

She awoke on the side of the fast flowing river next to a mirror. The woman had no idea where she was, why she was here, and when she got up, who she was. She looked at the mirror to see herself wrapped from neck to toe in bandages that completely covered up her body concealing any details underneath, a cloth strapped to her stomach by a sash that descended to her knees, golden plates that were cracked, battered, and brittle located on her arms and legs, and a golden mask with two simple eyeholes in the same state as her plates with markings on it. On her feet were plates that included sharp talons on her toes, or were those her toes? She couldn't remember for the love of her. Her black hair descended into curls that extended to the top of her back. The woman opened her mouth and spoke, "Do I still have a voice?" It has a smooth, calming, but emotionless tone to it. She sighed in great relief.

"Good. But what do I do now?" She heard rustling in the bushes and looked around.

Out from the shrubbery came a group of men. They all wore patched up robes and armor along with bird skull masks.

"Hello there. What brings you here?" She asked,

"Do not ask, just give." One of them pointed their crude excuse for a sword at her,

"I do not understand. What are your names?" The woman asked once more,

"Didn't you hear him? Just give us what you have." Another demanded,

"Why should I? What did you do for me to deserve it?" She continued to question them,

"That doesn't matter! Stop asking questions before we cut you in half!" One carrying an axe demanded pointing it ever closer at her.

"I believe it does. Now please stop bothering me and leave if you aren't going to be nice about this." The woman said,

"What's your name even?" Another asked,

"..." She stood there unsure of how to answer to that since she couldn't remember it,

"Well? Spit it out." The one with an axe growled,

"Ma... Ma... Ka..." The thieves were now beyond irritated,

"ANSWER IT!" One of them yelled,

"Ma-Ka-Ra." She quickly came up with.

"Thank you... you made that a lot harder than it should've- AUUUUUGH!" He screamed in pain as he was mysteriously and mercilessly hacked to ribbons by a flurry of blades. The thieves wasted no time and charged at Ma-Ka-Ra. She put her hands up in defense only to summon a wave of spikes that impaled two of them. Surprised she waved her hand at another where a chained blade materialized and struck him in the chest before wrapping him around a tree. She couldn't believe what she was witnessing: she was summoning blades out of thin air without effort no less and killing these guys without even breaking a sweat. The worst part was that she felt no remorse for what she was currently doing or showed any kind of emotion.

"W-Who are you!? W-W-What are you!?" The last one asked terrified,

"I... don't know... but I want you to leave. Now." He quickly dropped his weapon and ran back into the shrubbery without another word.

“Good... but now where do I go from here?” She found a trail alongside the river and decided to go from there.

After a while of walking Ma-Ka-Ra stopped to catch her breath,
“This is pointless. Where does this path even lead?” As soon as she finished that sentence she could hear screaming. She ran as fast as she could to see a village with the more thieves like the ones from before dragging people from their homes and onto the streets while others were taking valuables and tossing them into carts and wagons. Ma-Ka-Ra approached the village to see what the issue was when she was stopped by two men arguing,
“I won’t let you! You’ve already taken five of my daughters and none of them have returned! I know what you did to them! I’m not letting you kill another one!” She turned to see a man yelling at a thief holding the arm of a young girl with short brown hair and a headband. Tears were streaking down her cheeks heavily and made visible attempts to break free.
“We haven’t killed any of them. This is simply paying a debt you owe us.” The thief said forcing the girl onto a carriage and hopped onto it.
“What debt!? Why is a debt worth my precious little girls!?” The man continued to protest,
“Enough. We’re done here.” The carriage began to take off,
“I’m not letting you Scavengers leave with my girl in hand!” He jumped onto the carriage only to be knocked off. A woman that Ma-Ka-Ra suspected to be his wife ran to his aid and helped him up before weeping into his chest.
“Don’t do that again if you want to keep your head attached to your neck.” He scowled. The carriage finally took off along with the others and headed into the forest. Ma-Ka-Ra took after them to see where they went.

As they traveled deeper into the forest Ma-Ka-Ra waited patiently to see where they stopped and then strike; she wouldn’t let a crime like this go unpunished.
“Here we are!” One announced. The carriages and carts all came to a stop around a campsite set up with various tents carrying all kinds of trinkets and treasures, and prisoners. She could see the little girl pushed into a cage along with five other girls to which Ma-Ka-Ra presumed was the five daughters that the man mentioned.
“I got another one from that man. At this rate we’ll have enough to satisfy the king in no time.” He said before laughing.
“He always likes them related to one another.” Ma-Ka-Ra had nearly had enough of these two talking about what they were going to do with these girls. She needed to free them from their grasp and reunite them with their parents. She snuck past the poorly crafted fence and hid behind a tree.
“So when will they be shipped out?” They began talking again.
“They’ll be shipped out by tonight, the king plans on keeping them in his dungeon until they’re the proper coming of age.” Ma-Ka-Ra realized she needed to act quickly about this. She attempted to slip behind another carriage; unfortunately this is where her luck would end as she stepped on a twig alerting a nearby archer carrying a crossbow. He took aim almost immediately and fired.

Ma-Ka-Ra swiftly dodged it only to run into one of the two guys talking in front of the cage holding the girls.

"What the!? Who are you!? Alert the others!" He yelled,

"You're not taking those girls away..." Ma-Ka-Ra responded in the same monotone voice as always. He pulled out a sword and got into a fighting stance,

"That guy sent you! Didn't he!?" The woman only stood there in silence.

"Well he isn't getting them back! This debt must be repaid to the king! All must know the power of the great Gorklat!" He charged at her full force. Ma-Ka-Ra still stood there unmoved; the girls watched anxiously as she didn't move an inch. Ma-Ka-Ra soon also became a bit worried as nothing happened,

'Why isn't this working!?' She narrowly avoided a swing from the sword and hopped back.

'I need to watch out for that sharp blade-' As Ma-Ka-Ra thought that, sharp blades suddenly came from the ground and struck the Scavenger in the feet causing him to get stuck. He dropped his sword and pulled his legs to get them free. Ma-Ka-Ra could only think about that for a moment before she heard more coming her way. She thought about the blade once more as she looked at it on the ground before hearing another scream. As she turned around she could see the thief with a chained blade through his chest pulling at him from the ground. The six girls looked away as his torso was ripped from the waist killing him for good but Ma-Ka-Ra only stared at it unmoved by the brutal kill she just performed.

"S-She, she's an Aichomancer!" One of the girls yelled. As she yelled that a group over to the cages to see their dead companion. Three approached her with their weapons at the ready. Ma-Ka-Ra thought about chains this time and watched as the three were entangled in a sea of chains. She now figured out how this special magic worked and was now ready to put it to good use. She summoned a plethora of spikes to impale the three before throwing a sawblade at an archer who was ready to fire at her only to be decapitated by the blade. The rest of the group took up their weapons and attacked Ma-Ka-Ra. With swift movements the woman wrapped a chain around one's spear, cast a line of kunais in one direction to strike a few more, and threw another group of spikes killing a couple.

"Those Scavengers don't even stand a chance against her!" As the girl yelled that the prisoners looked over to see a Scavenger have a barrage of knives mow him down. One of the prisoners noticed that the thieves were distracted at the girl's magic. Immediately he stomped his foot causing him to drop his weapon. The archers scrambled to load their guns and stop this rebellion only to have various sharp objects thrown at them; slicing and impaling them dropping their crossbows. The other prisoners immediately took this chance and began fighting back against their captors.

"We've had enough of this and it's about time we change it! We will not be slaves or soldiers to that undead king of yours!" The man yelled as he lifted the bloodied sword. The captives roared in agreement as they struck down the Scavengers. One by one the thieves began scrambling from the camp for their lives while others attempted to take what they could and make a run

for it only to be restrained by the ones they once captured. The entire camp had been liberated and all prisoners were free.

Back at the village the man was still comforting his wife about the loss of yet another daughter of theirs.

"It's alright... they would want us to move on-" He was interrupted by a man screaming something inaudible from inside the shop. As they walked out they were greeted by the embraces of their six daughters.

"Our girls! It's a miracle!" The wife cried in joy.

"I'm glad I could help." They looked up to see a woman wrapped in bandages.

"Andrew, look around us." He did just that and noticed the people who had been held prisoner from this village were now back.

"Unbelievable... how can we ever thank you?" He asked Ma-Ka-Ra,

"No need. I feel that my journey calls me on my way once more so I bid you all farewell. But first, may I get a name from you?" She bowed before turning around.

"My name is Lily, and this is Kelly, Natalie, Fiona, Olivia, Wendy, and Vanessa. At least take this coin purse as a thank you. Thank you so much once again." The family waved as Ma-Ka-Ra took the purse not wanting to look rude and took off once more.

Back on the trail leading to who knows where Ma-Ka-Ra took this time to ponder what the little girl said what she was.

'An Aichomancer? I thought those kinds of mages were so few... none can ever truly master its magic. There are no documented cases of anybody truly mastering it. But, yet... I could perform it without any problem. Perhaps I'm thinking too deeply about it.' As she finished thinking she happened to reach a fork in the road. The sign to the left stated it led to another town while the sign pointing to the right said this in big bold red letters that resembled comic sans:

"FERRY LEADING TO SHAMBLING ISLES ONLY 0.4 KM AWAY."

Ma-Ka-Ra pondered which she should take. In the end she felt gravitated towards the right believing this would lead her closer to answers and possibly a reason why she was here. She ran as fast as she could in hopes to catch the ferry. The only thing she saw would've made her disgusted is she could actually feel. The entire dock was surrounded by scavengers transporting prisoners to these isles. She approached one of them with a plan.

"Does this ship lead to the Shambling Isles?" She asked one of them. The news of the camp surprisingly hadn't reached them yet so the scavenger had no idea she was.

"Yeah... why do you ask? Do you want to go there? You realize the place is a death trap, right?" The Scavenger asked,

"May I go on the next ship?" The Scavenger looked at her like she was crazy,

"I guess you really are asking for a death wish, unfortunately I can't take you. It's strictly against the king's rules to take any passengers." Ma-Ka-Ra took out the coin purse and pulled out several golden coins.

"Will this do?" She asked,

“Though he did make an exception for paying passengers. Make it fifteen and you’re free to come aboard.” Ma-Ka-Ra sighed and pulled out a few more to satisfy the greedy Scavenger. “I’m not responsible for anything that happens to you.” He said as he led her onto the ship.

On the top deck Scavengers were conversing with each other about certain things that Ma-Ka-Ra didn’t care to hear about. When she got closer to the front of ship she could see who was sailing the ship: pirates. Elvakin pirates to be more exact but still pirates nonetheless, *‘How many criminal outlaws does this King Gorklat have for allies?’* She thought to herself moving away from the front to avoid anybody getting suspicious of her.

“We’re taking off! Prepare to set sail!” Someone announced and Ma-Ka-Ra felt the ship beneath her feet. She didn’t know why but the feeling of sailing and the smell of the sea salt made her queasy, she felt violently sick all of a sudden. But due to having no food in her she just dry heaved throughout the entire voyage.

“Looks like someone gets a little seasick easily.” She could hear pirate say before the passengers aboard broke in convulsive laughter at her suffering.

Finally after for what seemed like an eternity they had hit shore. Ma-Ka-Ra was quick to run down the plank thankful that she was off the forsaken thing. As she caught her breath and felt her strength returning to her she stood back up. The beach was covered in sickly black sand with driftwood and shipwrecks washed ashore, the entire place was covered in an eerie thick green fog and was constantly night time. She looked over to see a green Lambara covered in bandages and wearing a wooden mask. From the ship Ma-Ka-Ra could see Parasithians, Swampies, and Akronians, along with the humans.

“Here are your new undead you asked for king.” The pirate told him,

‘This is the guy? New undead? Please don’t tell me...’ Ma-Ka-Ra watched worried.

“What are you still doing here? Get lost.” A scavenger told her,

“Why don’t I just show these new recruits what to look forward to?” The king spoke in a scratchy voice. He took out a green vial and shook it a bit causing the prisoners back up a bit in fear for what was in store for them.

“Why don’t you come here little girl?” He grabbed a little Swampie girl by the arm and dragged her to her feet. She looked away from the vial with her eyes closed. Ma-Ka-Ra couldn’t stand around anymore; she acted on impulse. Gorklat felt the vial painfully thrown out of his hand and watched in horror as the horrid virus hit the ground smashing to pieces harmlessly. The girl ripped herself free of his grip and ran back into her mother’s arms.

He looked over at Ma-Ka-Ra standing there with her arm out.

“Kill the prisoners! I’ll convert them-!” As soon as he said that the pirates and scavengers were ripped apart by Ma-Ka-Ra’s blades.

“...” Gorklat growled before summoning a group of Swampie zombies.

“Slaughter them!” He demanded. Before they could move an inch their attention was redirected by a bullet driving itself into a zombie’s chest. A mysterious figure jumped from the ledge of the hill and struck a zombie’s head off. He wore a plague doctor’s mask and a strange

coat. Ma-Ka-Ra took this opportunity to bind them in chains allowing this stranger to pick them all off with relative ease.

"Who are you? Who let you onto the ship?" Gorklat asked,

"I'm an Aichomancer. And you've made me your enemy. That's all you need to know." She threw a blade at him which only missed and struck the wall of a nearby shipwreck.

"Very well. Take these people back to the mainland. I've got plenty of soldiers and workers anyway." He huffed before disappearing for good. The prisoners immediately stood up and looked at each other. Ma-Ka-Ra cut all their ropes loose allowing them to move freely. Few grabbed blunderbusses and cutlasses from the rotting chests and cleaned them to prepare for the scavengers back at the port.

"Thank you for what you have done." The Swampie mother said,

"Don't mention it." Ma-Ka-Ra simply replied.

As the ship took off with the prisoners aboard Ma-Ka-Ra took a look over at the figure to see him walking away.

"Wait! Who are you!?" He stopped in his tracks,

"Why did you come here?" His voice sounded light and innocent but cold towards Ma-Ka-Ra as if she had made a mistake.

"I could feel this island calling for me. I had to embrace destiny for I feel empty inside." The man was dead silent.

"Feel empty inside? Well you don't know what horrors this island holds in its sickly appearance. You should've gone with that ship while you still had the chance." He now sounded hostile.

"Something tells me you have trust issues." Ma-Ka-Ra walked closer to him,

"Trust issues? I'm only practically a hollow shell after what I've had to go through to protect my adopted son from the abominations of these isles." Her face lit up immediately at the mention of adopted son.

"Adopted son? Does he live with just you? Do you think he needs a female role model to look up to?" She now sounded bubbly and joyful as if a motherly instinct had taken over her.

"He doesn't need any more people in his life. His father put him through enough torture and nobody else is cut out for caring for him except me." Now Ma-Ka-Ra was offended,

"Nobody else? I think I could get this child to warm up to me." She slipped back into her monotone voice.

"Yeah right. I'd like to see you try." He taunted,

"Well it seems we've made it to your home. So why don't I?" She pointed out as they reached a cottage covered in foliage and steam pipes.

"...DAMN IT!" He screamed out.

As soon as yelled said that, a voice came from inside the cottage.

"Lukip? Father? Is that you?" They heard the clapping of hooves,

'Hooves? How odd... what kind of creature is he?' Ma-Ka-Ra thought to herself before the door opened up. Out from it came a gray Lambara rushing out to embrace his father.

"Papa!" He yelled out as he cuddled his legs with his head. Ma-Ka-Ra was immediately struck

with an overbearing sense of love for this little child. She kneeled down and laid a hand upon his hair which was soft as a cloud. As he felt the hand he opened his eyes to see someone petting his hair without permission.

"Let go of me!" He cried before hiding behind Lukip. He looked behind him to see him bawling his eyes out.

"It's okay Betolra. She isn't here to hurt you. She's here to help me with taking care of you." He picked up the crying kid and hugged him tightly to calm him down.

"How do we know?" He said, tears still streaking down profusely.

"Well, she came here on a ferry boat that was carrying prisoners and she helped me free them from that nasty Lambara Gorklat." Ma-Ka-Ra could see Betolra whispering something under his breath barely audible,

"Father..." She stood there stunned,

"That's your father? What did he- actually, perhaps it's a better idea to leave that for a later time." Lukip nodded in agreement.

"Good catching yourself there. Why don't you tell us your name and come inside to get yourself acquainted in our humble home?" He suggested,

"I go by the name of Ma-Ka-Ra. It's nice to meet you Lukip and Betolra. I hope to get to know you two more as time passes on." She smiled underneath her mask. She couldn't wait to continue her adventures on this island and perhaps uncover her past and secrets.