
The Star of Zara
And the Quest for Ladon

Act 2:

“Archmage Guildmaster”, I could hear coming from the castle grounds. I was being summoned by Lord British. I set my peacock quill pen on the table and looked down to the book I was scribing. “Archmage Guildmaster”, Lord British again called from outside my window. Looking up and then back down to my book, I realized that the book was empty still, I must have been day-dreaming, nothing has been written at all and I let loose a sigh. I don’t have time for this, I thought and hurried to the window. “Archmage, come look”, Lord British said again, but now coming from outside my study. I hurried over to the door and opened it to see what the lord of the castle required of me. “Archmage” as the words where directly behind me now and I turned to find no one standing there, as the walls of the room began to fade around me. “Archmage, come and see”, I heard the call, but I could no longer make out my surroundings and my eyes began to open.

I was waking to Zara who was excited about something and was pushing and pulling on my arm. “Come see what Valkyries did-hurry Archmage”. As I gathered myself and in desperate need for a cup of coffee and coming to my senses, I replied, “whatever, dear child, are you clamoring on about.” “Upstairs the Christmas room, it’s amazing”, Zara replied. I followed Zara to the ladder and looked up at the hatch leading to the attic. I climbed up and opened the hatch, at Zara’s request to enter the dark cobwebbed place, to only find no cobwebs or a dark place waiting for me. I climbed up into the room to find Valkyries standing there and then I looked down, as she handed me a cup of coffee, of which she had made for me. I was trying to take in the entire room, when Zara said, “isn’t it beautiful”, as she came into the room from behind me. “I wish my dad were here to see this”, she continued on.

I looked around the attic and the entire room had been transformed into, as the child had said, a Christmas room, and it was amazing-as the girl had also said. A snow-white tree in the center, a beautiful large carpet underneath it, a grand piano with a golden candelabra and a rocking horse. There seemed to be no detail left unattended, I have never seen anything like this before and that couch looked like a good place to sit down and take the entire room in. There were presents on a large table, scented candles and I noted the lute from the previous night laying on top of one of the packages, underneath the tree.

Zara noticed two angels on top of the two small trees in the front of the room and asked Valkyries about them. Valkyries replied to her: “I am pleased you asked about these angels, they are very important where I come from”. The angel on the left is the Archangel Destiny and the one on the right is the Archangel of Angels, simply known as Angel. They are the lieutenants in the grand army of Kumara”.

They are the Archangels that hold up the pillars of the world and the ones that I have depicted on my banner as well." Zara was fixated on the two angels as Valkyries continued with her rendition of the accounts of these beings, and to be honest so was I. "Together these angels are known as the Archangel of Destiny of the Angels". "They oversee all angels everywhere and are assigned to protect both of the pillars of the realms of mankind", Valkyries continued.

"Are they powerful", Zara asked. "yes" replied Valkyries. "Are they more powerful than you Valkyries?", Zara continued to ask. "of course," said Valkyries. Taking a sip from my cup of coffee I could tell this line of questioning would continue for a while. "What are the two pillars?", the young girl then asked.

"My sisters Hathors and Venus", replied Kumara.

"Sire!", as Valkyries kneeled before Kumara, and I looked over to find Kumara standing near the hatch. "Daddy!", Zara shouted out as next to Kumara a ranger-scout was produced. The ranger dropped to a knee and embraced his little girl and hugged her tight when Zara ran to greet him. "I was so worried about you", he commented, as I decided this would be a good time to stand up myself and greet Kumara and the ranger-scout. Kumara looked around the room and said, "you have been busy my dear and you have done very well as always", said Kumara as he directed himself to Valkyries. "Thank you, milord", Valkyries replied, as she stood. Yes, I chirped in, this room is fantastic and the ranger-scout looked around the room and re-enforced the same sentiment.

I hear that young Zara had a visitor last night. "Right-right, you are", I mumbled and then reached down to pick up Lolo's lute. "I had a visitor last night?", the young girl asked, puzzled with Kumara's question.

I explained to the party what had happened as I handed Zara the Lute and as I continued with the story Zara went to sit down with her dad on the couch.

"I don't know how to play", Zara proclaimed to the occupants of the room and we all turned to see the girl examining the lute, kicking her feet back and forth, while she sat on the couch with her father.

"Why don't you give it a try-just play from the heart and I'm sure it will be perfect" Kumara noted with a smile. Zara looked down at the lute and then to her dad, who gave her a re-enforcing nod. Zara rotated the lute to its side and sat it facing upwards, on her lap. She placed both hands on the lute and was attempting to play the instrument-as if it was a piano. This was a rather odd thing, I noted to myself, then Zara began to pluck the strings with both hands and somehow, she produced a little melody. It sounded quite good actually, another odd thing I noted. When Zara finished, I heard an unlocking sound

and I instantly recognized that noise. The lute had a spell-lock on it, which must have been unlocked by her playing that song, an even odder thing I noted, as I walked over closer to take a look.

Zara looked at the instrument and shook it a little and realized something was inside. Turning the lute upside down a pendent fell out. I sipped my coffee and took a few steps closer to see what it was. She held up the necklace with the ankh of spirituality on it, but with some kind of formation at the other end of it. "What do I do with this", Zara looked over to me and then to Kumara. "Wear it for good luck", Kumara replied, and so Zara did.

A few moments later, The Dire wolf outside began to growl and bark feverishly and we rushed outside to meet the animal, who was clearly sounding some kind of alarm. Suddenly in the far distance a menacing laugh echoed through the woods and we all sat there trying to process the noise to recognize what was making that awful sound.

the ranger-scout turned to us and said he would go look, then he looked to his daughter and said, "wait here where it is safe-and Zara, do not follow me this time". The ranger-scout then sprinted off into the distance. I looked to Kumara and asked if we should go with him. Kumara mounted the dire wolf and said, "no Archmage, we should stay here for now, but you should take Zara to her father and follow him". Confused by this, I said, "you're not coming?" "I can't Archmage", Kumara said in response. Then Zara said, "but my dad said to wait here". Kumara looked down at the child and smiled. "Do you want to wait here Zara?" "No, but I have to", she fired back.

Kumara agreed that she should mind her father, but this exact moment is for her and her alone to decide and "let your heart speak your mind." Kumara added. Valkyries came out of the house and handed Zara her compound bow and arm brace that she had made for her the previous day. "Zara took the items from Valkyries and said, "but I can't fight, I don't know how-and Saint Valentine never came back to finish the training".

"Do not be afraid" Kumara replied, "but you need to decide your course now, at this moment, and your decision needs to be yours alone to make". Zara looked down at the brace and the bow and then back up to where her father had run off into the distance, then back down to the brace mechanism that Valkyries had given her. Another menacing echo could be heard, then Zara started to equip the mechanism and, on that cue, I summoned my horse to take the poor girl to meet whatever end was at this conclusion. I then paused briefly and thought, maybe to my conclusion as well.

I could tell Zara was terribly frightened as she held onto me as tight as she could, as we rode off into the distance. A few moments later, another demonic scream echoed through the woods, even louder now-as I flinched and realized how terribly frightened, I was too. The sound of a large battle was taking place

ahead of us and I heard Zara say, “don’t be scared Archmage, we need to find the courage to be brave right now”.

This little girl’s words at this moment summoned within me emotions that inspired me, but also condemned my cowardice thoughts simultaneously. I promised myself that I would not let anything happen to her-whatever the cost. I instantly found my courage with this covenant I made to myself I found the resolve to steady my senses. I readied my defensive spells and cast protection and blessing on the both of us, as we rode to meet this threat together.

Just ahead, I could make out the screams of men dying and then suddenly the horse stopped. I kicked my heels into the side of the summoned creature but nothing happened. I looked up and in front of us was Saint Valentine. He did some kind of slow circle drawing motion in the air with his hands and then the horse vanished as we collapsed to the ground in a thud. “What is the meaning of this”, I demanded. “We need to approach on foot”, the judge proclaimed. Saint Valentine produced a bag and dropped it before us and told the girl to put on the armor. “It is daemon-bone”, he said. That was quite the rare-set of armor I thought and then realized that it just might be of some great-use for the girl, to protect her, from any demons that may lie ahead.

“Put on the armor”, I said. “Quickly child”, I insisted and so she did. The three of us approached the battle and then I said to the judge: “how should we proceed Valentine.” I looked to my left, then my right and then I stood up from my crouched position, turning around and realized he was gone. He had vanished as if he never existed and so I looked to Zara and said to her, “it looks like it is just going to be the two of us for now”.

We ran to the edge of the battle where there were only two men left standing. A tamer whose pet was dead and Zara’s father peppering this horrific looking demonic thing with arrows. Just then the beast turned and crushed the tamer where he stood and his lifeless body was pushed into the ground, with one fell swoop.

“Santa Clause, no!”, screamed Zara and then the ranger-scout realizing his little girl had disobeyed his orders cried out in return, “Zara run!”. This demonic monstrosity turned and laughed an evil-laugh then said, “Krampus Claws is coming to town”.

He then waved his hands in the air and summoned a small group of demonic minions, like some kind of twisted versions of elves. They made sickening childlike demonic noises then rushed the ranger-scout and overwhelmed him immediately. “Zara screamed out in terror, “nooooo!” as the minions then turned their attention to us. Zara readied her bow while sobbing and was barely able to hold onto the compound bow that Valkyries had made for her. The minions ran towards us and I created an energy

shield around myself and yelled for Zara to get inside the shield's protective aura quickly and with haste. The minions reached Zara first, but she was too heartbroken to move. When the minions reached her, they stopped and started walking up to the girl and one by one and each laid candy canes at her feet, then they quickly ran off into the woods. My mana had absolutely run its course and in my old age, I realized I was not the useful companion in the field as I once was. I readied my dagger and stood next to the girl, pushing her behind me.

The demon laughed with a hideous echo and then it spoke again: "Your armor cannot protect you from me little girl", then planted one of its feet forward and leaned in towards us as it screamed at our direction. The violent bellow slung a vicious wave of hate to us, which knocked both of us down in a great and sudden crash. Zara fell backwards and broke her bow and the mechanical device on her arm was also damaged. It was clear that Zara was hurt, so I picked myself up and crawled over to her.

A loud snort from a horse could be heard on the road, behind us and I looked up and over towards the noise to find Valkyries on her horse, wearing her blue gem-stone encrusted armor holding her banner in her right hand. The horse lifted its head up in the air and stomped its hoof on the ground while its wings kicked up the soft dirt. Valkyries held up her banner high in the air for Krampus to see and intensified her gaze at the demon. I recognized that gaze, for it was the same one she gave to me when I first summoned her and I instantly knew this demon was in for a fight.

Krampus yelled to Valkyries: "you are out of your place here Valkyrie, this not your boundary", the demon decried. As I started to help Zara back up to her feet a familiar voice came from behind Krampus that said, "but it is my boundary Nicolas". I looked up as Krampus turned to see Saint Valentine hovering above the ground and then I looked down to the girl to make sure she was not too badly injured.

The demon howled as the judge started to draw in the air, like he had done before. His fingertips blazed a bright ruby sparkle as he was drawing. I realized He was drawing a bow and then I looked down to Zara and saw a bright ruby gem-encrusted bow in her hands. Krampus turned to our direction in shock, when it realized the danger, it was in then it started running toward us frantically, while screaming.

"Fire Zara-shoot the bow", I lamented as Krampus raced to our position. I resummoned the energy shield with whatever little mana I had left around both Zara and I. Zara raised her arm, steadied the ruby bow and she gripped onto it as tightly as she was focusing her aim. "Fire Zara!", I cried out. Zara drew the string back as flakes of ruby dust started flickering to the ground. She could not draw the bow back, for she was not strong enough, only partially, then she said: "love cures all things", as she let go of the string. As she did a bright Ruby arrow appeared and departed from the bow towards Krampus. The Arrow slightly wobbled and then began to fall pathetically to the ground, just as before and then my heart sank to my stomach as I watched in horror.

I felt a small breeze to my back and then out of nowhere was a hurricane force wind of immense power that landed right in front of Zara and I. My energy shield was still active and we only slightly got pushed backwards. I lowered my head under my left-arm and looked away. When I looked up, the dust, leaves and branches were falling back to the ground around us and I saw laying a few paces in front of us, Krampus and he was clearly dead.

I collapsed to one knee as my energy shield faded, completely exhausted. Zara took off her helmet, throwing it to the ground and ran over to her father who was lifeless. She crashed onto him and began crying and I lowered my head in grief as well.

We had won, but it had come with great cost, too much cost I thought to myself and I lowered my head with regret for what had transpired that afternoon. It was impossible for me to see at this moment how any good could come from what had just happened-but this story does not end here.

End of Act: 2

- Archmage Guildmaster