

Something had been bothering me throughout the whole day, but I was unable to discover what exactly it was. Perhaps it was the coming storm, or maybe the large amount of orders I needed to fulfill; yet the feeling I had was unfamiliar and foreboding. Every now and then throughout the day, and odd scent would be carried in on the south wind; it was barely discernable through my workshop window, but it was enough to tickle my senses.

I tried sleeping when the sun set, but remained restless all night, only snatching a few moments of slumber here and there. In time, I gave up trying to force myself to sleep, and instead lit a candle that I might begin working again and catch up with my order list.

I hardly had time to start before the first screams were heard.

Rushing outside to see what had occurred, I stood at the door and felt something inside me drop, plunging into a deep despair that is rarely experienced by anyone. A mass of raiders—nay, a hoard—stormed the village of Templis from the south. Each one armed to the brim, they raged along their way, several of them ramming into houses or smashing windows as they passed by. Men and women could be heard shouting, children screamed as they were awoken by the intruders, and steel clashed against steel. Within a few minutes, the village had been transformed into a battlefield.

I retreated to my room, but only long enough to arm myself. Though a weaver by trade, I still keep a blade for such an event as occurred that night.

By the time I had retrieved it off of my bedroom wall, I heard a loud ruckus within the confines of my house—within the very room of my livelihood, a place I would fight tooth-and-claw to protect. Knowing I would be outnumbered, and probably outskilled, I awaited my opportunity, which came when one of the two who entered my domain was foolish enough to walk through the door to my room. I doubt he ever knew what ran him through. The second git, laden down as he was with my handiwork, was a fairly easy matter as well.

Understand, I take little pleasure in the memory—only that I was able to protect myself and my trade—but I hold no regrets, either, for they surely would have destroyed me had I tried to defend myself and my property by any other means.

I knew that if I were to venture out into the streets, it would be a very different experience. I would need to be cautious, lest I be overwhelmed by superior fighters. So I waited until the sound of rushing footsteps outside faded, then exited my house and quickly worked around behind it; here, the walls of adjacent dwellings were close to each other, narrow the pathway, and allowing me to remain in relative safety. A large commotion could be heard from the direction of Templis' center—shouting and sword-clashes. Many of the voices were familiar to me, but each one sounded desperate and distressed. I ran to help, weaving between various walls, as well as the barrels, carts, and other miscellaneous items that were placed behind them.

Rounding the corner of one house, I ran headlong into somebody. Both of us were so tense and nervous that we drew our weapons back, ready to run each other through, before recognizing the other's familiar face.

"Reling?" I asked, staying my blade.

"Bradley? Oh, thank goodness!" he replied, lowering his axe. "I was preparing to strike down whatever raider just appeared at my back door; I do hope you'll forgive me."

I motioned with my paw, encouraging Reling to follow me as I resumed dashing along my way. "No hard feelings; you yourself saw that I was ready to do the same—though I'd probably be the only one to hit my mark."

"Come now!" the tawny rothan exclaimed.

"We both know that you are far from accurate," I joked with him, despite the situation. (Or, perhaps, in a deliberate attempt to lighten the weight I felt.)

"That may be so," my friend conceded, "but at least I'd would have finished you in one blow, you weakling."

"Oh, now you've asked for it," I chuckled, panting a little by now. "When all this has passed, you and I shall have a duel, to see if our statements hold true." Naturally this was all in good humor, for there was no way to test Reling's claim without risking my life.

At a certain point, the uproar we ran towards was louder than ever, even to the point of aural discomfort—however, it was the very location we needed to get to. "This way," Reling said, calling me back to a small alley that I had overlooked; there was barely enough room for the width of our shoulders, so it was fortunate that we weren't attacked while inside it.

We stepped out onto the sidelines of the fray. The people of Templis had been quick to respond; men and women alike were gathered just outside the village's center, wielding whatever could be used as a weapon, from proper swords to kitchen knives to pitchforks to frying pans. The fighting was spread out, with no clear division between the opposing parties; some people fought duels, others faced off in even numbers, but a majority of the fights were woefully imbalanced. The raiders were being held at bay, but it was apparent that they were better trained and better armed. It's heartrending to even give thought to, but... we lost some of our members that night—good friends, and even family for some.

In the midst of the tragedy, however, there was no time to dwell on such sobering thoughts. I felt the thrill of battle rise up in me, urging me to fight for the protection of myself and those I loved. Raising our weapons in the air, Reling and I lifted our voices to join that of the fight. "Have at ye'!"

We dove in from the side, rushing to the aid of a couple who were barely holding their own against three of the invaders; Reling took down one of them with a vicious blow from his axe, and I struck low at another, knocking him off his feet. He landed heavily amidst the clattering of his armor, and was quickly run through with a butcher's knife by the woman he had been

assailing. Turning, I saw that Reling had plowed into the remaining raider, causing him to stumble sideways and within reach of my sword.

The man stepped to his wife's side, helping her back to her feet from the kneeling position she had been in. He nodded to us gratefully, then hefted his scythe and prepared himself for another bout.

As we plunged deeper into the fray, my mind began to focus more and more on survival. As such, very little of the experience was translated to memory—though that may be for the best.

Without noticing, Reling and I became separated, pulled in separate directions by the tides of battle; as I remember, I began fighting alongside a young lad, who brawled bare-pawed with wooden scroll casings fitted over his arms for protection; despite this unusual fighting style, his blows were powerful, landing true and knocking many a foe to the ground.

I myself found that my strength was wearing thin; my sword became heavy in my paw, breathing came as a struggle, and enemy blows grew in frequency and intensity—a bruise here and a deep cut there; fur was shaved away from my skin, and I even lost an ear tip to one sword. Finally, it all caught up to me.

Out of the corner of my vision, I glimpsed a large object swinging towards me. I dodged sideways, but exhaustion slowed me down, allowing my arm to be struck hard by an iron mace. A crunching sound came forth from the limb, and the force of the blow sent me spiraling to the ground, where the arm gained further damage. I shouted and let my blade slide out of my grip, agony burning through my veins. Looking up, I saw my assailant hefting his heavy, crushing weapon overhead, and winced, my body too weakened to react in time. *"So this is it, then..."* I thought to myself. In that moment of slowed time, there was no peace; only a grim acceptance. As the mace began falling, I shut my eyes for what I thought to be the last time.

Yet fate would not have it that way. Hearing a shout above me, I looked up and saw the young man charging the raider from the side, driving a fist into the side of his neck and sending the invader flying. His heavy weapon landed on the ground nearby, and my life was spared.

I tried to rise, but found that I had little strength left in me to do so; I had been given a chance to rest, and my body finally realized just how tired it was. My right arm was weary from swinging a sword, and my left arm—bent, twisted, and broken as it was—flared up in tremendous pain whenever I moved.

I panted heavily, wincing and gasping for lost breath. Opening my eyes, I looked out towards the night sky, blocked out by clouds and an imposing figure that stood on one of the rooftops. Through the haze of my vision and the poor light of night, I saw the mysterious figure rise from a crouched position, as though he had been casually observing the battle, and stand tall, allowing his tail to flow like a phantom in the breeze, a movement that was mirrored by the cape that hung off his back. Reaching to his side, he pulled an object from beneath the folds of his cloak and held it to his muzzle. A deep, commanding horn blast rang out through Templis.

Almost immediately, footfalls began rushing around me. For a moment, my dazed mind was confused, wondering why the invaders were making what seemed to be a retreat; believe me, I wasn't disappointed, but simply baffled. Only later did I come up with a logical conclusion: the attackers were withdrawing from the village while the raid still remained profitable, though it was not a retreat of any sort.

No, it was far from a retreat, and the village's battle was far from over.

Several of the villagers ran by me also, chasing after the raiders with a vengeance. One of them, however, stopped, then doubled back to me; it was Reling, alive, even after everything that had happened. He spoke to me, but the words fell on numb ears. The last thing I remember was seeing an orange glow arch towards one of the village's houses, where it began growing and spreading....