitting at a console, pressing buttons and turning dials while referring to a rather thick, handwritten manual of sorts. Mala, Cami and Willi Marie were standing off to one side, staying out of the way while they were watching the two males work. Michael, a heavy equine/giraffe cross, was fiddling with the plasma display controls while the jaguar flipped a few switches on the console to power the unit up.

The blue and white femme motioned at the object taking up most of the warehouse space while she gave Willi and Cami some information. “For thousands of years, nobody knew how this machine worked until Nikola Tesla looked it over.” Mala told the others with her. “He discovered it had a power cord that had been hidden underneath it all that time. It runs on two-forty three phase alternating current, by the way.”

Willi looked at the huge monolithic block, wondering why some being would design something like this in the first place. “So, it can tell us where my Aunt Victoria and Uncle Torvald have been taken to?” she questioned.

“It might pinpoint them or it might just suggest a planet.” Mala replied. “It's rather hit and miss, since we have no real manual for it. Most of what we know about using it came from experiments where we wrote down what we did and what the outcome was.”

This information made Willi curious. “Does any fur know what the original use was?”

Mala smiled and nodded. “The Hasadi used it to locate minerals, we think. That wall of samples were with the machine when it was found.” She indicated a wall full of small rocks and such, displayed behind glass.

“Um, so what happened to the Hasadi?” Cami inquired.

“They killed off their own race.” Mala replied. “They mined and refined highly toxic material to trade to space farers. They poisoned their planet, to the point that we have marked planet UN-00001 off-limits.”

Michael looked up from his console and got Mala's attention. “Mrs. O'Kendranal, we're ready,” the tall cross stated, indicating the main monolithic machine.

A small door slid open, revealing a small sample enclosure behind it. She put a piece of an undershirt that belonged to Torvald along with a section of one of Victoria's bras into the chamber. A clear shield closed off the opening followed by the machine humming loudly.

“Um, erm, yeah, I have something,” Doug stated, looking at the display. The image was a galaxy, then a zoom down to a solar system, then a planet. After a moment, it zoomed down even further to show an overhead view of the Immortal Couple, resting against a fallen log. A set of symbols flashed along the bottom of the display, followed by what must have been coordinates.

“IS-34988,” Michael announced, smiling as he wrote down the data. “We can be there in about five minutes.”

“Just like that?” Willi asked, confused as to how they could do that.

“We have another machine that was just as ancient as this one when we found it.” Doug offered up. “We've been using it for a very long time to transport mortals from place to place. It's as safe as sitting at your kitchen table.”

“Who's going to retrieve them, may I ask?” Mala queried.

“Uh, we are.” Doug offered up. “We know them from a previous mission together so they won't be startled by our appearance.” He shrugged his shoulders as he added, “Besides, we have our equipment ready, including a full field emergency surgery kit.”

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Victoria looked up to see the familiar forms of Doug Muir and Mike Wilson materialize just a few yards away from her location. She was momentarily shocked by their sudden appearance but quickly got up to help them move a few packs full of equipment.

“Gah, am I ever glad to see you two!” she blurted out, hugging them both.

“We're just happy to have found you and your hubby alive,” Mike replied. “Would you please help Doug with the equipment while I check on Torvald?” he directed. The tigress wiped away her tears of joy and grabbed a pack, glad to have finally been rescued.