

## MAGEKILLER

Frederick walked by the castle corridor with determination but with equal nervousness. His heart was pounding as he approached the princess's rooms. He stopped for a moment, left the dinner tray on the floor, and made sure that his noble garnet clothes were in perfect condition. Then he combed her dark brown hair and blew her breath into her hand to confirm that it smelled good. After taking a deep breath, he picked up the tray again and continued on his way.

He had been living in the castle of Vordis for more than five years. He was the younger brother of the sons of the King of Korela, the neighboring kingdom with which Vordis had been at war. When his father died, part of the peace treaty had been to agree that Frederick would be under the tutelage of King Grostar II of Vordis. A diplomatic strategy that had undoubtedly brought peace during this time and that had "encouraged" his older brother, now the legitimate king of Korela, to ensure that no soldier crossed the borders. At that time Frederick was just a child who did not like the thought, because despite his age he was well aware that he was really a prisoner of war.

But the reality was very different; King Grostar II gave him freedom as long as he followed a few rules, such as not going outside the palace area and dedicating himself to the life of book study instead of the art of war. According to King Grostar II he said that these measures were for his protection, but for Frederick it was evident that the king's intention was to ensure that he never had a chance to hold a weapon against him.

None of this mattered to him. On the contrary, he felt lucky. Over time he had gained autonomy and the people of the palace had taken to him affection. But the most important thing is that he had met Princess Mariel, who was the same age. Over time they became great friends and although they did not have the same status, she treated him like a brother.

But today they were not children anymore; Mariel had grown into an attractive woman and Frederick had fallen deeply in love with her. Tonight Frederick had managed to muster the courage to declare his love.

As usual he had been ordered from the kitchens to bring the dinner to the princess. For the occasion Frederick had obtained the best perfume of violets, Mariel's favorite. Frederick sighed in front of the princess's room and raising his fist, he started to knock on the door. Then he heard Mariel's sweet voice ... did he talk to anyone else? It was a male voice! Frederick was paralyzed for a moment and then decided to back up.

-Not not damn, it can not be! Frederick wailed, agitated after a few steps.

- Who the hell shares the privacy of Mariel's room? If he does not let me in for more than a year. He says he's embarrassed! I can not go like this! I have to find out who it is. Surely it is a misunderstanding. Yes, sure that's it, a misunderstanding.

After self-congratulation Frederick stealthily approaches the door again and looks through the lock without being able to distinguish anything. Keep hearing the voices inside but can not hear clearly what they are talking about. Therefore, Fredkerick decides to put his ear to the door to try to get the words more clearly. But then the masculine voice suddenly ceases and a hideous animal roar is heard. Then Fredercik listens to Mariel screaming scared.

- I'm here Mariel! Frederick yells as he tries desperately to open the door without success.

To the roars and screams is added the noise of violent blows and the rumble of objects breaking. Desperate Frederick runs down the hall asking for help but without finding anyone. He decides to take one of the ornamental swords that accompanied the coat of arms that decorates the rest between corridors. A heavy and blunt weapon with only decorative purpose and that Frederick manages to lead awkwardly back to the door. Using all the force of which he has, he hits the lock with the vast iron until he can break it and open it.

The room was a mess, with crockery and broken furniture. The balcony door was open and the outside air came in moving the curtains. Traces of blood spattered the bed, the floor, the walls. Frederick goes out on the balcony and from there he sees far away in the night sky a winged creature the size of a man who moves away.

- There! look! Alert some voices from the courtyard of the palace.

From the balcony Frederick looks out to see four royal guards stationed around Sir Maegur, a young knight of the kingdom who was now mortally wounded as he writhed in a pool of blood.

- It's Frederick! And he has a weapon! Sentencing another of the guards.

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The thick mist of the cold dawn covers the streets of the city. From it arises a dark rider who slowly approaches the gates of the palace walls. As soon as the guards see him, they take up their weapons and stop him.

- Stop! The captain of the guard orders to the traveler.

The horse reduces its speed until it reaches the height of the guards. It is a strong but dirty animal with marks of wounds. He has bald hair on part of his back and his left eye is missing. The captain studies the rider with half-closed eyes. But the rider is hooded with a worn, dark green travel cloak that covers most of his features.

- You can not pass under any circumstance. So return to the swamp where you came from and you better not come back here. Threat the captain.

After a second of pause the rider moves his cape slightly revealing the sheath of his sword. The gesture causes the distrustful guards to tense up and prepare to face it. However, the captain opens his eyes wide when he recognizes the silver knob finished in a black gem of that sheathed weapon.

- The Magekiller ... the captain whispers to himself.

- Then? The rider asks in a deep voice, making the captain leave his self-absorption.

- He's the Magekiller! Let him go! Let him go right now, piece of shit! The captain shouts, pushing his soldiers away from the road and instructing them to open the gate.

- I beg your pardon, sir. I'm useless. We did not expect him so soon and I did not recognize you. The king is waiting impatiently for your visit. I will send word of your arrival.

- It is not necessary. He already knows that I have arrived. Explains the rider to the muted captain. And without even looking at him, he spurs the horse and enters to the palace grounds.

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King Grostar II moved repeatedly his foot while waiting anxiously on his throne. A few minutes ago a strange crow had come flying into the throne room, rumbling and squawking the word Magekiller, and then disappearing as quickly as it arrived. However, it seemed to Grostar II that instead of minutes it had been hours.

- Jalester, are you sure the crow announced his arrival? The king asked impatiently to the royal magician on his right.

- There is no doubt about your majesty. The long-bearded old man replied while raising an eyebrow, giving the king an understanding that it was so obvious that no magic was necessary to realize it.

- I know, I know, but why the hell does he take so long? The king rhetorically asked as he scratched hard at the curly beard and gray hair.

He was about to protest when suddenly the doors of the throne room were pushed open by the guards outside, allowing the passage to a dark figure hooded with a dusty travel cloak.

The rest of the guards inside the room looked at each other doubtfully, not knowing if they should remain quiet or come out to stop that mysterious person, until the king stood up and went friendly to the stranger.

- Magekiller, at last, I looked forward to your visit. The king greeted the newcomer.

The traveler opened his cloak and removed his hood to show his respect to the king.

- Majesty. The traveler returned the greeting with a bow.

For a moment all the people in the room remained silent observing that mysterious man who had raised so much expectation and who could now see much more clearly.

He was a tall man of athletic build, wearing a worn metal armor full of runes over dark gray clothing. He had a short three-day beard and his face was partially covered by a long dirty ash blond hair. Ears finished in tip protruding, making clear his partial elven offspring. But it was his bright red eyes that caught the attention of the spectators. In that partially dark room those scarlet eyes seemed to emit an inner fire.

It was the magician Jarester who broke the silence with a slight cough to clear his throat.

- In fact majesty, to be correct, his name is Ekendor. And it is really his sword that has the name of Matamagos. Although his name has been extended to his bearer. A magnificent sword I understand. Explains the magician while holding his gaze curiously on the hilt of the weapon.

Ekendor raised his piercing red gaze to meet the magician's.

- Your fame precedes you Ekendor, guardian of the Tenebrous Forest of Arrujar. The king hurried to cut the tension created. - I have heard that you are the most relentless demon killer of the Unreleased Borders. Saving a multitude of people from infamous creatures of hell. Everyone talks about your legendary exploits. If the people of Vordis can sleep peacefully, it is thanks to your vigilant work.

- I am deeply honored. Thanks Ekendor. - But I'm not just dealing with demons. Also witches, outsiders creatures and also ... <mages> are among my specialties. The dark warrior comments with a clear emphasis on the word <mages> without looking away from Jarester.

After a tense pause the king decides to continue.

- Well, that's why I called you. As I told you in my message, my daughter Princess Mariel has been kidnapped by a demonic creature.

- Presumably demonic. The magician Jarester is quick to point out.

- Oh, hell. A humanoid creature with wings has always been and will be a fucking demon Jarester. The king replies to the magician. - And demon or I do not care. Sir Maegur is an expert knight who can not be defeated easily by anyone. The king adds, pointing to a young man sitting with several bandaged wounds.

- I'm sorry I can not remember anything. Everything that is in my mind about that night is covered in shadows. Try to explain the young knight who emits a slight pain moan when he tries to sit up.

- Quiet, quiet Sir Maegur. I am grateful to you because you went there to defend my daughter. It is fortunate that the trees stopped your fall. I'm sure that if Frederick's traitor had not attacked you from behind, now my daughter would be safe. Regrets the king with rage.

- Frederick's version is "slightly" different ... try to point out the magician Jarester. But his argument is sharply cut with a gesture from the king.

- I'm going to get the truth out of that bastard. Neither your good words, nor your divination magic, nor the prayers of the priests can see or find out anything of what happened. Even Sir Maegur's mind has been clouded. Fuck! Am I the only one who sees here clearly the influence of dark magic and the plot of that son of a bitch? The king reproaches clearly angry at all the people in the room. -Although if you think it is necessary, you may find it appropriate to interrogate Frederick on your own. The king suggest a bit calmer to Ekendor.

- My king, I have come to rescue the princess from any threat. Not to clarify the why of a crime. I dedicate myself to what I am. And I am what I do. If you give me the resources I need, I will immediately start searching for your daughter. Ekendor answers King Grostar II.

The rude but sincere words of the dark warrior raise the approvals and rumors of the people in the room. The king stares at the partially kneeling half-elf, wields his sword and places the flat part of the edge on his shoulder.

- You speak like a gentleman. The king affirms by addressing Ekendor first and then raising his voice to the rest of the audience. - If you give me back my daughter, I'll turn you one as reward. Men, money, provisions; Tell me anything you need to rescue my daughter and I'll give it to you.

After a dramatic pause, Ekendor looks up at the king.

- I just need one thing, Majesty. Just one. I need her ... Asha.

The rumors of the people in the room are heard again after that request. Although this time they are loaded with indignation and protests.

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Asha was at the bottom of her cell sitting on the floor with her legs bent and intertwined. She was naked except for a few shreds of cloth that she used to cover her chest and crotch. It was not that he cared too much. She preferred to feel free of clothes like when she lived in freedom in the Dark Forest of Arrujar. He felt some pity because his skin was dirty and had become paler by the absence of sunlight. Sometimes a halo of light filtered through a small barred gate, but the shackles prevented him from reaching that area of the humid room. Since she was punished in this disgusting city, she had barely seen either the sun or the moon directly.

But what bothered Asha the most was simply that she was cold. The cold was not only uncomfortable, but it also made her have to expend energy to maintain body heat if she did not want to get sick and die. And with what little they had to eat, it was not possible to have all the energy she needed. She had been weak for a long time until he made the harsh decision to start eating rats.

Thanks to her improved diet Asha had been saving her strength to use them at the right time. Not only that; She had also made a small punch that would serve as an improvised weapon. She had promised herself that the next visit of the guards would be the last for better or worse.

Asha was trying to use that punch as a picklock to get rid of her shackles when she heard the guards' footsteps. She did not expect them to come so soon that morning. Had she entertained herself too much and had she been counted wrong the hours of the day?

She moved away these annoying thoughts to focus on her task and managed to open the shackles just as the door of the cell opened.

The agile woman jumped to her feet and launched herself into the attack with a grunt like a feline throws on its prey. But something she had not foreseen; that the man who entered through the door was no a prey; He was the biggest predator.

Asha halted hypnotized by the fascinating Ekendor's red eyes, who watched her impassively.

- It's already the second time I do not see you coming. Although on this occasion I am strangely glad to see you. Confess Asha to the dark warrior.

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Jarester was moving down the stone corridor with extreme caution. For more than an hour they had been walking through the tunnels underneath that crypt to which the Amazonian woman whose name was Asha had guided them. The savage had the best tracking skills she'd ever known. At first, everything that Ekendor explained about the prisoner's capabilities seemed exaggerated. But after seeing it with his own eyes he was really impressed.

With only sniffing the princess's room, Asha had entered a small trance in which she visualized the trail to the cemetery on the outskirts of the city. And when they reached the place in the evening, the woman went through it without delay, guiding Ekendor and him to the entrance of the crypt. Asha had claimed that the princess's trail was driving there.

King Grostar II did not willingly accept Ekendor's request to free Asha. After all, she had killed many of his soldiers when they tried to cross the Dark Forest to attack the kingdom of Korela by surprise. She killed them one by one, leaving their corpses broken as if they had been devoured by fierce predators. And although they had hundreds of soldiers, it was the fear that the men felt that forced King Grostar II to have to leave the forest and take a longer route for his army. A decision that almost cost him the war and for which the king swore he would make the wild woman pay.

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Of course, it is not that Jarester liked to have to go into dirty and smelly places, but his offer had not been purely altruistic. The truth is that He wanted to see by first-hand if all the feats that were told about the half-elf ranger were true. But above all He wanted to know as much as possible about <Magekiller>, the legendary sword that ended with Illudan the Golden, the greatest arcanist of the Ancient Empire.

And reality again exceeded their expectations. Ekendor had led the expedition through that dark place as if he knew everything beforehand. He stopped in front of traps that the magician could never have imagined to circumvent or deactivate them. He had confronted several ghouls, gelatins, giant spiders and other scavengers who inhabited those tombs with dexterity and tactical efficiency, ordered the minimum but necessary to overcome easily all those threats. And <Magekiller> seemed to dance mortally in all those combats. His trail of silver light, the sound of its edge cutting through the air, the bright runes of its blade, and the hypnotic black gem of its knob ... but Jarester knew that behind that beauty was hidden a power of death, a power that stoles his breath and made him feel vulnerable every time the weapon came closer than necessary to him.

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If only let that arrow escape now she could end with Ekendor at that moment crossing his unprotected neck. But just as that thought crossed Asha's mind the dark warrior stopped and looked back at her. The woman smiled to herself, because she was really beginning to think that the man was capable of reading her mind. On all the occasions that she really felt an urge to attack Ekendor, the warrior seemed to have sensed her intentions.

It was not only that she wanted take revenge of the Magekiller, the man who had captured her and brought her before the king. After all, in the wilderness you always find a predator greater than you,

becoming sooner or later from hunter to prey. But her savage instincts urged her to kill any enemy when it shows weakness. However, she still had not attacked him. Asha wondered if it was either because deep down she no longer perceived that man as an enemy, or because that weakness did not exist ...

Asha relaxed the recurved bow that Ekendor had given to her and pointed the arrow towards the ground, taking care to keep the enchanted silver point away from herself. "Legs", the giant spider the size of a mastiff with whom she had mentally empathized approached her from behind to inform her that there were no dangers in the rear. Asha stroked the hairy head of the arachnid and nodded to Ekendor. The warrior's red eyes stopped looking at her to focus again on the road and continue with the march.

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Ekendor felt the threat again from his back and responded with a sudden turn. Taking advantage of the energy of the movement, he made a cut with the sword at the height of Jarester's neck, decapitating him at once. The magician's head, still with eyes of surprise, fell to the ground in a heavy way producing a dry noise.

Then the warrior used the body of the magician, from which sprung a source of blood, to cover the arrow fired by Asha. Noticing the sound of the projectile digging in, Ekendor pushed the body hard to the Amazon and jumped on it before it could stabilize, piercing his chest with an accurate thrust.

Or at least that's what happened in Ekendor's mind for a brief moment. Another fleeting thought whispered by the sword Magekiller, who returned to claim blood to be satiated. Ekendor dismissed the idea and let it pass, but he was aware that the influence of the magic weapon was much greater than he expected.

He already counted that recruiting Asha for this mission was going to have a part of inconveniences. Not only because he felt the murderous look of the hunter every time he turned his back on him, but because the sword craved his blood. All that could control it. But what Ekendor had not anticipated was that the meddlesome magician accompany them. His mere presence was a real mental challenge. Every minute that passed required more concentration so as not to lose control.

At any moment, with only a flinch or doubt, what was only an idea, could become a real act.

Ekendor focused again on the corridor when he saw a door at the end. At first glance it was an old metal door, which could easily force. But Ekendor's vision allowed him not only to see in the dark, but also to distinguish the magical spectrum. Any trace of magic was perceived by the half-elf as clearly as the red of the hot metal in a forge. And in that door I could see a mortal enchantment weaving.

He glanced sideways at Asha to make sure the rearguard was safe. Once he received the confirmation from the hunter, he approached and knelt by the door to examine it carefully. He took out a small bag and emptied the contents of silver powder into his palm. Then he whispered a few words and scattered the dust on the door with a blow. The brightness of the silver particles intermingled with the reddish signs of the magic trap and after a few seconds both disappeared. After using a picklock to force the lock with ease, Ekendor turned to his companions to warn them.

- Wait for my instructions and act in a coordinated manner. Ekendor added this time addressing the old wizard.

Jarester simply nodded in silence. His pulse quickened and his mind was now a whirlwind of unanswered questions to which he was not accustomed. A powerful user of magic? Who was?

Would he be more powerful? And how did Ekendor know? And why did the sword seem to shine more intensely now?

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They entered into the room quickly. It was a wide and rectangular room where they accessed by a side located at one end of the room.

Ekendor stood in the middle ready for combat. In his right hand he wielded Magekiller while in his left hand he held a long dagger of Elvish craftsmanship.

Jarester followed him a little farther behind the door, holding his stick with two hands like a spear, ready to unleash his magic.

Asha entered the last one quickly to be on the other flank of Ekendor with an arrow ready in her bow. Her giant spider advanced at the same time through the roof to descend to her side.

On the other side of the room was a decrepit old man in an old tunic and cloak filled with embroidery of arcane letters and cadaverous symbols. Around him floated strange black stone orbs, emitting a faint funeral light. In his right hand he held a ritual dagger with a dark edge, while in his other hand he took a long stick of twisted wood from which hung skulls and bones.

Among them, in the middle of the room were two skeletons dressed in armor, shields and swords. Surely corpses of old knights who had been animated. They immediately faced them with a dark aura and a dim light inside the their eyes sockets.

Princess Mariel was handcuffed at the old man's feet, practically naked. After recovering from the surprise, she shouted help while struggling against her bonds.

- Help! Help me I beg you! Beware of the orbs, protect them from attacks! She added

The old magician stood for a moment studying the princess and then slowly turned to face them. His terrifying appearance was accentuated by showing a face that was almost like a dead. He watched the trio of adventurers with eyes that were an almost brilliant blue that stood out in the darkness. He pointed his staff toward them and began to utter some arcane words in a deep voice.

Without further delay, Ekendor gave the orders to his companions and charged.