

(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: Synestra's perspective.

-x-X-x-

Everything was going according to plan. Standing there in the privacy of her command tent, the First Princess of the Royal House of Vairath lets a pleased smile spread across her face as she looks down at the map of the enemy's territory and what she has wrought so far.

The remaining human lands not already plagued with Rot have been separated into 'rings', with their Rotting to be carried out in phases. By slipping her army past the humans and into the Rotlands themselves, she's completely obfuscated her and her soldiers' location from the primitive insects.

So far, they haven't known what to do about that. They thought that they were going to get an actual fight, but of course... Synestra never intended to give them that. No, this was always going to go only one way... with their complete and utter annihilation.

She would kill every last stinking human, including her sister's Otherworlder 'Master', and she would drag Sevinarya back to the Capital, where she would torture the bitch for the next one hundred years at the very least.

By starting the Rotting close to the border of the Darkwoods and then moving inwards from there, they were going to drive the humans exactly where Synestra wanted them... to their Capital City. It didn't hold a candle to the Dark Elf Capital of course, but it was still their greatest population center, and once they ran out of lanterns capable of holding back the Rot, they would have to flee there.

The first two phases have already been completed. Living Rot has been dropped off in most of the human towns at this point. The third phase, waiting for the Rot to push the humans inwards, was well underway. Reports should be coming back within the day about how things were going on that front.

The final phase after that would be to slaughter the last of the humans once and for all. Once they were all penned up in their city, in the last 'safe bastion', her army would be able to exterminate them at their leisure. Not a battle, not a fight... but rather, a slaughter. It was no less than any of them deserved, after all.

Synestra's smile drops as she's once again reminded of why she's doing all of this. Graelo-

"Your Highness."

Pulled from her thoughts, the First Princess' nostrils flare as she whips her head around, pinning the one to interrupt her with an intense glare. One of her commanders stands in the entrance to the command tent and immediately snaps off a salute... but doesn't back down or flee in the face of her ire.

Silence drags on as tension fills the air, before finally Synestra grunts.

"Speak."

"It's the lanterns, Your Highness. We've had half a dozen fail inexplicably in the last hour."

Synestra's eyes narrow at that. Those lanterns... without them, her forces would be vulnerable. Especially since Synestra hadn't bothered teaching most of them how to cure Rot Lung. It simply wasn't necessary, not when they'd brought along a massive stockpile of the same lanterns they'd supplied House Godman with all those years ago.

The lanterns weren't the best... but then, they weren't intended to be. They were always meant to be little more than a stop gap measure, a way to hold the Rot at bay but never truly solve it. Those she'd had invent both the Rot and these countermeasures had come up with numerous ways of dealing with the Rot in a far more permanent fashion, but they were costly and not what Synestra had wanted anyways.

She didn't want to cleanse the human lands. She didn't want to heal them. She wanted to kill every last stinking human and then leave nothing but Rot behind when she finally left. Let there be not a single trace of humankind remaining after she's done... nothing but desolation in her wake.

That all said... Synestra didn't actually know how the lanterns worked. That was not something she'd ever had to concern herself with. All she'd needed to know was that they kept the Rot at bay and nothing more... that was all that mattered.

Huffing, she waves a hand dismissively.

"Then go and replace them. And while you're at it, have the rest checked and replaced as well. There should be more than enough idle soldiers for such a thing."

The commander snaps off another salute.

"As you command, Your Highness."

And then she turns on her heel and departs. Synestra turns back to the map on the table before her, putting it out of her mind. After all, most of the army she's brought with her doesn't have much more to do out here other than wait. They've had to institute a lottery system of sorts so that every squad gets an equal chance at being sent on a Rotting mission, because otherwise some of them would have stayed stuck here for weeks while others got to go and ruin the human lands for her.

While the failure of so many lanterns at once was irritating, it was not the end of the world. It would give some of those just lying around something to do if nothing else.

A while more passes before another Dark Elf appears in her tent. This time though, its through the use of her Gift, a shadowstep that brings her out of a dark corner. Synestra looks over and perks up... this is one of those who was

sent out to check on the progress of the first two phases. She can't help but be a little excited.

"Report. How goes the Rotting of the human lands?"

Dropping to a knee and bowing her head, the scout speaks.

"My Princess... there is something amiss."

What? Synestra's eyes narrow and she pushes away from the table with a growl.

"Something amiss? Explain! Immediately!"

Head still lowered, the scout chooses her words... carefully.

"... There is no sign of Living Rot at any of the locations we've checked so far. After the fourth showed nothing of note above or below ground, I was sent back to inform you of this discovery, rather than making you wait for the end of our mission."

Synestra's nostrils flare, even as her mind races. No sign of Living Rot? How was that possible? It had been days at this point... the Rot should have covered most of the towns it had been slipped under by now. Only, this wasn't just a failure to do that... from the sound of things, the Rot had been removed from the caves underground entirely!

The First Princess opens her mouth to demand further answers, but before she can speak, several things happen in quick unison. First, a second figure appears out of the shadow that her scout stepped from, but the fact that they're male and not wearing the armor of one of her soldiers alerts Synestra to their true nature.

At the same time though, she doesn't have the time or opportunity to warn her subordinate... because she feels death itself at the nape of her neck. Hard-earned instincts cause her to move without hesitation, her swords clearing their

sheaths and blocking blades aimed for both her throat and her side at the same time.

The sound of metal grinding against metal fills the air as she blocks and deflects the attempts on her life in that split second before shadowstepping to the other side of the command tent. She suffers no bodily harm... but at the same time, there's no saving the scout. She's cut down before she can even lift her head and realize something is wrong.

A moment later and a blue light washes over the area, making Synestra stiffen as she finds herself cut off from the shadows that otherwise filled the command tent. Instead, she stands awash in the dim blue light, staring at the ones who brought it with them... her sister, the Otherworlder, and the third one, who is even now wiping his blade clean of her subordinate's blood.

"Sevinarya. How uncharacteristically duplicitous of you."

Her younger sister bristles at that, her red eyes flashing with anger.

"Like you're one to talk, Synestra! What is all of this if not duplicity?!"

Always quick to anger, that one. Synestra simply arches a brow and shakes her head in response, slowly twirling her swords and rotating her wrists as she... limbers up. She wasn't expecting to see combat today, but she would be lying if she said she wasn't becoming excited.

"It wasn't an accusation. It was an observation. You were always rather terrible when it came to subtlety and the utilization of more... underhanded tactics. When you ran away from home like you did, I was frankly astounded you managed to escape without being caught in the process. You're quite the bad liar, after all. But then I found out mother had arranged for it to happen. Another sign of her favoritism of you, in the end."

Sevinarya growls.

"I'm *not* her favorite. I don't know where you even got that idea. Mother only ever barely tolerated me... tolerated any of us."

Foolish. It was blatantly obvious... but also utterly meaningless, in the end. Synestra fully intended to fake Sevinarya's death here so that when she smuggled her back to their people's lands, she could do whatever she wanted to the other Dark Elf for as long as she wanted without their mother's interference. So in the end... it didn't matter.

"Did you come here to talk or did you come here to kill me? Because at this point, it feels like you're just wasting time."

Sweeping her gaze across all three of them, Synestra sneers.

"Well? Come at me!"

How they had found out where she and her army were... Synestra didn't know. How they'd managed to make it this far into the Rotlands, she didn't know. But also... she didn't care. It was obvious what their plan was. Kill her and command of the Dark Elf forces here would fall to her sister as Fourth Princess. It was as simple as it was idiotic. After all... they would need to actually kill her first.

Wordlessly, all three of them move at her at once. Synestra bares her teeth in a rictus of a grin and moves to meet them right back. Her twin blades flash through the air as she contends with her would-be assassins. Within minutes, she has their measure.

The least of them is the unknown, the one who killed her scout. He's somewhat skilled as far as a human is concerned, but truly nothing special. If it were just him, this wouldn't have lasted more than one exchange... he would already be dead and she would be triumphant.

Fortunately for his sake, his companions are far more skilled. Her sister in particular has improved dramatically since their last spar over a decade ago. Sevinarya moves with an elegance and grace that she frankly always lacked in Synestra's opinion. Graelo had done his best to train such things into her

sister... into all of her sisters, but even he could not make something out of nothing.

Someone apparently had though, because her sister was actually starting to impress her for a moment before Synestra ruthlessly strangled that feeling and stomped it down flat deep inside of her.

However, much to her surprise... Sevinarya was not the best of the three fighters. No, that honor fell to the Otherworlder. He was truly something else, moving faster than either of the other two and with more strength behind every swing, thrust, and jab he makes.

Synestra has heard plenty of tales about Dark Elf Otherworlders over the centuries of course. But this is her first time encountering a human one... and he's a lot more skilled than she was anticipating.

It can't have been even a year since he arrived in this world, and he's already like this? Her mother would have been intrigued if she'd known. But Synestra... Synestra just saw a threat. No... best to nip this in the bud here and now.

Having gotten each of their measure over the course of a five minute exchange of blades, Synestra stops playing around. Her swords flash out... and the weakest one falls back clutching at his throat, his lifeblood flowing from his quickly thanks to her blades.

There's a brief pause at that and Synestra chuckles as her sister and the Otherworlder both take a step back. Not out of fear, to their credit, but rather to reassess and reposition themselves. Neither tries to save their downed comrade... which is smart of them, because if they had, Synestra would have punished them for such sentiment quite... *judiciously*.

Unfortunately, the momentary lull does come with one small drawback. Even as Synestra is basking in her innate superiority over her would-be assassins, her sister takes the chance to talk some more of all things.

“Why are you doing this, Synestra?! Why go to these lengths to kill the humans?! Graelo wasn’t worth this!”

The amusement on Synestra’s face drops as her grip on her blades tightens. She glowers at her sister.

“Do not say his name. You of all people do not get to speak of him OR what he was worth.”

“But he was just a male! You shouldn’t even care about him! Our entire society cares little for males!”

Even as her anger rises, Synestra can tell Sevinarya is being hypocritical in this moment. She doesn’t believe her own words about the inherent inferiority of males to females. She just believes that Synestra should. And to be fair... she *does*. The thing is, Graelo was no mere male.

“You foolish little cunt. How dare you compare him to others of his gender. Graelo was more than that.”

And... why not tell the secret? Why not reveal the truth of why this was happening to her sister? It wasn’t like Sevinarya would ever have a chance to tell anyone.

“He was my progenitor.”

It feels good to say it out loud. After everything she’d tried to do for him, after using up every bit of favor she had with their mother to take him from the Queen and have him by her side... while still being unable to acknowledge their true connection... Synestra finally speaks the words.

“He was my father. And you killed him, Sevinarya. So yes, I am going to kill every last filthy human insect that plagues this world. And then I’m going to make you beg me to kill you as well. And when you do, when you are broken and weeping before me, asking to die... I will *refuse*.”

Horried understanding dawns on her sister's face now. Synestra forces a smile onto her lips and points her blades forward, still dripping with the blood of the one she'd already slain.

One down. Two to go.

-x-X-x-

A/N: Things are looking rough...

Please let me know what you think either on Patreon or Discord! Your feedback, suggestions, and ideas for this story are keeping the inspiration flowing in a big way!