**Precipice of Darkness**

Falling Into Resistance

As a storm rages around me, I fall to my death. A thin line of blue energy heads from my forehead into the hand of a hooded man standing atop a black tower. The sheer height of it is unbelievable. As I fall, I can barely see the quickly advancing ground far below. I turn in the air and see the man is holding out his hand as though waving goodbye. I cannot see much of him, but I can somehow sense malice radiating off of him. The reason escapes me, but I feel a complete sense of hatred for him. I scream at the top of my lungs, “I will kill you!” as I continue to fall, the top of the tower and the man in the hood fading away until, eventually, I crash into the earth.

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You are probably wondering who I am, who the man is, why I hate him, and what that blue energy was, correct? I hate to say that your guess is as good as mine. Falling from that tower is the beginning of my memory. The first thing I know, I am falling, and then a horrible crash. When I hit the ground, I see that I am in a large crater. Above me, black clouds circle and twist unnaturally in the sky. The sky looks darker than it should be, I can barely see a thing, as though it is nighttime. Just before I lose consciousness, I see a thin blue rod land next to me, nearly impaling me in the head. I wonder about how I have survived this fall as my vision fades to black.

When I awake, I am lying in a raggedy yet not uncomfortable bed and there is a young man looking down at me. I yelp at the sight of him. How long has he been there? Who is he, and what does he want? Does he wish me harm? Wait, where exactly, or better yet, *who* exactly am I?

He is young, perhaps sixteen, maybe seventeen; he has spiky blond hair and big green eyes. He is skinny but he looks strong, I believe the word is wiry. He has on a strange blend of armor and…other clothes, strange looking ones and odd looking tunic with short sleeves, and strange blue bottoms. On his face is a smile so wide, it seems his face will split in two.

“Morning!” he says cheerfully. “Oh man, you’ve been asleep for like two days, we tried everything to wake you up, that’s why you’re bed’s wet, tried an ice-cold bucket of water to the face this morning, at least, I think it was morning, no sense of time down here. Either way, it didn’t work, we’ve tried slapping you, smelling salts, loud noises, everything in the book; now you’re finally awake out of the blue; it’s amazing! There was actually a bet started on whether or not you would even wake up, I won the pot. Fifty gold pieces; too bad money is pretty much worthless now. Ah well. Frankly I can’t believe you’re even alive, looked to us like you fell from the top of the Dark Tower, that thing’s gotta be like a thousand stories, and not a scratch on you, it’s unbelievable. A lot of the guys wanted to kill you because they think you’re a monster or some other type of bad omen, but I talked them out of it. I got a good feeling about you, I’m clairvoyant, ya’ see. Can’t see specifics, but I get feelings, like, I know you’re gonna be really important to the Resistance. Which is great, we need more people. ‘Ya hungry? Probably, from the look of you, I’d say you’re starving.” I can barely follow him; not only because more than half of the things he says make no sense, but he speaks so quickly, I hardly follow his words.

“Um, hungry?” I say, responding to the only thing that makes sense to me. My voice is raspy. As though it had been a long while since it had been used. “Yes, I suppose. Will you tell me who you are?”

“Name’s Darren. Welcome to the Fox-Hole.” He says. I look around the room, it is not much; nothing but a dresser with a cracked mirror above it, a small closet, and the beaten up and uncomfortable bed I now rest on. A curtained-off window offers a look outside, but little light filters through it, giving me the impression that it is nighttime.

“Alright, the Fox-Hole then, whatever that means. You said you saved me, do you know who I am?” I ask. It seems a fair question. Why would he save me if he did not know me?

“No idea.” He replies, dashing that hope. “I was kinda hoping you would tell me; guess you can’t, oh well. Maybe we’ll find out later,” clearly he is going to be of little help.

“Well, alright, what is the Fox-Hole?”

He smiles strangely, “Come on, I’ll show you, there’s a change of clothes for you in the closet.” He tosses me a towel and opens the door.

“Hey wait!” I call as something occurs to me.

“What’s up?”

“How…how long were you standing there?”

“About five minutes.” He answers as he turns and walks out the door.

I lay back down and wonder about what is going on. Where is this place? I try to sit up again, but pain slows my ascent. I swing my legs out from under the blanket, and find them damp. I remove the blanket entirely and see a large wet spot around most of me.

“He was not lying.” I say, my voice still scraping its way through my throat. “They actually poured water on me.” I swing my legs over the bed and set them gently on the floor so as to study them. They are long and have minimal hair. I bend forward and draw in a shaky breath. Strands of hair fall in my face and as soon as I notice them I grab hold and pull them further down. It reaches down past my chin and shines in the minimal light. What startles me, however, is the striking white hue. I let it go and my hands go immediately to the rest of my head. The hair is long and thick. I reach down to my face and feel soft skin, with no wrinkles.

An energy flows through me that propels me to the mirror. Fortunately, I am not an old man. In fact, I look rather young, not even a man yet. My eyes are a brilliant blue shade with a burst of white swimming through it from the pupil. Striking and at the same time slightly unsettling. An almost unnatural palor coats my skin, almost gray in sheen. I look down at my shirtless torso and see the body of a formerly strong young man adorned with muscular abs, chest, and arms.

I flex my arms, feeling how strong they are. Surely I possess a great might, despite my fatigue. I am muscular, but I am also quite thin. My build is small and lithe. As Darren said, I look as though I have not eaten in a long while. My stomach rumbles, affirming this.

Another look at my face discomforts me, but I do not look away. I find the idea unsettling that I have not seen my face before. After studying it I try to determine whether or not I am good looking. Frankly, I am unsure.

Quickly I grow sick of looking at myself and go to the closet. I sturggle with the door’s rusted hinges while I push it open. My sight is immediately drawn to the floor, where I see a pair of enclosing sandals that appear to be armored.

I pull these out and study them, they are black, but for the armor, which appears to be made of iron. How I know it is iron I am unsure, but it is undeniably iron. I set these down and turn back to the closet. The next thing I find is a pair of baggy black leg wear. I slip these on and find them very liberating. The cloth is comfortable, soft and cool. Oddly though, the portion about three inches below the knee, where it meets the sandals, hugs my skin tightly. It does not lessen the comfort, but I find it strange. Perhaps to prevent billowing?

A skintight black tunic clings to my gray skin, offering slight warmth and a sruprising amount of comfort. A six inch piece of iron is sewn into the shirt at the right breast. And two more pieces cover each shoulder. The fabric around the abdomen is hardened, likely to protect the belly and lower back from harm. Next I find long black gloves. A curious addition to the outift, but I do not object and slide them on. They end halfway up my forearms and have small bits of iron covering the back of the hands. The top part of the forearm is covered in hardened fabric like the abdomen. My fingers remain bare, with nothing to cover them. For what purpose I cannot imagine.

“There is a lot of black, is this an Underworld cult or something? Wait, what did I just say?” I mutter. That was strange, what did I say? I shrug it off and make my way out of the room. Hopefully Darren is not one to get impatient.

When I exit the room I find myself in a long hallway. Looking down both ways, I see several other doors, all probably leading into rooms like the one I just emerged from. Where the flickering light is coming from I cannot guess. There are no torches or other light sources in that I can see. Dull pain starts to throb through my skull from the incessant blinking. I focus on it and the entire hallway becomes brighter for a few seconds. This makes me happy until a small explosion tears around inside my head and the light goes off entirely. I stumble through the now pitch-black hallway, trying to find some kind of exit.

I cannot tell where I am in the hallway until empty space appears out of nowhere beneath my feet. I slide down a couple steps before I manage to stop my abrupt descent. I take a few more steps and then realize that I am standing on a staircase. Quickly I reach the bottom and am greeted with a pleasantly steady light. However, this hallway is occupied by several young men.

One of them, a dark haired teenager, turns to me with a look of confusion on his face.

“You the new guy?” He asks.

“I…” His question confuses me. New guy? My voice is growing smoother with use, the raspiness and pain subsiding. “I am not sure. Let me ask you something.”

“What’s up?” He responds.

I look up to the ceiling, but shake my head at the nonsensical inquiry. “How old do I look to you?”

The boy chuckles for a few moments before seeing my question is serious. “Oh, uh, I dunno. Sixteen, maybe seventeen?”

“Oh.” That was my feeling as well, but I wanted another opinion.

“Are you alright?” He asks, “You look a little lost.”

“I am not sure where I am. Or what is happening.”

A look of sympathy changes his features, “Oh, then you’ll wanna go see Darren. If you are the new guy, he’s waiting for you outside.”

“Outside?”

“The building I mean. Just go down the stairs and when you reach the bottom, go straight until you find a set of double doors. Go through them and Darren should be there.”

“Thank you.” I say to him.

“No problem.” He says.

I nod and turn back to the staircase, looking down at about four floors. I follow the boy’s instructions until I find the glass double doors he mentioned. What am I about to see? I push through them and gasp, I actually gasp. I look up to see a huge ceiling far above my head, made entirely of rock. This…this is a cave. I look down and around to see that this is in fact a colossal cave.

The area is not unlike a small town with various buildings and streets going off in many directions. It is difficult to judge, but I think it is perhaps one and a half miles across. This is clearly a cave, I can almost feel tons and tons of rock above my head. I get a feeling of queasiness at the idea of being down so low, where darkness is prevalent, but the feeling passes as a new feeling of pain lights my skull.

I see people almost everywhere, none of them much older than I. Most of them are wandering about, heading to destinations far away. I see a few people sitting around doing nothing but talking (about what I am not sure). Within moments, I catch a good number of them glancing at me occasionaly. The look on their faces, distrust? Or is it fear?

I turn around and look up. Stretched above me is a building decorated with windows and terraces. It is made out of red stone, but still looks as though it is about to come apart on its own. About halfway up the buiding, I see a statue of a man in armor, weapons in his hands and on his back. Something stirs within me at the sight of it. It sends a shockwave through the emptiness in my head.

I turn around and take another look at the people behind me. They are all wearing black clothing similar to mine. Only, the boys are all wearing pants, like me, the girls, however, all wear skirts. Even so, it is all worn and in a pitiful state. The only part that looks alright is the armor, which looks brand-new. However, even new, I can somehow tell that it is not professionally made. Whatever smith made the armor was probably an apprentice, surely no master.

I tap my own armor, feeling its durability. It clangs the way it should, but something about it seems off. There are small pieces covering each gloved knuckle, to check them, I punch the brick wall with all my might. To my surprise, the brick cracks. I shake my hand on instinct, but then realize that there is no pain.

“This armor looks crude.” I say to myself, “But it is in fact, high quality.” I think I shall have to find the blacksmith and commend him for his work.

This place…what could have brought on the need for it? I see a flash in my mind of that man on the tower. Who was he? I feel like I should know him, like he is someone important in my life. Although, I can also feel that it is not a good importance. Like a… a necessary evil. Just who am I?

That strange pain flashes through my mind again, like the ache of a wound that has long since healed. It passes after a moment, and then I see Darren talking to some people. They do not look like muc…wait. One of them catches my eye and when she does, my sight, my attention, even my heart are all taken. Hair the color of midnight cascades down her shoulders, ending at her lower back. A sword hangs sheathed on her back. Strapped across her shoulders is an odd machine with a tube on the end. She wears the same clothes as everyone else, and even though they are in the same state of wear, it looks amazing on her.

I cannot help but stare, she is a shining vision of perfection. She turns and I see more of her face. Her eyes are a most beautiful purple color, and her raven hair accentuates her porcelain skin. She has a slender build, but a well proportioned body.

Darren finishes whatever he was saying and sees me. He notices I am staring at the girl and somehow manages to grin even further.

“Alright guys,” He says, “I gotta show the newbie around.”

The girl says something to him I do not here. Darren laughs and holds up one of his hands.

“It’ll be okay Solution.” He tells her, “I’ve got a good feeling about this guy.”

“His hair is white.” Another girl points out.

“Yeah, what’s up with that?” A dark-skinned boy asks.

“I dunno,” A third girl with light hair says. She looks at me and continues in a loud whisper easy for me to hear, “He’s kinda cute.”

“His hair is white.” The girl repeats, “It’s weird.”

“It kinda works on him.” The light haired girl says.

“Guys.” Darren says, “Shut up. I’ll get answers and we’ll discuss how to proceed tonight. For now…do whatever, I don’t care.”

The four of them all head off in different directions while Darren walks back to me.

“Like it?” He asks, gesturing with his eyes to the entire cave.

“It is beyond incredible.” I say.

“I know, right? Sometimes I wonder how they managed it.”

“You do not know?” I ask.

“Nah, wasn’t even born at the time.” He tells me.

“Who is that you were talking to?” I ask.

“You’ll find out later.” He assures. “For now, why don’t I show you around?”

“Alright.” I agree, and start to follow Darren down the dirt street.

“By the way,” Darren says, “If Solution catches you staring at her again, she’ll cut you into pieces and feed them to her wolf.”

“Solution?” I repeat.

“The girl you were staring at.”

“Her name is Solution?”

“That’s what she likes to be called, yeah.”

“Does that mean she has another name?”

“Of course she does.”

“Will you tell me?”

“Nope.” Darren shakes his head. “Only I know it, she won’t tell anyone else and has forbidden me to do so. She’s really special to me, so I respect her wishes.”

“What sort of special?” I wonder aloud.

“Why, jealous?” he teases.

“Yes.” I answer honestly.

He loses the smile, “Oh, well then…forget about it. We have a very special relationship, but it isn’t like that.” He shudders suddenly, as if smelling something sour.

“What is it?” I ask.

“The thought of Solution and I…” He shudders again, more violently.

“What is so wrong with that?” I ask. “She is a stunning beauty.”

“Is she?” Darren asks, “I can’t tell.”

“Really?”

Darren shrugs, “I try not to look at her like that.”

“If she is not named Solution from birth,” I wonder, “Why is she called that?”

“That would be due to her unbelievable intelligence. That girl has the answer to pretty much any problem. She makes all the plans and serves as my right hand.”

“Your right hand?” I repeat.

“Meaning that she’s in charge, besides me.”

“Impressive. What happened to left hand?”

“Alright, fine, she’s my left hand.”

“Okay.” I say, “Um, in charge of what, exactly?”

“The Resistance against the Dark god.” Darren proclaims proudly.

What a clever name, but Dark god? Possibly the man who threw me off the tower? He seemed dark, and powerful.

“I know it’s lame,” Darren says, “But we don’t really have a reason to come up with something fancy do we? After all, the name is more for us than anyone else. We’re secret, only the Dark God and his flunkies know about us. Then again, not hard to get that way when most of humanity is dead.”

“Fair poi… wait, what!” I shout,

“Yeah, most of the world’s population was destroyed a while back. We don’t know how much is left, but it can’t be a whole lot.”

He said that so calmly, what is going on here?

“How were they killed?” I ask.

“Radiation poisoning, for a good portion of ‘em. A lot more were killed in battle, I’m sure a few died from starvation or dehydration by trying to survive in a world like this.”

“What could have possibly caused a world like that?” I ask, horrified.

Darren looks somber, “The Dark God did.”

“Elaborate, please.” I beg of him.

Darren shakes his head, “We’ll get to that later. For now, I want to show you the rest of the Fox-Hole.”

“Fine,” I concede, my voice hollow, “Lead the way.”

“Wonderful.” Darren says happily, a grin again lighting his face. “I think you’re gonna love this place!”

He leads me to the end of the street, then turns and faces it.

“There are six streets in total, all serving different needs. We face living. Where obviously, there are the buildings where we all live.

“What is over there?” I ask, pointing to a large section of wall away from any street.

“Ahh, that is where the fun happens.” Darren says.

“But what is it?” I ask again.

“First, a question.” Darren says. He looks me in the eye, “Are you in?”

“What are you talking about?”

“Are you willing to help us fight against the Dark God and end his tyranny forever?”

I consider that for a moment. If this so called Dark God caused the death of so many people, then he is clearly unfit for anything other than Tartarus. (What is Tartarus?)

“I do not like the idea of tyranny.” I decide, “Beyond that, it is obvious that a man who would kill so many for power, should not possess it. He should be condemned to Tartarus for eternity.”

“Great!” Darren says, “I have no idea what the hell you’re talking about, but great! Anyway, um, we do need more warriors; most of the people here are just trying to stay alive. Are you a warrior?” he asks. He looks me up and down, seemingly trying to gauge my abilities with but a look.

“I do not know, but I am willing to find out.”

“Perfect.” Darren leads me to the section of wall I pointed out, and lifts up his hand to the wall. Before placing his hand down, he turns to me with a glint in his eyes, “Welcome to the party.”

He slams his hand down and a part of the cave wall slides away, revealing a gigantic arena. They have an entire arena cut into this place!

“Where are we?” I ask in wonder.

“We call this place the Great Hall, this is where we train, eat, and plan for missions and stuff.”

The room is colossal, with a giant table set aside in a corner. Large theater style seats ring the place, high above the lower floor. Most of the room is clearly meant for training, as several dozen dummies and targets are scattered about, along with an odd assortment of pipes and ropes the purpose of which I cannot discern. Perhaps…meant for climbing? No, that cannot be it. I turn my attention the exact center, an empty space where several people spar, seemingly using…

“Hey Darren, are they using actual weapons?”

He looks where my eyes are and chuckles, “Yeah, how else are they gonna learn?”

“Fair point.”

He walks over to a wall lined with hundreds of weapons: Swords, axes, pole arms, shields, daggers, and even a few scythes. Needless to say, I am quite impressed. Darren starts picking through the weapons, obviously looking for a particular one. My eyes wonder and I notice hundreds of those tube things, what are they?

“Darren, those tube things, are those weapons?” I ask.

“Uh, yeah, they’re called guns, or fire-arms.”

“Fire-arms.” I say the word slowly, rolling it around on my tongue. “What do they do?”

“Wow, really? Okay then, um, they fire these little metal fragments, called bullets, really fast, aim right and their deadlier than the best sword.”

“Incredible, how long have they been around?” I have never heard of them before. At least, I do not think so. I could blame the amnesia, but I can name all of the other weapons easily. Look, a halberd!

“Um, I actually don’t know, a few hundred years, I think.”

“What about the clothes we are wearing, what are these? I mean, the tunic and the gloves, obviously. But I do not think I have seen all these other things.”

“Wow, you are really amnesiac, aren’t you?” Darren says, laughing, “Well, the ‘tunic’ is something developed based on ancient sportswear, skin-tight, but flexible and reinforced with hardened fibers that it virtually impervious to tear. As the for the pants, they’re developed from the same durable material, only made to handle more wear and tear. Pockets were sewn into them for storing med supplies, should that be necessary. The boots on your feet are ninja-styled and armored; since you thought they look weird.

“Ninja?” I repeat.

“Not important.” He responds.

“What of your pants?” I ask, pointing to the dark blue cloth that covers his legs. “They do not look like mine.”

“Ah, these are blue jeans. I usually wear the standard black as everyone else, but I found these during a raid a while back and they just look so damn good I couldn’t resist.” Apart from the blue jeans, he is wearing the same clothing as I am, only it seems in better condition, with less tears in the fabric. In addition, the metal that make up his armor pieces looks like polished silver rather than the dull iron that constitues my protection. His right arm is covered by a thin silver gauntlet, ending at his elbow; though it leaves the fingers bare. His other arm only has the same glove as I currently wear.

Darren is still picking through the weapons, mumbling something about misplacing things. Finally he picks up a small blue staff that, judging from the end, had been broken off of something much larger. He tosses it to me, and I catch it without a thought.

“We found this in the crater you were in; we assumed it was yours, is it?” He asks, taking out a knife and fiddling with it.

I shake my head “I honestly have no idea about, anything before falling off that tower. And now even that is… fuzzy.”

He does not look very surprised. “You’re not the first amnesiac. They all showed the same symptoms, even recent memories becoming foggy shortly after they occur. Though you do seem to be the calmest so far.”

“How so?”

“The others freaked out, like, immediately and got themselves killed within minutes.”

“Is that a joke? They actually died?”

“We’re usin’ real weapons here, they didn’t know anything. You may be an amnesiac, but at least you woke up coherent. They didn’t, so yeah, they really died. It’s a bitch, I know. But that’s less people to worry about, right?”

Seriously, what in Tartarus is going on? (Wait, what?)

“Anyway,” Darren says, he gestures to the weapon in my hands “What do you think of that?”

Darren is… unusual, and this Resistance of his…I shudder to think of whatever horror could have brought this on. I try to put it out of my mind and focus on the weapon. Something strange happens; I get a flash, a vision. A winged man in blue robes, with a golden theater mask over his face, frowning. He is holding the staff, and then tosses it to me. The vision passes and suddenly I know to change my grip, and hold the weapon correctly. It is small, but durable, made of a strong kind of wood. Also, I can feel that it has seen many battles; it is smooth as only a well-used weapon can be. It also feels…familiar.

I feel all this in only a moment. I look up and see Darren studying me with an expectant look.

“This weapon feels, connected to me somehow.” I say, “And I can, almost read it, it has seen many battles, and rarely lost. Strange, the weapons is…almost talking to me. I cannot explain it.”

Darren loses the odd look, donning a serious face. “If you believe nothing else from me, believe this: weapons are alive. And they have emotions, like we do. They know when they’re in the hands of an experienced fighter. And they know when a person has used them before. That’s who they’ll respond best to.” He then looks normal with that strange grin. “I favor hook swords, but let’s see what you can do with that thing, huh?”

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At the same moment, in the Dark god’s Tower, Erebus looks out at his world, basking in the brilliant black storm clouds funneling around the tower. He swirls his hand, watching as the clouds respond to and mimic his movement. He plays with the clouds while five of his servants bustle about the room, still hard at work cleaning the carnage of the battle that happened two days before.

Erebus wonders about the battle, how suddenly it had started. And how he had won so easily.

“Too easily.” He says to no one in particular. “He is going to be so much trouble. Or, perhaps he will be a useful tool. I wonder if I should bring him to me. Convince him that I am worth following, maybe even…finish absorbing him. With his power, my plans would be moved along even faster.

“But could that work? It should have been easy but it was not. He prevented me from taking his full power. But still, how the mighty has fallen!” Erebus laughs, “He was once so powerful; how is it that I was able to beat you so quickly? It was like you were not even trying.”

Anger briefly flashes across Erebus’ face. “Is that it? Did you let me win? Were you planning this? Why would you do that? Why would you lose on purpose and what would you gain from doing so?” Erebus seethes for a moment before regaining his composure. “Perhaps it was not so wise of me to take his godly power. No, without it, he will be much easier to manipulate. And easier to defeat should he challenge me again.”

“But now he is with Darren and his resistance.” Erebus scoffs, “They have never been anything more than amusement. But now, now they will be a thorn in my side. For the first time since people started rebelling against me, they may actually present a challenge. They will try to make him fight me, not that it will matter, there is no way that he will be able to defeat me now. But still, something must be done about them; with them, he may learn his power. He may come to realize who he is. Or rather, *what*  he is. Then again, perhaps it is a good thing they found him. Darren could be of use, and Solution as well. I wonder just how much I can use them.”

One of the servants stops working, “Sire, if the boy had such great power, why did you take it from him?” The Dark god raises his eyes and looks over at him.

“You are my newest servant, yes?” The servant has a look of shock and lowers his head, knowing better than to answer. Erebus merely raises his hand and the servant disappears in black ash. “Any more questions?” he threatens. The remaining servants bow their heads in silence and engross themselves in their work. “Good”