

((Note: This section takes place during [Chapter 41](#)..))

32-year-old Severin breathed in, cool air slipping through his helmet, filling his lungs. His battered, once-golden armor shined in the morning sun, a number of scratches revealing the dull steel beneath the thin veneer of beauty. He ran a shimmering, golden gauntlet over the battered wood of the railing, casting his enhanced sight over the valley below, one of the rare untouched forest areas of central Haniyas, the intricate, delicate runes scribed on the front of his helmet granting him sight. They blazed a pale blue as his head moved upwards, focusing his visage upon the shadow flying through the sky, its wings twisting in the air as it flaunted the freedom that only its kind possessed after they began their war of extermination on all of humanity. His fingers curled around the treated wood, the metal of his armor digging into the elegantly curving patterns carved into the material.

He had arrived early, befitting his role as the youngest son of the George family. The mountain lodge had been fully stocked, ammunition had been procured, and armor had been polished. It was to be the perfect hunt for the George family. A thrilling recreation of the family's history, reliving the glories of the first draconic war, hunting down selected dragons from the arenas. It was going to be glorious. A noble death for the beasts involved, which was the most they could ask for. His hand drifted to the blade at his belt as he gritted his teeth, cursing the drakes silently. He was the only member of the George family to survive the mass murder the beasts were perpetrating below. One minute he had been speaking to his father over the phone, the next, the cold silence of death. He pushed off the railing and began to walk, his mind awash with resolve and hatred.

The man pushed open the door to the stables, the solid oak door moving silently. He had spent far too much time oiling the massive hinges. It was shameful he was the only soul able to enjoy the time and effort he had put into this endeavor. He strode into the circular chamber, a reinforced glass skylight dominating the ceiling, while his mount lay curled on the floor within a nest of hay, raising its leathery head at his approach. *Wyvern*. The George family had always bred them. His ancestors had taken a clan of them in the great war, snaring them in nets and nooses. They were disgraceful, fleeing and scampering from beings a tenth their size. They have since been brought to heel; centuries of selective breeding, controlling chemicals in their food and water, and rigorous training. They had shrunk to the size of a horse, lost much of their mental faculties, and been severed from the world of magic. They were perfect; loyal, agile, as intelligent as they needed to be. He reached around its dagger-toothed maw, bypassing his horns. He stooped down and began to scratch the soft hide there, eliciting a constant leg spasm from his mount. Severin rose as his mount began to scramble to its feet. "Come, Thaddeus. Today, we hunt." The once-noble beast eagerly scampered after him, its forked tongue lolling from its mouth.

His greaves rested in the leather stirrups of the adapted saddle, the warbeast easily carrying his weight. The reins hung slack from Thaddeus's horns. He rarely needed to use them. Thaddeus was the product of generations of discipline and carefully controlled and forced evolution, not to mention years of intense training. A cruelly barbed harpoon rested in his lap, the iron chain wrapped around the pommel

of the saddle. Severin took a moment to test the clasp on the first link, ensuring that the chain would be severed when the situation demanded it. Pain ran through his leg, a permanent reminder of what happened the last time he had a lapse in diligence. Across his back hung a sturdy crossbow, although he knew from experience the bolts were useful for little more than catching the attention of his prey. He still saw the dragon in his mind, an emerald tyrant flaunting its control over the sky. *'Sic semper Tyrannis.'* He chuckled at his private joke and dug his heels into Thaddeus's side, prompting his trusty speed into a sprint, its two legs propelling it over the lip of the hangar carved into the side of the mountain. The pair plummeted, the straps of the saddle holding Severin in place as the wind whipped by his helmet, tugging at his armored frame. The ground grew ever-closer, a rocky plain expanding to fill his glyph-granted vision. In a sudden motion, the wyvern's wings expanded, extricating the two from their deadly fall. As Thaddeus's wings moved, buffeting Severin with air, he scanned the skies for his target, azure flame alighting across the eldritch patterns sketched on his faceplate as his enchantments worked their magic.

The ground beneath the pair blended into an indistinct blur, Thaddeus's wings scything through the air as they rode towards their target. The man's grip tightened around the harpoon, the oaken shaft merging into a barbed point. There was little chance of it being removed easily, especially without dedicated, skilled help. But of course, the dragon would not survive long enough to be concerned with removal. His steed rose through the air currents as he approached the dragon. He cast his gaze over it, runes burning as he looked over its scintillating green hide. Spines rose along the curvature of its back as great sails of wings beat lazily in the air. He had entered its blind spot, obscuring himself behind the massive beast's own body. A set of massive horns spiraled up from the abomination's skull, forming strange patterns that caught the eye and drew them deeper into the mass of bone. As the sun shone off of its scales, a veritable twin to his own reflective nature, he hefted the weight of the harpoon. He knew what he had to do. The beasts had burned down civilization in a day, slaughtered and eaten millions, including his own family. The blood of humanity was on their hands, an eternal debt hanging over their heads, a debt he would collect. The markings scribed on his helmet began to swirl and twist, warping around each other, entrapping the disparate strings of reality within their arcane forms. Severin's eyes locked themselves shut as the future forced its way into his mortal mind, scorching a pathway into his consciousness.

The armor; it would catch the sun, reflecting the light into the beast's eye. It would see him, a shining beacon of mankind, bearing down on it, a figure of legend come to avenge the fallen. It began to roll left. The strings of fate snapped, extricating themselves from his mind like knives pulling themselves from his brain. He gritted his teeth, sucking air as pain wracked his head. There was always balance in his magic. Power did not come without pain, without taking its just due on reality. He shuddered to think what price the beasts had paid in order to cause this devastation. But that was a worry for another day. At this moment, there were far more pressing matters.

Severin hefted the harpoon, barely thinking as he threw it to the left of the dragon. He jinked Thaddeus to the side, following the creature as it began to dodge. The spear flew through the air, sinking into the abomination's flank, eliciting an ear-piercing screech of pain. His hands quickly flew to the pommel,

uncoiling the chain, keeping the restraint slack. Thaddeus flew at a constant distance from his prey, his superior maneuverability allowing him to follow the evasive flying of the dragon. Severin gripped the chain, following its iron path towards the dragon. Taking a breath to steel himself, he unbuckled himself from his saddle and began to move.

The man grasped the chain for dear life, fixing his sight upon the sky, rather than the ground far below, iron links digging into his hands through the leather on the undersides of his palms. His legs were wrapped around the single metallic lifeline he possessed, inching along the chain as fast as he could, fully aware that a single mistake would mean death. The wind tugged at him, threatening to send him careening to the ground, *a failure*. He was a George. He refused to tarnish the family name by dying so ingloriously. With a world-turning shudder, the dragon twisted and turned, almost tossing Severin from the chain as it rotated, leaving him directly above the beast. *'Perfect.'*

He loosened his grip as he slid down the chain, the ragged strands of fate captured by his rune work revealing the temporary stability of the dragon, before sending pain alighting across every nerve in his body. He had to capitalize while it lasted. His greaves impacted on the glimmering green of the drake's hide; a sinuous sea of scale. He threw himself across the beast's back, plunging a crossbow bolt desperately clutched in his hand into the creature's armored skin, forming a makeshift piton as the beast began to turn. He clutched to it with all of his might, burying his face in the endless expanse of emerald. He began to leave the scaled surface of the beast as it turned, his legs dangling over the certain death of empty air. Adrenaline poured through his system as he began to breathe heavily, the constant threat with death bringing him to life. Quickly dropping a hand to the quiver at his hip, he pulled free another bolt, stabbing it upwards, creating another handhold. The dragon screamed again, a bone-shaking roar escaping its deadly maw, one that it was unable to use against the murderous parasite clinging to its back. Severin reached for another bolt when it moved again, breaking his tenuous grip on his makeshift climbing gear.

Severin scrambled across its ridged surface as he slid across, searching for anything that might save him. He fell across its back, sliding towards death. In a moment of panic, he reached out, grasping one of the spines that rose from its back, a bony growth that was the only thing between him and his demise. *'There were many.'* He looked across the back of the dragon, grateful that its anatomy had provided him with the means to end its existence. He reached out, clutching another spine, dragging himself along its length, his sword still hanging at his hip, still eager for blood.

Severin arrived at its wings, the paired appendages beating rhythmically as they propelled the abomination through the sky. As he crawled towards them, he hazarded a glimpse down, gazing down towards the surface below. Where once rolling plains dominated the landscape, great pines filled his vision. *'Perfect.'* He grabbed his blade from its scabbard, pulling it free from the leather, focusing his sight upon the pinion. The man rose to his feet, trying his best to steady himself on the dragon's back. He raised his sword, and with a wordless cry of hatred, he cleaved into the dragon's wing, the heavy blade severing flesh and snapping bone, rendering the wing useless. Already the dragon began to drop, plummeting through the air, its roars of pain and hate replaced by a single scream of pure and utter

terror as it was faced with death. Severin raced along its back, caution abandoned and replaced with urgency. He threw himself upon the chain as the dragon began to twist, its cries dominating the wind. He wrapped his hand around the chain, desperately clinging to it as his other hand reached the clasp. With a practiced, deft movement hastened by his fear, he released the chain from the spear, pulling him free from the dying dragon. As he dangled from the chain, he watched the dragon curl and twist upon itself, desperately trying to extricate itself from its predicament.

Severin watched it fall towards the earth. He watched it impale itself on the conifers rising from the ground, the trees splintering beneath its force and weight. He watched its death spasms end, before finally beginning to climb the chain back to Thaddeus, his ever-loyal mount, still circling the scene of the battle.

((**Note:** This section takes place during [Chapter 42](#).)

Thaddeus glided into the solid stone hangar, his claws scraping off the chiseled grey rock, carrying his rider home as he had done a hundred times before. Severin hauled himself off the adapted saddle, immediately stumbling to the cold floor with a brief cry of pain. Agony surged through his limb as soon as he attempted to walk. He silently cursed his carelessness and recklessness. Even in this hellish remnant of the world, it would not do to have a George behave as such. Sucking air through gritted teeth, he pulled his shining helmet from his scarred face, runes dying as he shambled forward and delicately set it on a crate of dried meat. He was reminded once more of the need to sustain himself. Hunger growled in his gut, demanding to be sated. With a deft motion, he grabbed a fistful of jerky, quickly introducing it to his set of perfect teeth, masticating the preserved meat between his ivory incisors. It was a welcome distraction from the pain of his damaged leg. His wyvern followed him as he advanced through the well-worn corridors, the uncaring stone eventually giving way to welcoming wood.

Sighing, Severin collapsed into a plush chair, the holographic picture display on the end table next to it deadened and useless. Shifting his gaze to the more traditional photographs, he picked up a memory. His elder brothers, crowded around a young babe, wrapped in the golden colors of the family. He choked back tears, letting the framed picture drop to the carpeted floor beneath as he cradled his damaged face in his hands, saline solution leaking between his fingers. The world had been ruined. The lizards had destroyed humanity and their future, rending the world asunder in one fell swoop. There was no hope; only despair. He stared at his now-clenched hands, his nails digging into the pale skin. How long would he fight for shadows of the past? How long would he carve his name into beasts an order of magnitude larger than himself? When would he embrace the end and simply let the monsters devour him?

He laughed to himself, resting his hand on the pommel of his sword. He would fight, so long as one of

the scaled abominations flew the skies, still nested and shitted in the monuments that humans had built to their accomplishments. He would fight so long as his sword still had an edge, so long as he could still curse and spit at the destroyers of humanity. He looked out over the vast expanse of emptiness held at bay by the glass windows of the lodge, still free of the scaled bastards. He would tear them all to pieces. Every last abomination would be slain by his hand.

The man readjusted himself in the luxurious chair. For now, he rested. In the morning, he would remind the beasts why they once feared the Georges. He slipped into a sleep as fire and blade filled his dreams, accompanied by the roars and screams of the dragons and the echoing cries of the dead.

((Note: This section takes place during [Chapter 44](#).**))**

Severin limped to his steed, tinges of pain still afflicting his leg, a further reminder of the price of carelessness. Thaddeus lowered a wing, allowing his rider to clamber across his back, taking up his familiar position atop the saddle, sweat-stained leather meeting familiar contours, sword and bow clashing against his armor, the only sound in the painfully silent lodge. He was alone here, amongst the ghosts. He was all that remained of what was once a name etched into legend. How long would it last? The beasts were undoubtedly erasing the world that once existed, tearing down the monuments and sacred sites they had been used to forge. It was all they could do, destroy. Some fool god gave them claws, flame, magic and a mind to use it all, and it left them complacent. They never created, never built, for they were perfectly equipped for life once they cracked their shell. He stroked a gauntlet along the ancestral sword at his side. *'We were born soft and toothless, and forged our hide and claws from fire and steel.'* They looked at themselves and saw winged perfection and grace, the apex of nature. Man looked at himself and saw weakness, a flawed creation that begged for improvement. Talons scratched across the roost's floor as Thaddeus leapt into oblivion, leathery expanses of wings unfurling to carry the pair across the skies, remnants of humanity's glory and hubris scattered across the land, begging for a man strong enough to reclaim them from the monsters that squatted on their desecrated shrines.

Severin cast his rune-granted sight down upon the carcass of the city beneath, what was once shining spires, abuzz with activity and information, were turned to blackened fingers, reaching up from ash-coated earth in their last moment of purpose. A shimmering blue lake gleamed behind these macabre remnants, fragments of naval vessels occasionally surfacing, a testament to the brutality of the dragons. It was his home, once. Raastal, the capital of Haniyas, the pinnacle of industry and advancement, built on the scaled backs of dragons. As Thaddeus gently turned within the thermal, the man tried to remember what this place was like, when it was alive. People had filled the streets, mere ants from the family's penthouse. Dragons had lumbered through, laden with materials and merchandise, mere beasts of burden. His gaze shifted to where their quarters and arenas had been, now rendered unto slag, scorched and melted beyond all recognition. Of course, no George made a habit of visiting them. Dragons, monstrous as they are, should die by a man's hand, not by each other's. Thaddeus dived,

spiraling towards the ravaged tower where he once slept. *'Not the homecoming I imagined.'*

Thaddeus touched down upon the burnt floor, easily accessing the suite through a shattered window, the flames that consumed the building having long since sated their hunger. Severin stepped off of his mount, wincing at the pain of his injured leg. Ashes shifted beneath his metallic stride, disturbing the pristine white coating over his treasured past. He ran his armored fingers across the scorched cabinet, remembering the mild concussion he had received when he had first begun to run. He pushed aside what passed for the door, hinges screeching as it moved the destroyed hunk of wood aside. Severin gasped when he witnessed the scene inside.

The fire had consumed the expansive living area. The two floors had been wholly devoured by flame, beautiful wooden engravings and knick-knacks, hunting trophies from centuries of glory, all destroyed. A chandelier, half-melted from the heat lay collapsed on the floor. Beneath it laid a charred corpse, its finery burnt away in the vengeful fires wrought by dragonkind. Partially annihilated portraits of ancestors past looked down upon the visage, unable to do anything for their descendant than to watch. Tossing aside his helmet, carefully scribed runes smudging into uselessness upon impact with the cluttered floor, Severin limped to the corpse, falling to his armored knees, tears beginning to stream down scarred cheeks. Saltwater fell on his kinsman, staining desiccated flesh, ivory-white teeth stark against blackened flesh. It was several minutes before Severin rose unsteadily to his feet, his helmet tucked under his arm, his blade clenched tightly in white knuckles.

((Note: This section takes place during [Chapter 47.](#)**))**

How long has he sat here? Rain cascaded against his shining armor, its brilliance sacrilegious in this defiled place, a mockery of life and opulence laughing at the vista of carnage strewn around him. Severin drew in a shuddering breath, the only light in this seemingly eternal night the cerulean flames burning patterns through reality on his golden helmet. Those monsters had killed his family. Immaculately-polished gauntlets twitched and curled as he hung his head in despair, the downpour seeping into the treated leather underneath his ceremonial armor. To think that a George would perish here of all places. Trapped beneath the riches they had earned, burnt alive by the monsters they had slain and crushed beneath their well-cobbled boots. It defied reason, spat in the face of all that he had known. What now?

The man was still plagued with memories of that place, that sacred penthouse where he was raised. He could still remember the laughter that rang throughout its gilded halls, the twinkling of the morning's light through the chandeliers dangling gems; his brothers; his parents. The human race had been shattered by the dragons' fell magic, scattered across the face of the earth.

And yet, humanity endured. The beasts' arcane apocalypse had not succeeded. His hands slipped down to the haft of his blade on his hip, ceasing their trembling as they wrapped around the hide-bound hilt.

At the very least, they had missed one. A grin began to form from underneath the faceless mask, parting the tear streaks running down his marred visage. And he had made them pay for it. The shrieks of utter tear and helplessness the foolish, foolish dragon had offered still rang in his ears, a sweet song of vengeance. Would they even notice its absence? Were they so busy with rending asunder the work of millennia that they had failed to care for their own?

They were not worthy of the freedom they cheated their way into. They flew their own separate paths, burning down the world where the whim took them, every individual exulting in their own newfound liberty, unable to witness the burning beacons of their abominable essence being snuffed out. They had forged this dark age, and yet they still flaunted their gifts, soaring through the skies above the derelict towers where their betters once dwelled, spitting fire amongst the cold and dead streetlights that once illuminated the city. And worst of all, their magic. They had turned a world of reason and progress into their own personal paradise, where their innate ability to sunder reality reigned supreme. They were god-like monsters, each of which was infused with more magic and strength than 20 men.

Severin looked upon the bright surface of his heavy blade, watching the rivulets of water stream off of its worn metal, his family's heraldry worked into its steel length. The dragons were the terrors in the dark, the hungering maws filled with flame that lurked underneath beds and in shaded corners, the rending claws that slowly worked their ways across bed sheets to sleeping children. He was a George.

The man spurred Thaddeus into motion, his mount leaping off the balcony into the sky over the ruined city. Dull gray wings stretched out over the expanse, a mirror of the charred rubble beneath the ascendant aristocrat. A seemingly infinite plane of dashed hopes and dreams, of a future denied, stretched before them. His gauntlet clenched around his sword, steeling his resolve, the sharp blade a constant presence in this tumultuous time. He was Severin Tomas George, son of Samson, last of his line. He was a dragon slayer, and he was just getting started.