

## Chapter 8: Overseer

Back at Northstar, I was visited at night by the claws of a dream. I remember how the snow shimmered bright silver in the moonlight. How I'd awoken to snow on my face, ice in my bones.

I remember how I'd sit up and hold up my hand against the stars. I remember something looking back at me, somewhere out there.

They call it Aval, that thing up there. They call it Aval and Aval weeps. When Aval weeps, the sky lights up with a rain of stars, dashing from north to south.

A local guide told me once that, when the sky lights up like that, this Aval is mourning the loss of someone named Ephes.

A story of grief. I have yet to hear someone tell it from start to finish. As with many old tales, accounts of the events seem scattered at best and straight up unreliable at worst.

I guess that's what I get for being so late to all this.

Supposedly, once upon a time, Aval's Tears could be seen all over Statera. Nowadays, it is reserved only for the far northern coast. But I didn't come here for a lightshow.

I was planning our next expedition when my lieutenant came to find me. His armour was wet with molten snow, but I remember the relief in his voice.

Lieutenant Iris: "Commander. We struck an opening in the western range. The guides are saying we found it."

I had never put my armour on so quickly in my life. The thought of finally getting out of the cold rallied my stalkers and myself.

We drove through a snowstorm that day, just to be there by sundown, knowing that it would remain dark for a very long time.

We ignited our flashlights when we arrived at the mine, where I sent some of my people ahead to clear a path through the snow, to make sure that we had not unearthed some kind of curse.

Truth be told, I am not so sure if I even believe in such a thing. Either way, it never hurts to consider the will of the dead.

When my scouts came back with their heads still on their shoulders, I led the rest of my company inside through the maw of the storm.

What we found down there, it was something that even the fables couldn't have prepared us for. There were walls of ice, towering above us like the skyscrapers back home.

Within the ice, lifeless yet living, were suspended rows upon rows of dead. Their blue piercing eyes, cold as the frozen lakes, would follow us through the corridor.

I remember how their pale skin glistened with the light of millions of stars. I remember how I could hear their voices.

The air was thick and unyielding, but we trudged on. With one grave disturbed, what was one more?

Iris: "What is this place called again?"

Overseer: "The Crypt."

Iris: "Apt."

Overseer: "It covers the matter at hand."

Iris: "Are they really still..."

Overseer: "Alive? I feel like we will be finding out soon enough."

I had two of our people cover the rear, while the rest of us descended further into the frozen halls. As we got lower and lower, a silence started to rule. Then I heard it.

A song.

A whistle, almost like a howl. With every tone, the wind would rush between the cracks in the ice, sounding the cave like a horn.

In the depths, we saw it.

A tomb, built for a demigod.

It was hewn into a pale, glowing ice, in the heart of the mountain. Up top sat a crest, one I recognised.

Overseer: "The Northstar. Iris, you're with me. The rest of you, hold the line until we return."

I waited not for any answer, before descending one final time.

Trailed closely by my lieutenant, I was greeted by something even more otherworldly. Here, the ice held not corpses, but constellations of stars. An entire night sky, trapped in the cold.

At the end, another wall of ice, adorned with a single burning star, bigger than all the others. Beneath it, a silhouette, deep within the heart.

Iris: "Overseer, I know that we planned this but- Are you certain?"

Overseer: "This is it, Iris. Five months. Five months and we're here. The mountain can have its Northstar. I just need the necklace."

Iris: "I will hold your back."

I remember this reverberance in the ice, almost as if my steps echoed a thousand times over. In the dark, it came to me.

It whispered.

It whispered so sharply.

I thought I was bleeding.

I thought I was bleeding from every wound I'd ever had, then my hand felt cold.

When I looked down, I was holding it, jewellery of the finest silver I'd ever seen. And within it, a single blue gemstone, with a bright light within.

If I knew any prayers, I might have whispered one. Yet, all I could say was...

Overseer: "May the Northstar guide us home."